

With closest custody, guard your heart, for in it are the sources of life (Proverbs 4:23).

In the heart is the will, in the heart is love, in the heart is understanding, in the heart is the face of the All-holy and Divine Trinity.

The heart is the home of the Father, the altar of the Son and the workshop of the Holy Spirit.

God wants the heart: “My Son, give me your heart” (Proverbs: 23:26).

Let the mountains be overturned, let the seas dry up, let your friends abandon you, let your wealth fail you, let your body be consumed by worms, let the world pour upon you all the ridicule which it has but be not afraid.

Only guard your heart, guard and affix it to the Lord and give it to the Lord.

From the heart comes life. From where does life in the heart come if the breath of the Lord and Source of Life, God, does not dwell in it?

St Nikolai Velimirovich

**On Sunday, 16 June 2013,
we commemorate the
Fathers of the First Ecumenical
Council**

Matins Gospel: John 21:1-14

Epistle: Acts 20:16-18, 28-36

Gospel: John 17:1-13

**Apolytikion for the Fathers of the
First Ecumenical Council:**

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.

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Readings and saints for this week:

Monday: Acts 21:8-14; John 14:27-15:7
Martyr Isaurus & Companions; Martyrs Manuel, Sabel & Ismael

Tuesday: Acts 21:26-32; John 16:2-13
Martyr Leontius & Companions

Wednesday: Jude 1:1-25; John 14:21-24
Apostle Jude; Martyr Zosima

Thursday: Acts 25:13-19; John 16:23-33
Hieromartyr Methodios; Father Callistus

Friday: Acts 27:1-44; 28:1; John 17:18-26
Martyr Julian; Hieromartyr Terentios of Iconius

Saturday: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17; John 21:14-25
The Saturday of Souls; Hieromartyr Eusebius; Martyrs Zenon and Zena



Archbishopric of Good Hope,
Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa

Evangelion

A Bulletin of Orthodox Christian Faith

16 June 2013

The true knowledge of God

This past Thursday we celebrated the Ascension of Jesus Christ and next Sunday we will celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Christ is no longer among us in a bodily way as He once was, but He assures us that His Holy Spirit will comfort, strengthen and guide us.

Today is also the Sunday on which we commemorate the Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council. We honour them for their zeal in defending the true faith, something that can seem a little out of place in our contemporary world which emphasizes tolerance and diversity. But it is important to realize why the Church insists on the need to guard the life that Christ has left us, for here we find the truth that leads us to God, allowing us to be nourished by His life.

In today’s Gospel Saint John tells us of Jesus’ prayer before His Crucifixion, in which He prays for His followers, praying that they would be kept in the truth and in unity with one another: “Holy Father, keep those You have given me true to your name, so that they may be one like us.”

The truth of the Gospel and the faith of the Church is not something abstract, much less something oppressive that we need to submit to out of fear of punishment. Rather, it is the possibility of sharing in the communion of the Church, of being led to a greater participation in God’s own life. This is no abstract knowledge, but it is a knowledge that leads to life and is the cause of a great joy.

This knowledge ... is life. For it dwells in our hearts, reshaping those who receive it into sonship with Him and molding them into incorruption and piety toward God through life, according to the Gospel.

St Cyril of Alexandria



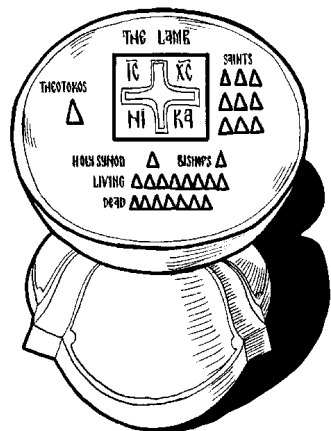
A Mercy of Peace, a Sacrifice of Praise

An introduction to the Divine Liturgy

We saw last week that we are all called to prepare ourselves to celebrate the Divine Liturgy and to receive Jesus Christ in Holy Communion. An important part of this preparation is the service of the *Proskomedie* which the priest offers (sometimes assisted by a deacon) before the Liturgy begins.

