



Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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May 28, 2017

Holy Fathers of the

First Ecumenical Council (325)

St. Nicetas the Confessor of Chalcedon (9th C)

St Germaine of Paris (576)

The God-mantled Fathers
gathered on this day as
bright torches flaming
with light, O Christ!
They recognized Thee
as the only Son of God,
Consubstantial and
Co-eternal with
the Father!

✠ **Tuesday, May 30, 6:30pm - Inquirer's Class > Next Sunday, June 4 is Pentecost**

✠ **Saturday, June 3: Baptism – 3:00pm Child Marie Ory**

✠ "Since then Christ's Ascension is our uplifting, and the hope of the Body is raised, where the glory of the Head has gone before, let us exult, dearly beloved, with worthy joy and delight with thanksgiving. For today, not only are we confirmed as possessors of Paradise, but we have also in Christ penetrated the heights of Heaven. We have gained still greater things through Christ's unspeakable grace than we had lost through the devil's malice." **St. Leo the Great of Rome**

✠ "It is impossible for someone to acquire a catholic knowledge of the spirit except by being incorporated into the life of the Church. The entire significance of the perseverance of Orthodoxy through the centuries lies exactly in the numerical identity of the Church, in her uniquely catholic, universal, and continuous existence, with an uninterrupted and continuous hierarchical succession, with the performance of the mysteries, with the communion of the faith, and by the action of the One Spirit and one grace in all of these. This is none other than the unity of the Body of Christ, the unity of the house of God, in which all who have fallen asleep in the faith and piety presently live and dwell along with all the saints and holy fathers." **St. Justin Popovich**

"I am not a heretic."

It was said concerning **Abba Agathon** that some monks came to find him having heard tell of his great discernment. Wanting to see if he would lose his temper they said to him, "Aren't you Agathon who is said to be a fornicator and proud man?" "Yes, it is very true," he answered. They resumed. "Aren't you that Agathon who is always talking nonsense?" "I am."

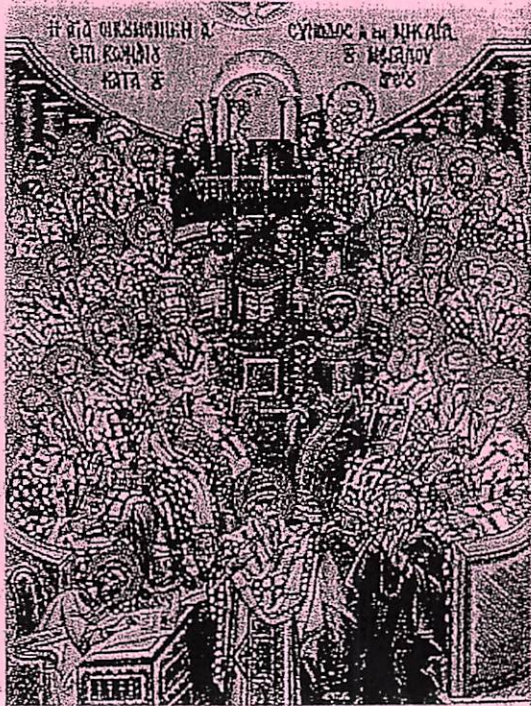
Again they said, "Aren't you Agathon the heretic?" But at that he replied "I am not a heretic." So they asked him, "Tell us why you accepted everything we cast you, but repudiated this last insult." He replied, "The first accusations I take to myself, for that is good for my soul. But heresy is separation from God. Now I have no wish to be separated from God." At this saying they were astonished at his discernment and returned, edified.

✠ The Christian who loves all people has a great reward, especially if he forgives those who do him evil. For if we don't love our neighbor, all the good works we do will be worthless. They amount to nothing, we will be worthless. Love, my brethren, God requires love from us.

(Blessed Elder George Karslides, +1959)

THE FIRST ECUMENICAL COUNCIL

Today's feast, the Commemoration and eulogy of the holy Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council, which was held in Nicaea in 325 in the reign of Constantine the Great — is celebrated every year during the week before Pentecost, or the seventh week after Easter. The First Ecumenical Council or Synod was summoned to remove the confusion which Arius, an Alexandrian priest, had created by his false teaching. He had



been spreading the teaching that Christ was created from God in time, and that He is not the pre-eternal Son of God, equal in being with God the Father. Three hundred and eighteen holy Fathers took part in this Council. It condemned the Arian teaching, and anathematized Arius when he would not repent. This Council also definitively confirmed the Symbol of Faith (the Creed) which was later amplified at the Second Ecumenical Council. Many bishops were present at the First Ecumenical Council, among whom the following stood out: Saint Nicholas of Myra in Lycia, Saint Spyridon, Saint Athanasius the Great, Saint Achillius, Saint Paphnutius, Saint James of Nisibis, Macarius of Jerusalem, Alexander of Alexandria, Eustathius of Antioch, Eusebius of Caesarea, Mitrophanes of Constantinople, John of Persia, Aristarchus of

Armenia and many others from the East. And from the West: Hosius of Cordova, Theophilus the Goth, Cecilianus of Carthage, and others. The most important work of this Council was the confirmation of the Symbol of Faith. The Council also confirmed the time of the celebration of Easter, and prescribed twenty Canons.

