

SOBORNOST

St. Thomas the Apostle Orthodox Church

(301) 638-5035 Church

4419 Leonardtown Road

Waldorf, MD 20601

Rev. Father Joseph Edgington, Pastor

(703) 532-8017

fredgington@gmail.com

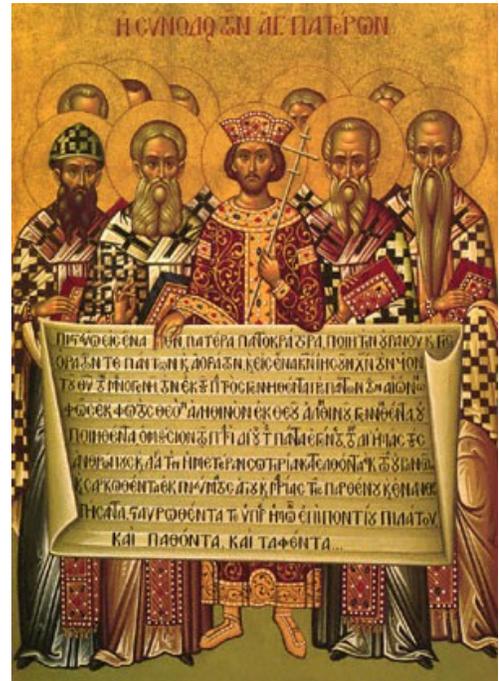
www.apostlethomas.org

American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese

ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE
OF CONSTANTINOPLE

SERVICES

Public services are in abeyance pending resolution of the COVID-19 pandemic. Please refer to the information on our parish and diocesan websites on how you can worship at home.



May 31, 2020 | Sunday After the Ascension | Commemoration of the Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council Questions and Answers regarding the Sunday of the Holy Fathers of the First ecumenical council

QUESTION 1

When is the Sunday of the Holy Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council celebrated? Why?

ANSWER 1

The Sunday of the Holy Fathers of the First ecumenical council is celebrated the Sunday before Pentecost, following Ascension Thursday. When Christ ascended, He reiterated His promise of the Holy Spirit to the apostles. The Holy Spirit guided the church, and this guidance is magnificently made manifest in the ecumenical councils, when dogmas were confirmed and heretics were put to shame. As we await the celebration of the giving of the Holy Spirit, it is appropriate to think of the ways in which He guides the church. Through the Holy Spirit, who guided the Holy Fathers in the councils and confirmed their pronouncements in the mind of the Church, the Orthodox Faith, which is nothing less than the only correct and saving faith in the true God, was preserved.

QUESTION 2

What is an ecumenical council? How many have there been? Why in general were they called? How do the Orthodox view the pronouncements of the Ecumenical councils? What was the primary reason for the 1st Ecumenical Council? When and where was it called?

ANSWER 2

The principle that hierarchs can meet and formulate doctrinal and disciplinary statements and resolutions that are the will of God and accepted by the entire church was established in the apostolic period, with the first RECORDED council, which was reported by St. Luke in His acts, with the famous statement which has become an anthem of sorts for the Orthodox: "For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us" (Acts 15:28).

There have been seven ecumenical councils, which were always convened when there was some heresy that was endangering the purity of the Orthodox faith. The First Ecumenical council was held in 325 AD in Nicea. It was called primarily to combat the heresy of Arianism.

"You have become exact keepers of the apostolic traditions, O Holy Fathers; for in setting forth in council the dogma of the consubstantiality of the Holy Trinity in Orthodox fashion, you cast down the blasphemy of Arius. Then, after censuring Macedonius, the enemy of the Holy Spirit, you condemned Nestorius, Eutyches, Dioscorus, Sabellius, and Severus the headless. Where-fore, make entreaty that we be delivered from their error, and that our life be preserved blameless in the Faith, we pray." (Vespers for the Holy Fathers, The Litya Glory)

"Today the brilliant city of the Niceans has called together to herself from the whole world three hundred eighteen hierarchs against Arius, he who uttered blasphemy and made little account of the One of the Trinity, the true Son and Divine Rod; and having thus deposed this man from power, the Fathers mightily strengthened the Holy Faith." (Matins for the Holy Fathers, Sessional hymn after the 3rd Ode of the canon, Glory)

QUESTION 3

What major church document was produced in part by the 1st Ecumenical Council? Why? Comment on the importance of this document vis-a-vis a person's Orthodoxy.

