

# SOBORNOST

## St. Thomas the Apostle Orthodox Church

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*American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox  
Diocese*

*ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE  
OF CONSTANTINOPLE*  
**SERVICES**



**Saturday: Confession 5:00 PM | Great Vespers 5:30 PM**

**Sunday: Matins (Orthros) 8:45 AM | Children's Sunday School 9:30 AM  
Divine Liturgy 10:00 AM.**

## **May 20, 2018 – Commemoration of the Holy Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council (7<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Pascha)**

“How do the perfect speak,” asked St. Silouan. Answering his own question, he says, “The perfect never say anything of themselves...They only say what the Spirit inspires them to say.”

### **THE COUNCIL OF NICAEA**

Today is the Seventh Sunday after Pascha on which we commemorate the First Ecumenical Council. This Council is called the first Synod of Nicaea and lasted from May 20 until August 25 in the year 325. The Council was summoned by Emperor Constantine to address the teachings of Arius that were causing considerable disturbance in the Empire. Arius taught that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was created by the Father and therefore had not existed alongside the Father from all eternity.

The decisions of the Council concluded with:

- The condemnation of Arius and his teachings;
- the formulation of the Nicene Creed (which begins with, “I believe, in one God...”);

- how to deal with schismatics, how various types of heretics are to be received back into the Church; and
- the proper dating of Pascha so that the whole Church will be celebrating it on the same day.

### THE UNIQUENESS OF THE COUNCIL

The Council of Nicaea is unique in that it became the first of the Ecumenical Councils and therefore had no precedence before it to guide its deliberations. At the time that the Council of Nicaea was called, there was previously no established canonical regulations for when and how a Council was to be convened. Many synods were already called to adjudicate on matters of urgency that were of mutual concern but only as the need arose.

Unity within the Church was evidenced during these times by adherence to Tradition and the Faith, more than on any institutional pattern. When the Empire became unified under Constantine, the unity of the Church became more visible.

### TRADITION

How was this unity revealed? Ultimately, it would be through adherence to the Scriptures as revealed through the Apostolic Tradition. As Fr. Georges Florovsky writes, “Those Councils... were actually recognized as “Ecumenical,”...not because of their formal canonical competence, but because of their charismatic character: under the guidance of the Holy Spirit they have witnessed to the truth, in conformity with the Scripture as handed down in Apostolic Tradition.

### SCRIPTURE AND TRADITION

For the Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council and all Christians previous to the Council, the understanding of the Scriptures was not in the reading of those Scriptures but in their proper interpretation. The Ethiopian Eunuch exemplifies this when he asked the Apostle Paul while reading the Scriptures in his chariot, “How can I [understand], except some man should guide me” (Acts 8:31). St. Hilary of Poitiers, echoes the same when he writes, “For Scripture is not in the reading, but in the understanding.”

The understanding of the Scriptures is taken up into this “Tradition” and is a part of it, as Fr. Georges Florovsky further writes,

Tradition was in the Early Church, first of all, a hermeneutical principle and method. Scripture could be rightly and fully assessed and understood only in the light and in the context of the living Apostolic Tradition, which was an integral factor of Christian existence. It was so, of course, not because Tradition could add anything to what has been manifested in the Scripture,

but because it provided that living context, the comprehensive perspective, in which only the true “intention” and the total “design” of the Holy Writ, itself of Divine Revelation, could be detected and grasped.

Therefore, only within this “living context” can the divinely revealed Scriptures be understood because “Tradition” is not “a transmission of inherited doctrines” as though a text of theology is handed over from one generation to the next. No, it is a “continuous life in the truth” and an “insight into the meaning and impact of the revelatory events.” In this sense, how you live and what you do will affect how you understand God and the world around you. The longer you live in Christ, in the Tradition, the more you will understand. This “Tradition” is the whole life that the Fathers lived in within the Church and the life that we are brought into through Baptism.

