



Tomorrow we commemorate **Saint Symeon the New Theologian**, a monk in the Studite Monastery in Constantinople and later the abbot of the Monastery of St Mamas. After a life of great asceticism, including many trials, criticisms and afflictions, he reposed in peace in 1022. His teaching on the soul's ability to enter directly into communion with God in this life aroused some opposition but his teachings are firmly rooted in his doctrine of the Church and his writings contain many powerful affirmations of the centrality of participation in the Holy Mysteries in our struggle for salvation. He is the author of many sublimely beautiful sermons, writings and hymns. With St John the Evangelist and St Gregory, Patriarch of Constantinople, he is one of only three whom the Church has officially called "Theologian."



11 October 2015 is the Sunday of the Seventh Ecumenical Council

Matins Gospel: John 20:11-18

Epistle: Titus 3:8-15

Gospel: Luke 8:5-15

Resurrectional Apolytikion:

When Thou didst descend unto death, O Life Immortal, then didst Thou slay Hades with the lightning of Thy Divinity. And when Thou didst also raise the dead out of the nethermost depths, all the powers in the Heavens cried out: O Life-giver, Christ our God, glory be to Thee.

Seasonal Kontakion:

O Protection of Christians that cannot be put to shame, mediation unto the creator most constant: O despise not the voices of those who have sinned; but be quick, O good one, to come unto our aid, who in faith cry unto thee: Hasten to intercession and speed thou to make supplication, O thou who dost ever protect, O Theotokos, them that honour thee.

Readings and saints for this week:

Monday: Philippians 2:12-15; Luke 7:36-50

Martyrs Probus, Andronicus, & Tarachus; Simeon the New Theologian

Tuesday: Philippians 2:16-23; Luke 8:1-3

Carpus, Papyrus, Agathodorus, & Agathonica; Benjamin the Deacon

Wednesday: Philippians 2:24-30; Luke 8:22-25

Martyrs Nazarius, Gervasius, Protasius, & Celsus; Cosmas the Hagiopolite

Thursday: Philippians 3:1-8; Luke 9:7-11

Hieromartyr Lucian; Righteous Sabinus

Friday: Philippians 3:8-19; Matthew 27:33-54

Longinus the Centurion

Saturday: Romans 9:18-33; Luke 6:1-10

Prophet Hosea; Martyrs Cosmas & Damian of Arabia



Evangelion

A Bulletin of Orthodox Christian Faith

11 October 2015

**Archbishopric of Good Hope
Patriarchate of Alexandria & All Africa**

The Good Soil of the Kingdom of God

Today, on the Sunday of the Seventh Ecumenical Council, we hear Saint Luke's account of the parable of the sower. Jesus Christ tells His listeners of a sower who went out to sow seed. Some of it fell on the path and was wasted, some of it fell on rocks and could not grow well, and some was choked by thorns. But some fell on good soil and grew well to produce a hundredfold.

When His disciples asked about the meaning of this parable, the Lord explained that the seed is the Word of God. God, or Christ, sows the seed, but, like the seed that is sown on the path, or among thorns, it may not be able to grow well. Only the seed that is sown on good soil produces a harvest.

Christ speaks in negative terms about the places where the seed does not grow well, and the things that prevent us from hearing the Word of God. But He also challenges us to consider the positive conditions that are necessary if God's Word is to take root within us.

The reasons that Jesus gives as to why the seed was not fruitful give us clues about the conditions that we need for the spiritual life. For seed to grow it needs a certain protection from the hustle and bustle of the road and so we need to find times of withdrawal and silence. It also needs to be regularly watered and nourished and protected from harmful influences. The measure of these things will vary from person to person, but we need to be conscious about preparing the soil of our own hearts so that the Word of God may germinate, take root and bear fruit in our lives.



Let those who are awake, whose heart is sterile and unfruitful, open your mind, receive the sacred seed, be like productive and well-tilled soil, bring forth to God the fruits that will raise you to incorruptible life.