In its Canon XX, this holy Ecumenical Council states: "Since there are some persons who kneel in church on Sunday and on the days of Pentecost, with a view to preserving uniformity in all parishes, it has seemed best to the holy Council for prayers to be offered to God while standing."

"...AND HE ASCENDED INTO HEAVEN"

Each time the Nicene Creed is recited, Orthodox Christians proclaim their belief that the Risen Lord has returned to His heavenly home, reunited with the Father. The writers of the Gospels tell us that this blessed event took place 40 days after our Lord's Resurrection. In the presence of His faithful followers, Christ ascended from the Mount of Olives, disappearing from their sight as He rose into the clouds above them.



It is interesting to note that many of the early Christians firmly believed that the Lord's Second Coming would occur during their own lifetime! Some theorize that this was one reason they were so willing to give up their lives in THIS world, for, in their own minds, they strongly felt that the WORLD TO COME was definitely at hand!

Of course, we know that the Lord Himself tells us that "even the angels in heaven do not know when the Son of Man will return in all His glory." Certain Orthodox icons of the Feast of the Ascension are written in such a manner that it is impossible to determine whether Christ is ascending into heaven, or coming to earth again! This captures the profound truth that we are ALREADY living under His reign while awaiting His actual return to establish His Kingdom in its fullness. Just as the Apostles were chided and chastised by the two angels who appeared to them on the Mount of Olives after Christ's departure from their midst, we, too, should not be found "gazing idly up into heaven." It is our task to PREPARE ourselves diligently for His Coming, FILLED with the Spirit as we live lives of RIGHTEOUS in anticipation of His Return.

THE FEAST DAY OF THE ASCENSION OF OUR LORD

V. Rev. Fr. Thomas Hopko

The Feast of the Ascension of our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ is celebrated each year on the fortieth day after the Great and Holy Feast of Pascha. Since the date of Pascha changes each year, the date of the Feast of the Ascension changes, but is always celebrated on a Thursday.

The Feast commemorates when, on the fortieth day after His Resurrection, Jesus led His disciples to the Mount of Olives, and after blessing them and asking them to wait for the fulfillment of the promise of the Holy Spirit, He ascended into heaven. The story of the Ascension of our Lord, celebrated as one of the Twelve Great Feasts of the Church, is found in the book of the Acts of the Apostles 1:3-11, and is also mentioned in the Gospels of Mark (16:19) and Luke (24:50-53). The moment of the Ascension is told in one sentence: "He was lifted up before their eyes in a cloud which took Him from their sight" (Acts 1:9).

Christ made His last appearance on earth, forty days after His Resurrection from the dead. The Acts of the Apostles states that the disciples were in Jerusalem. Jesus appeared before them and commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the "Promise of the Father," stating, "You shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now" (Acts 1:5).

After Jesus gave these instructions, He led the disciples to the Mount of Olives, where He commissioned them to be His witnesses "in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). At this time the disciples were directed by Christ to "go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19). Jesus also told them that He would be with them always, "even to the end of the world" (Matthew 28:20). As the disciples watched, Jesus lifted up His hands, blessed them, and then was taken up out of their sight (Luke 24:51; Acts 1:9). Two angels appeared to them and asked them why they were gazing into heaven. Then one of the angels said, "This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as you have seen Him going into heaven" (Acts 1:11).

The icon of The Ascension of Our Lord is a joyous icon. It is painted with bright colors. Christ is shown ascending in His glory in a mandorla, a design which is almond-shaped or round. Inside the mandorla is the figure of a holy person. Christ blesses the assembly with His right hand. In His left is a scroll, a symbol of teaching. This icon shows that the Lord in heaven is the source of blessing and the source of knowledge, reminding us that Christ continues to be the source of the teaching and message of the Church, blessing and guiding those to whom He has entrusted his work.

The Theotokos occupies a very special place in the center of the icon, immediately below the ascending Christ. The gesture of her hands is gesture of prayer. She is clearly outlined by the whiteness of the garments of the angels. The Theotokos is depicted in a very calm pose, quite different from the appearance of the Disciples, who are moving about, talking to one another and looking and pointing towards heaven. The entire group, the Theotokos and the disciples represent the Church.