### DEIFICATION

It is in this atmosphere, in this whole world of “Tradition,” that we become united to God. It is not as though we are only pardoned of our sins but, what is more than this, God unites himself to us, as when Christ says, “That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us...” (cf. John 17: 21). St. Athanasius of Alexandria (who was at the First Ecumenical Council) repeated what St. Irenaeus wrote, approximately one hundred and fifty years earlier, when St. Irenaeus said, “[God] became what we are in order to make us what he is himself.”

The term for this “life united to God” is called “deification” and each of us, as baptized Christians, participate in this life, this experience of and union with God, in varying degrees.

### CHURCH FATHERS

Those whom the Church considers “Fathers of the Church” are described by Archimandrite Sophrony (Sakharov) who said of them: they had personal experience of God, had excellent intellectual gifts and they had also acquired the education of their day. “They were, therefore, able, on the one hand, to record this experience and, on the other, to confront the various heretics of their era.”

We could say that these Fathers of the Church are “mature” Christians, or “experienced.” But, more to the point, they have experienced the dogmas. Not only does living within the Tradition of the Church reveal the truth of God through the Scriptures, but this truth is revealed experientially. In their experience, wherein they are illumined by Divine Grace or have visions, they see God, as the Apostle Matthew writes, “Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God” (Matt. 5:8).

This is true, not only of the fathers at the time of the Ecumenical Councils but in every age.

## EXPERIENCE AND DOGMA

Up to the time of the First Ecumenical Council, we find two instances where a standard is referred to when dealing with heretics. Firstly, we see this in St. Irenaeus. He describes the dogmas of the Faith as an image of a king made with costly jewels. The heretics, he says, rearrange the stones to make the image of a fox. St. Athanasius, refers to the “total perspective of faith” and says that the heretics lack this and that is why they quote verses from Scripture out of context. These are both examples of theological constructions used to explain the experience of the Saints, to put into words the experience of God from whence comes the dogmas of the faith. Only the pure in heart who have seen God know what the image of the king looks like and know the total perspective of the faith.

### **Two Saints and the First Ecumenical Council**

Therefore, when we look at who attended the First Ecumenical Council we see St. Anthony the Great who cast out demons, worked miracles, was clairvoyant and even saw souls of the departed being borne to heaven. It was him who was called on by his friend St. Athanasius to refute the Arians even though he was unlettered. We also see St. Spyridon, whom St. Nikolai (Velimirovich) writes about saying that apart from performing many miracles, St. Spyridon also saw and heard the angels of God, foresaw future events and discerned the secrets of men’s heart. At the First Ecumenical Council, he displayed the unity of the Holy Trinity in a remarkable way: He took a brick in his hand and squeezed it. At that instant fire shot up from it, water dripped on the ground, and only dust remained in the hands of the wonderworker. “There was only one brick,” St Spyridon said, “but it was composed of three elements. In the Holy Trinity there are three Persons, but only one God.”

## CONCLUSION

These holy men, these Saints, lived in the Tradition of the Church and we live in that same Tradition. They were baptized with the same Baptism as us. They struggled and fought the good fight taking the Kingdom of Heaven by force and were united to God. They received Divine revelations and were used by God in these Councils to defend the Faith and through their lives show us the narrow way that leads to Christ, our deification. They were not ordinary men; they were Saints, who spoke as the Holy Spirit directed them. *Through the prayers of our Holy Fathers, Lord Jesus Christ Son of God, have mercy on us! (from holycross-hermitage.com)*

### **Today's Epistle Lesson – St. Paul's Letter to the Colossians 3:12-16**

Brethren, as *the* elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also *must do*. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

### **Today's Gospel Lesson – Saint Luke 18:18-27**

At that time, a certain ruler asked Him, saying, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" So Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one *is* good but One, *that is*, God. You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery,' 'Do not murder,' 'Do not steal,' 'Do not bear false witness,' 'Honor your father and your mother.'" And he said, "All these things I have kept from my youth." So when Jesus heard these things, He said to him, "You still lack one thing. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." But when he heard this, he became very sorrowful, for he was very rich. And when Jesus saw that he became very sorrowful, He said, "How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." And those who heard it said, "Who then can be saved?" But He said, "The things which are impossible with men are possible with God."