Saint Cyril of Alexandria

A Life Centred on Christ Alone

A series on the meaning of Monasticism

Since the earliest days of the Church, there have been Christians who have been called to follow Jesus Christ with a single-minded devotion, living a life of celibacy, poverty, and obedience, and engaging in intense prayer and fasting, while avoiding the distractions of everyday life. As the early monastic movement developed, it came to play an important role in the Church.



Saint Pachomius receives his monastic rule from an angel

The Monastic Movement in the Early Church

Already in the New Testament we find an emphasis on spiritual struggle, and a life of celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom of God is held up as an ideal. In the first two centuries of the Church, we have references to communities of virgins, or to ascetics who lived alone. However, from the third century we see the emergence of a distinct monastic movement that was often found in the desert and that would gradually acquire its own institutions – and would also generate considerable literature and produce many saints.

The development of monasticism is often associated with **Saint Anthony the Great** (c. 251-356) in third and fourth century Egypt. Although he was part of a broader movement, *The Life of Saint Anthony*, which was written by Saint Athanasius the Great, became very popular and helped to make the movement known. Saint Anthony was part of the anchorite movement in which hermit monks would live in their own huts, but in fairly close proximity to other monks. They would all keep their own individual rules of prayer and fasting, and be under obedience to an elder monk.

However, they would usually come together for prayer each Saturday evening, keeping vigil through the night, and celebrating the Divine Liturgy on the Sunday morning. They would then share a meal together before returning to their individual cells for the rest of the week.

Around the same time, a more communal form of monasticism also developed that was centred around **Saint Pachomius the Great** (290-346) in upper Egypt. Saint Pachomius had originally been trained as an anchorite, but he was instructed by an angel to build a monastery where monks could live a life in common, enabling many more people to benefit from the fruits of a monastic vocation. His monks shared a common life of prayer, work, and meals, and held all their possessions in common after the example of the early Christians. (Acts 2) Within a short time, there were several Pachomian monasteries spread along the Nile.



I saw the snares that the enemy spreads out over the world and I said groaning, “What can get through from such snares?” Then I heard a voice saying to me, “Humility.”

Saint Anthony the Great

If you see a man pure and humble, that is a great vision. For what is greater than such a vision, to see the invisible God in a visible man, the temple of God.

Saint Pachomius the Great

The Sunday of the Seventh Ecumenical Council

Today we commemorate the Fathers of the Seventh Ecumenical Council. This council was convoked by the Empress Irene and met at Nicaea in 787, with Patriarch Tarasios presiding.

The council was called to put an end the iconoclastic heresy which was threatening to divide the Church. The council Fathers established the veneration of icons as basic to the belief and spirituality of the Church. Many of the Fathers of this council were to die as confessors and martyrs during the second iconoclastic controversy in the following century.

In defending the veneration of icons, the Fathers of the council were defending the integrity of the Church’s faith in the Incarnation of the Son of God. For, as Saint John of Damascus insisted, if Jesus Christ has truly become human and has shared our material life, then it is most appropriate to depict and venerate His image and that of His saints.

This council is generally seen as the last ecumenical council recognised by the Church. That does not rule out the possibility of other councils in the future. But the Seventh Ecumenical Council represents the closing of an era of the dogmatic disputes in the first centuries of the Church’s life. In this it clearly set up the boundaries of the Orthodox Faith.



***You are greatly glorified,
O Christ our God, who
established our Fathers
as luminaries upon the
earth, and through them
led us all to the true Faith.
O Most compassionate,
glory to You.***

Apolitikion for the Sunday of the Seventh Ecumenical Council



The only thing God requires of us is that we do not sin. But this is achieved, not by acting according to the law, but by carefully guarding the divine image in us and our supernal dignity. When we thus live in our natural state, wearing the resplendent robe of the Spirit, we dwell in God and God dwells in us. Then we are called gods by adoption and sons of God, sealed by the light of the knowledge of God.

Saint Symeon the New Theologian