The icon of the Ascension includes some who did not witness the Ascension. St. Paul is shown to the left of the Theotokos, but we know that he was not present at the Ascension. At that time, St. Paul did not yet believe in Jesus, but he became a Christian and one of the greatest Apostles and missionaries of the Church.

The icon expresses the sovereignty of Christ over His Church; He is its Head, its guide, its source of inspiration and teaching; it receives its commission and ministry from Him, and fulfils it in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus did not live with his disciples after his resurrection as he had before his death. Filled with the glory of his divinity, he appeared at different times and places to his people, assuring them that it was he, truly alive in his risen and glorified body. To them he presented himself alive after his passion by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days, and speaking of the Kingdom of God (Acts 1:3).

It should be noted that the time span of forty days is used many times in the Bible and signifies a temporal period of completeness and sufficiency (Gen 7:17; Ex 16:35, 24:18; Judges 3:11; 1 Sam 17:16; 1 Kg 19:8; Jon 3:4; Mt 4:2). On the fortieth day after his passover, Jesus ascended into heaven to be glorified on the right hand of God (Acts 1:9-11; Mk 16:19; Lk 24:51). The ascension of Christ is his final physical departure from this world after the resurrection. It is the formal completion of his mission in this world as the Messianic Saviour. It is his glorious return to the Father who had sent him into the world to accomplish the work that he had given him to do (Jn 17:4-5).

"... and lifting his hands he blessed them. While blessing them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven. And they returned to Jerusalem with great joy. ..." (Lk 24:51-52).

The Church's celebration of the ascension, as all such festal celebrations, is not merely the remembrance of an event in Christ's life. Indeed, the ascension itself is not to be understood as though it were simply the supernatural event of a man floating up and away into the skies. The holy scripture stresses Christ's physical departure and his glorification with God the Father, together with the great joy which his disciples had as they received the promise of the Holy Spirit who was to come to assure the Lord's presence with them, enabling them to be his witnesses to the ends of earth (Lk 24:48-53; Acts 1:8-11; Mt 28:20; Mk 16:16-14).

In the Church the believers in Christ celebrate these very same realities with the conviction that it is for them and for all men that Christ's departure from this world has taken place. The Lord leaves in order to be glorified with God the Father and to glorify us with himself. He goes in order to "prepare a place" for and to take us also into the blessedness of God's presence. He goes to open the way for all flesh into the "heavenly sanctuary ... the Holy Place not made by hands" (see Hebrews 8-10). He goes in order to send the Holy Spirit, who proceeds from the Father to bear witness to him and his gospel in the world, making him powerfully present in the lives of disciples.

The liturgical hymns of the Feast of the Ascension sing of all of these things. The antiphonal verses of the Divine Liturgy are taken from Psalms 47, 48, and 49. The Troparion of the Feast which is sung at the small entrance is also used as the post-communion hymn.

Thou hast ascended in glory O Christ our God, granting joy to Thy disciples by the promise of the Holy Spirit. Through the blessing they were assured that Thou art the Son of God, the Redeemer of the world!
(Troparion)

When Thou didst fulfill the dispensation for our sake, and didst unite earth to heaven, Thou didst ascend in glory, O Christ our God, not being parted from those who love Thee, but remaining with them and crying: I am with you and no one will be against you!
(Kontakion)

This and That

If “once saved always saved” is true, then a life of self-denial and continual repentance makes zero sense.

When surface diversity trumps intellectual diversity of opinion, and tolerance of opposing viewpoints, then it ceases to have any substantive value. – Internet Comment

We have moved from a period where we understood ourselves as “pilgrims” in search of deeper meaning to one where we act as “tourists” in search of multiple but fleeting social experiences. ...By my reckoning, the greatest danger facing the United States is social disintegration. As family instability and other social pathologies increase, large sectors of our society become atomized and vulnerable.
~ R.R. Reno

Conservative Christians must always ask themselves what they seek to conserve. In 2017, our goal must be to conserve the conditions under which orthodox Christianity can thrive, which is the basis for the continuation in history of orthodox Christianity itself. Two generations ago, we could focus on the perils of an enlarged secular government. Now the problem has changed. The greatest threat to Christianity is liquid modernity, which dissolves any historical understanding of the Christian faith, and displaces worship of the God of the Bible with the worship of Self. And though the increasing (and increasingly militant) secularism of society is a threat to orthodox Christianity, the greater threat comes from within: most importantly, the religious illiteracy of contemporary Christians, and the failure of believers to comprehend the nature of present-day threats to the faith. Christians sense that something is deeply wrong, but they resist the radical nature of the diagnosis, which is why they either deny the seriousness of the problem, or mischaracterize the proposed solution (the Benedict Option) as a prelude to dismissing it entirely. We small-o orthodox Christians need to renew solidarity — solidarity with the Gospel, solidarity with the teachings and experience of the historical church, and solidarity with each other — and this is something that can't be done by Christians who have allowed their metaphysical dream be dictated by the post-Christian culture of liquid modernity.