## *A Word From the Holy Fathers*

It is necessary, I think, to submit in brief to your industriousness also the vices that are opposed to the virtues, until, having so ploughed the intellect, we remove the thorns of the thoughts from the sown land. We have not come to this task because of works that we have done, but having as our model the sound discourses which we have heard from the fathers, we have been equally a witness to some of their deeds. All is grace from above, which shows even to sinners the schemes of the deceivers and which also offers assurance, saying, 'For what do you have that you did not receive' (1 Cor. 4:7), so that in having received, on the one hand, we may give thanks to the one who granted the gift, and in having possession, on the other hand, we may not attribute to ourselves any bosting of honor, as though denying the gift. Wherefore scripture says, 'And if you received it, why do you boast, as if you did not receive it? Already you have become rich (1 Cor. 4:7-8), it says, you

who were poor in works, already you have been filled, now that you have begun to receive teaching. In these matters the error has now passed over to my account, for the reason that I, on the one hand, am in debt because I disguise the poverty of my works and, on the other hand, because of the opinion I recommended, whereas now I am reversing my instruction that one should receive teaching.

But nevertheless if any allowance has been made on your part, render it to me as well that we may make a brief submission on the vices opposed to the virtues, indicating what is gluttony against which abstinence is opposed, what is fornication and chastity, what is avarice and freedom from possessions, sorrow against which there is joy, what is anger and patience, acedia and perseverance, what is vainglory and freedom from it, jealousy and freedom from it, pride and humility. In what follows we have set these down in brief as opposed, contrary, and antithetical to one another.

There is gluttony then, the mother of fornication, nourishing the thoughts with words, the relaxation of fasting, the muzzling of asceticism, terror over one's moral purpose, imagining of foods, picturer of condiments, a dissolute fawn, unbridled madness, a receptacle of disease, envy of health, an obstruction of the throat, a groaning of the innards, the extremity of insults, a fellow initiate in fornication, pollution of the intellect, weakness of the body, wearisome sleep, gloomy death.

Abstinence is a bridle for the stomach, a scourge of immoderation, a balance of due proportion, a muzzle for gourmandize, renunciation of rest, the undertaking of austerity, a place of chastisement for thoughts, an eye for vigilance, deliverance from lustful burning, pedagogue of the body, a tower of ascetic works and a wall for our ways, reserve in morals and repression of the passions, mortification of one's members, revivification of souls, imitation of the resurrection, a life of sanctification.

Fornication is a conception of gluttony, that which softens the heart in advance, a furnace of lustful burning, an arranger of marriages with idols, unnatural activity, a form covered in shadows, a sexual intertwining wrought in the imagination, a bed of dreams, unfeeling sexual congress, bait for the eyes, immodesty of sight, dishonoring of prayer, shame of the heart, guide to ignorance.

Chastity is a robe of truth, an axe for wantonness, a charioteer for the eyes, an overseer for one's thinking, a circumcision of thoughts, excision of licentiousness, a planting opposed to nature and a counter to lustful burning, an assistant to our works and a collaborator with abstinence, a lantern for the heart and an inclination for prayer.

Avarice is the parsimony of idols, the prophecy of the crowd, a vote for stinginess, a hoarding mentality, a wealth of captivity, a race of injustice, an abundance of

illnesses, a diviner of many years, an enchanter for industriousness, a counselor of sleeplessness, poverty of the belly, meagerness of foods, insatiable madness, a wickedness of many cares.

Freedom from possessions is the uprooting of avarice and the rooting of freedom from it, a fruit of love and a cross of life, a life free of suffering, a treasure free of envy, a heaven free of care, a sun without distraction, immeasurable matter, incomprehensible wealth, a scythe for cares, the practice of the Gospels, the world readily abandoned, a fast-running contestant.

Sadness is one who dwells over loss, who is familiar with frustrated acquisition, a forerunner of exile, remembrance of family, a deputy of want, a kinsman of acedia, a complaint of exasperation, a reminder of insult, and a darkening of the soul, dejection in morals, drunkenness of prudence, a soporific remedy, a cloud of form, a worm in the flesh, sadness of thoughts, a people in captivity.