ANSWER 3

The Symbol of Faith, the Nicene Creed, was authored in part in Nicea (the first seven articles were written). This was the first written expression of the unwritten

Orthodox belief regarding the nature of God, and the internal relationship of the Father to the Son. It was the first document accepted universally defining what Christianity was. It was the first universal mean: it was the measure by which one could delineate Orthodoxy from Heresy. To vary from it meant that was had ceased to be Christian. Therefore, to this day, it is impossible for one to be a Christian if this symbol, which dogmatizes Divine Truth about God and His economy, is not believed.

"O assemblies of the Orthodox, let us celebrate today with faith and piety the annual memorial of the God-bearing Fathers who, in the illustrious city of Nicaea, came together from the whole inhabited world. For with pious mind they refuted the godless dogma of the grievous Arius, and by synodal decree banished him from the Catholic Church. And they instructed all to openly confess the consubstantial and co-eternal Son of God, Who existed before the ages. This, in exactness and piety, they set forth in the Symbol of Faith. Wherefore, following their divine doctrines and believing with assurance, we worship, in One Godhead, the Father, Son, and All-holy Spirit, the Trinity one in essence." (Vespers for the Holy Fathers, the Aposticha, Glory)

"The first gathering of Your priests, O Savior, piously proclaimed You to be begotten and consubstantial with the beginningless Father and Creator of all." (Matins for the Holy Fathers, The Canon of the Fathers, Ode 3)

"Having brought together all knowledge of things of the spirit and made careful inquiry by the divine Spirit's grace, lo, like godly scribes the august Fathers wrote the celestial Symbol, the august Creed of our holy Faith, wherein they clearly teach that, like God the Father, the Word of God is also unoriginate and is consubstantial with Him in truth. Thus did these all-blest and renowned and godly-minded ones indeed follow in manifest manner in that which the Apostles taught." (Praises for the Sunday of the Holy Fathers)

QUESTION 4

Describe the pernicious heresy combated by the council. Are there any recognizable groups outside the church that still hold to this heresy?

ANSWER 4

In essence, the heresy of Arianism, named after it's chief architect the former Protopresbyter Arius of Carthage, held that Christ was created, and not perfectly God. It set the model of a number of future heresies, all of which would in some way seek to either elevate the manhood of Christ to the expense of his Divinity, or elevate the Divinity of Christ at the expense of his manhood. The opposite extreme

of this heresy was the Monophysite heresy, which states that Jesus Christ had only one nature, since His human nature was "swallowed up" into His divine nature.

The Orthodox confess that Jesus Christ is of one essence "homoousios" with God the Father, and that was never a time when He was not God, and there was a time when He became incarnate, and assumed human nature as well, and His divinity and humanity (two natures) coexist in one person, without confusion or intermingling. This dogma is not just a war of words, or semantics. If Jesus Christ did not assume our full human nature, unmingled with the divinity (as our nature is, since we are mortal creatures), His resurrection would not be effectual for humanity, because He would not have resurrected the human nature we possess.

"You were born from the womb before the morning star and motherless from the Father before the ages, though Arius held You were created and thus not God, boldly and mindlessly identifying You, the Creator, with things created, thus storing up fuel for the eternal fire. But the Council gathered in Nicaea proclaimed that You, O Lord, are truly the Son of God, one with the Father and the Spirit in rank."

"O My Savior, who has thus rent Your raiment? You said: It was Arius who sundered the Trinity's headship, which is one in rank and honor. That You are One of the Most Holy Trinity he disputed: and he taught Nestorius the godless not to say Theotokos. But the Council gathered in Nicaea proclaimed that You, O Lord, are truly the Son of God, one with the Father and the Spirit in rank." (Vespers for the Holy Fathers, Lord I have cried, Stichera 7 and 8)

Continued holders of the Arian heresy include the Mormons, Unitarian Pentecostals, and Jehovahs Witnesses.