– Rod Dreher

The desperation to be “relevant” to a culture that has no interest in the faith delivered to the Apostles — and let's be clear, Catholics and Orthodox suffer from this too — is deadly. – Rod Dreher

There can be no more pretense of a culture around us that is Christian or that is even content with Christianity being in its midst. We must be for the world by being against the world: Athanasius *contra mundum*. The world is leveling every cultural institution in its path — we must save them or rebuild them from the dust, for the world's own sake, and for God's. – Anthony Esolen

At the very essence of a utopia is the idea of progressive movement toward a not-yet-achieved perfection. It is wrong to think of utopias as harmless dreams. Combined with the idea of progress, utopian thought is a dream that motivates action. It establishes a goal so lofty that it cannot be reached. The more ideal it becomes, the greater the stubbornness with which it is pursued. There comes a time when blood is spilled. Oceans of blood.

One of the most terrifying attempts to realize a utopia was the communist experiment in Russia. A slogan inscribed on a sign in the Solovki gulag was a simple but exact expression of the essence of utopia: “With an iron hand we will drive humanity to happiness!” Relentless pursuit of the communist utopia determined life in Russia for a large part of the last century at the cost of millions of lives.”

Eugene Vodolazkin, Author of *Laurus*

Pearls of the Holy Fathers (16 –2)

Whatever we do without prayer and without hope in God, turns out afterwards to be harmful and defective. St. Mark the Ascetic

If you wish to correct anyone from his faults, do not think of correcting him solely by your own means: you would only do harm by your own passions, for instance, by pride and by the irritability arising from it; "but cast thy burden upon the Lord," and pray to God "Who trieth the hearts and reins," with all your heart, that He Himself may enlighten the mind and heart of that man. St. John of Kronstadt

One of the Fathers asked a young brother, saying, "Tell us, O brother, is it good to hold one's peace or to speak?" Then that young brother spake unto him, saying, "If the words [to be said] be useless, leave them [unsaid], but if they be good, give place to good things, and speak them. Yet, even though the words be good, prolong not thy speech, but cut it short, for silence is best of all."

Paradise of the Fathers

Be slow and dull for idle talk, but knowing and wise in hearkening to the saving words of the Holy Scriptures. St. Basil the Great

Simplicity is given by the Spirit of God. Man cannot obtain anything himself if God does not give it to him. He will give it if you will be like a child, who receives everything simply and who lives by his feelings. We who know a lot and understand a lot are confused and divided by our knowledge.

Elder Gabriel of Pskov and Kazan

Every temptation and disturbance of the enemy is consumed by prayer. Elder Hilarion

The Saints all said: "I shall suffer torments in hell" — even though they performed great miracles. They had learned by experience that if the soul condemns itself to hell, but trusts the while in God's compassion, the strength of God enters into it, and the Holy Spirit bears clear witness of salvation.

St. Silouan of Mt Athos

Dwelling with the mind and heart in Heaven and in God — that is the chief fruit, that is the end of prayer. The repulsion and defeat of the enemies which oppose the attainment of this end is a secondary matter; it should not deflect to itself all our attention lest the realization and consideration of victory should give entry to pride and self-confidence and we suffer a crushing defeat through our very victory.

St. Ignatius Brianchaninov

Read holy writings, reflect upon them, absorb all that is useful, applying it to your life and to your soul.

St. Theophan the Recluse

Unlike animals which after death disappear, human beings were created for more than life on earth. We were created for a life with God and in God, a life which would last not just a hundred or a thousand years, but for all eternity. Only those, however, who are Christians are capable of this life with God. That is, only those who rightly believe in Jesus Christ. St. Innocent of Alaska

Know this, brethren: do not creep out of the church before the dismissal prayer, for he who exits from the divine chant or converses or whispers has been seduced by demons, as the Divine Scriptures bear witness.

St. Joseph of Volokolamsk

Anyone who bears humiliation, scorn, and punishment can be saved. Sayings of the Fathers

I entreat you: labor in your prayers and do not grow faint, and let us allow God to take care for us.

St. Alexander of Svir

You wish to live while you are asleep! Go, and labor. Go, and work. Go, seek, and ye shall find. Awake and stand up. Knock, and it shall be opened unto you. Paradise of the Fathers