Joy is the destruction of sorrow and thanksgiving for misfortunes, a vision that comes from prayers and gladness that comes from ascetic works, happiness from doing good, an ornament of renunciation, a receptacle of hospitality, a refuge of hopes, nourishment of ascetics, an encouragement for mourners, a consolation for tears, a help for affliction, a supporter of love, a partner in patience.

Anger is a plundering of prudence, a destruction of one's state, a confusion of nature, a form turned savage, a furnace for the heart, an eruption of flames, a law of irascibility, a wrath of insults, a mother of wild beasts, a silent battle, an impediment to prayer.

Patience is a shield for prudence, a tribunal for anger, a surgery for the heart, admonition of the over-confident, calm for the troubled, a harbor from storms, beneficence towards those in sorrow, gentleness towards all; it blesses when slandered, rejoices when insulted; a consolation for those in difficult circumstances, a mirror of things hoped for, a prize of those mistreated.

Acedia is an ethereal friendship, one who leads our steps astray, hatred of industriousness, a battle against stillness, stormy weather for psalmody, laziness in prayer, a slackening of asceticism, untimely drowsiness, revolving sleep, the oppressiveness of solitude, hatred of one's cell, an adversary of ascetic works, an opponent of perseverance, a muzzling of meditation, ignorance of the scriptures, a partaker in sorrow, a clock for hunger.

Perseverance is the severing of acedia, the cutting down of thoughts, concern for death, meditation on the cross, fear firmly affixed, beaten gold, legislation for afflictions, a book of thanksgiving, a breastplate of stillness, an armor of ascetic works, a fervent work of excellence, an example of the virtues.

Vainglory involves fantasizing about social encounters, a pretense of industriousness, the contrary of the truth, author of heresies, desire for privilege, the ultimate title, slavery to praises, a spirit with many forms, a beast with many teeth; the mean of vainglory is entwined with pride and jealousy, which are found within one another and which make war through one another, the three-strand chain of vices, the threefold poisonous mixture of passions, the threefold tongue of heretics.

Freedom from vainglory is the working of humility, a defection from obsequiousness, blindness to praises, contemplation of knowledge, a counter to the world, keen perception of the soul, a teaching of lowliness, a hiding place for ascetic works, hostility to fame, a hidden treasure in a corruptible body.

Jealousy is the garment of pride, the disrobing of humility, the root of slander, the coveting of cheerfulness, the feigning of friendship, treachery in confidence, hatred of love, envy of people highly esteemed, tumult of the steadfast, disparagement of the famous, alteration of the eyes, friend of curiosity.

Freedom from jealousy is an innocent eye, a good thought, the perfection of charity, the stability of brotherly love, the destruction of evil, the beginning of all praises, the assembly of the virtues, the support of the soul, sweetness of the tongue, the handmaid of obedience, the enemy of sadness, the dissipating of distress, the destroyer of deceit, joy without end, the likeness of God, the helpmate of Christ, the neighbor of the angels, the heavenly life.

Pride is opposition to God, demonic fantasy, wicked jealousy, obscuring blindness, insolence in one's attitude, conceit of the flesh, false love of esteem, servitude to wicked thoughts, friendship with the demons, an eminent soul, an obvious siege by the adversary, an admonition to destruction.

Humility is a thankful acknowledgement of God, a true recognition of one's nature, a forceful confession of one's weakness, a fortress for love, a refuge from hatred, an unfallen acropolis, a parting of the diabolic waves, flight over the snares of the enemy, the natural overthrowing of Satan, a pleasing life, praise of enemies, a philosophy provided by God, and true friendship with wisdom.

Knowledge of these things and their practical investigations purifies the heart. Who is the person pure in heart who does not find fault with himself for rejecting, or falling short of, or neglecting God's commandment?