The offering of ourselves

Jesus Christ speaks of Himself as the Bread of Life, who offers Himself for our salvation and whose Body and Blood we receive in Holy Communion. However, bread is also something that we offer to God. It is a basic food that has come to symbolise the whole of our lives. By offering bread to God, we are really offering our lives to Him, and when the priest places the bread that we have offered on the altar, he is really placing us on the altar, with all of our concerns and longings. And when God accepts this offer, He transforms it and offers it back to us as the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ.



The Proskomedie

In the service of the *Proskomedie*, which means preparation, the priest prepares the bread that is to be offered in the Eucharist. The bread used in the Liturgy is known as *Prospora*, which means an offering to God. It is specially baked for the Liturgy, often with special prayers being said while it is baked. A special seal is stamped on top of the offering loaf with the words IC, XC, NIKA, which are the Greek abbreviation for “Jesus Christ Conquers.”

The *Proskomedie* is performed in the sanctuary at the side table known as the Table of Oblation. The priest first cuts a large cube from the centre of the loaf, underneath the seal. This is known as the Lamb and stands for Jesus Christ who is the Bread of Life (John 6:32-35) and the “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” (John 1:29) It is the Lamb that will be consecrated during the Liturgy of the Eucharist and will become the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ.

While the priest is cutting the Lamb from the *Prospora* bread, he recites the words “He was led as a lamb to the slaughter” and other verses from of the Prophet Isaiah. While piercing the right hand side of the Lamb with the spear (a spear-like liturgical knife), he concludes with the words from Saint John’s Gospel: “One of the soldiers pierced His side with a lance; and immediately there came out blood and water.” (John 19:34)

After having poured wine and water into the chalice, the priest cuts a large triangular piece of the *Prospora* bread and places it next to the Lamb on the left hand side of the *diskos*, or holy plate. This piece represents the Holy Theotokos, the Mother of the Lord. On the right hand side of the *diskos*, the priest places nine smaller pieces of *Prospora* which commemorates the angels, prophets, apostles and saints of the Church. Finally, the priest prays for the living and the departed, especially those for whom he has been asked to pray, and he places small pieces of *Prospora* below the Lamb to represent them.

The whole Church

In the service of the *Proskomedie* we can see the gathering together of the one Church of God. Represented on the *diskos* we see Christ as our head, the angels, saints and those sharing His glorified life, together with all of the faithful disciples on earth, for the Liturgy is always about bringing together the whole Church and offering all of our concerns to God.

The Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council

Today, on the sixth Sunday after Pascha, we commemorate Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council which was held in Nicaea in 325.

The first centuries of the Church’s life were a time for clarifying and expressing what Christians really believe. Very often the Church did this in response to false teachers whose doctrines were endangering the truths of our salvation.

So it was that when the priest Arius started teaching that Jesus Christ was not true God but some sort of creature, his own Archbishop Alexander stepped in to put an end to erroneous ideas and to preserve the truth of the faith. However, Arius’ ideas gathered support in various places and led to much controversy.

It was against this background that the Emperor Constantine convened the First Ecumenical Council. He was concerned with preserving the unity of the Church and so he asked all the bishops of the Church to decide what the Church really believes about Jesus Christ. The Council Fathers proclaimed that Christ is truly God and of one substance with the Father.

The ideas of Arius were to resurface in the decades following the Council and the Church would be called to further clarify what it believed. However, the Council of Nicaea was an important beacon and highlighted how important faith in the Incarnation of Jesus Christ is. This is the hinge of our entire faith and it is for their role in preserving and passing on this truth that we honour the Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council.



Let us praise today the mystical trumpets of the Spirit, the Godbearing Fathers, who sang a harmonious melody of theology in the midst of the Church: one Trinity, unchanging Essence and Godhead; the overthrowers of Arius, the champions of the Orthodox, who ever intercede with the Lord that he have mercy on our souls.

From Vespers for the Sunday of the Fathers of Nicaea