– Evagrius of Pontus, *On the Vices Opposed to the Virtues*

## **Also Commemorated Today: Martyrs Thallelaeus, Alexander and Asterius of Aegea in Cilicia**

The Martyrs Thallelaeus, Alexander and Asterius lived during the reign of Numerian (283-284). The prefect of the city of Aegea in Cilicia sent soldiers to seek out Christians. They brought to him Thallelaeus, an eighteen-year-old blond-haired youth. To the prefect's questions Saint Thallelaeus replied, "I am a Christian, a native of Lebanon. My father, Beruchius, was a military commander, and my mother was named Romylia. My brother is a subdeacon. I, however, am studying medicine under the physician Macarius. During a former persecution against Christians in Lebanon, I was brought before the prefect Tiberius, and barely escaped execution. But now that I stand before this court, do with me as you will. I wish to die for Christ my Savior and my God, and hope to endure all torments with His help."

The enraged prefect ordered the two torturers Alexander and Asterius to bore through the knees of the martyr, pass a rope through the bone, and suspend him head downwards. But the executioners, by God's design, bored into a block of wood, which they hung up in place of the martyr. When the prefect saw that they had deceived him, he then ordered that Alexander and Asterius be whipped. They also confessed themselves Christians and glorified God. The prefect immediately gave orders to cut off their heads.

Twice he attempted to bore through the saint's knees, but the grace of God prevented him. Then he commanded that Saint Thallelaeus be drowned. The returning servants reported to the prefect that they had carried out the execution, but just as they finished their report, Saint Thallelaeus appeared in white raiment. For a long time everyone was numbed with terror, but finally the prefect said, "Behold, this sorcerer has bewitched even the sea."

Then one of his advisers, the magician Urbician, told the prefect to have the martyr thrown to the wild beasts. But neither the vicious bear, not the hungry lion and lioness, would touch the saint, all meekly lay down at his feet. Seeing this happen, the people began to shout, "Great is the God of the Christians. O God of Thallelaeus, have mercy on us!" The crowd seized Urbician and threw him to the beasts, which did not hesitate to tear the magician apart.

Finally, the prefect gave orders to kill the holy martyr with a sword. They led Christ's martyr to the place of execution, called Aegea, where he prayed to God and bent his neck beneath the sword. This occurred in the year 284.

The relics of the holy martyr Thallelaeus are in the church of Saint Agathonicus of Constantinople and have performed many miracles. Saint Thallelaeus treated the

sick without payment. For this reason, the Church calls him an Unmercenary Physician. He is invoked in prayers for the sick in the Mystery of Holy Unction, and during the Blessing of Waters. (*from oca.org*)

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***In Your Prayers – Please Remember...*** His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch BARTHOLOMEW, His Grace Bishop GREGORY, Fr. Joseph & Family, Greek Orthodox Archbishop Paul Yazigi of Aleppo, Syriac Orthodox Archbishop Yohanna Ibrahim of Aleppo, His Grace Bishop Neofitos of Nyeri and Mt. Kenya, Fr. John & Pani Betty Jean Baranik, Fr. Vincent Saverino, Presbytera Katie Baker and family, Santiago Alzugaray, Alicia Barosio and family, Jeffrey Carey, Tatyana and Slava Chumak & family, Xenia Chilkowich, Jon Church, Ramius Connour, Curtis Cooper, Luke Cooper, Tina Crull, Mary Diane David, Ron Dominiecki, Linda A. Georgiev, Heather Himler, John Homick, Cameron Houk, Helen Janowiak, John M. Janowiak, Tucker Karl and family, Robert & Pam Karpin, Andrew Kinn, Kopan family, Brian, Helen, and Luke Mahony, Valentina Makowelski, Susan Matula, Anna Meinhold, Dn. Henry Middleton, David & Kathryn Newman, Bobby Nutter & Family, Henry & Lisa Osborne, Westin Perry & Parents, John Reece, Mary Reed, Chris & Kaitlin Rixey, Jerry Von Ronne, Anne Rosario, James, Theodore and Christina Ristas, Samson Family, Sharon Sheptak, Bernie Takabayashi & family, Dawn & Faith Ulmschneider, Lydia Vita, Christine, Marshall, Nathaniel, Subdcn. Nectaros and Ia, the Syrian Christians displaced by war, Mother Virginia Marie and the Carmelite Nuns of Port Tobacco, and all those in need of our prayers. (Please advise Fr. Joseph of changes.)