QUESTION 5

What Gospel is read for the Sunday of the Holy Fathers of the First ecumenical council? Why?

ANSWER 5

The gospel read on for the Sunday of the Holy Fathers of the First ecumenical council is from St. John (Jn 17:1-13), and consists of the words the Lord told His disciples just before His arrest on Holy Thursday. His words shown below powerfully refute the heresy of Arius, as they show Him to be equal to the Father. *"These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify your Son, that your Son also may glorify You:"* (Jn 17:1)

A reciprocal relationship is seen where each person has the capacity to equally glorify the other. Christ's own words here: *"And now, O Father, glorify me with Your own self with the glory which I had with You before the world was."* (John

17:5) directly refute the blasphemous idea, first proposed by Arius, that Jesus Christ was created.

The words of the prayer of Christ are also magnificently realized in the Holy Fathers, the successors to the apostles. Blessed Bishop Nicolai explains: *"Christ's prayer ['Holy Father, keep through Your own name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one, as We are.'] is not only for the apostles - although it is firstly for them - but is also for all those who have and will come to faith in Christ through their word. This prayer, then, was also for the holy Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council, that we commemorate today. 'Keep them!' - the Lord prayed to His Father. And the Father kept them from the errors of Arius, and inspired, illumined and strengthened them by the Holy Spirit to defend and confirm the Orthodox Faith. This prayer is for all of us who are baptized in the apostolic Church and who have from the apostles and their successors, come to know the saving name of Christ the Savior."* Bishop Nikolai Velimirovic, Homilies, V. 1, on the 6th Sunday after Pascha.

QUESTION 6

What is the definition of eternal life that Jesus gives in the Gospel for the Sunday of the Holy Fathers of the First ecumenical council?

ANSWER 6

Our Lord defined eternal life in His High-Priestly prayer to the Father: *"And this is life eternal, that they might know You the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent."* (Jn 17:3)

QUESTION 7

Who were some of the Holy Fathers at the First ecumenical council? Which one struck an arch heretic? What happened? How many holy fathers were at the council? Where else does this number appear in the Holy Scriptures?

ANSWER 7

There were 318 Holy Fathers at the First Ecumenical council in Nicea, a number which also prophetically appeared in the Old Testament: *"And when Abram heard that his brother was taken captive, he armed his trained servants, born in his own house, three hundred and eighteen, and pursued them unto Dan."* (Gen 14:14) This refers to the incident where Abram (later, renamed by God "Abraham") rescued Lot.

The First Council was particularly rich with Holy and God-bearing Fathers, among them being: St. Nicholas the Wonderworker, St. Basil the Great, St. Spyridon, St. Athanasius the Great (at that time, an Archdeacon), and St. Paphnutius.

"Today the brilliant city of the Niceans has called together to herself from the whole world three hundred eighteen hierarchs against Arius, he who uttered blasphemy and made little account of the One of the Trinity, the true Son and Divine Rod; and having thus deposed this man from power, the Fathers mightily strengthened the Holy Faith." Sessional Hymn, Matins for the Sunday of the Holy Fathers of the 1st Ecumenical Council)

The Holy Fathers descended with ferocity against the horrible heresy of Arius, because they understood its implications, and the services faithfully capture the essence of this holy and violent battle: *"Mindless, foolish Arius once divided the All-holy Trinity's one dominion and made thus three essences dissimilar and foreign. Hence, the God-bearing Fathers gathered together in their fervor, burning with zeal like Elijah the Tishbite, and they cut down with the sharp sword of the Holy Spirit the vile blasphemer, who taught doctrines of shamefulness. Thus the Spirit revealed to them."* Vespers, Lord I have Cried)

The battle with Arius became so intense that Nicholas the Wonderworker, filled with divine zeal, struck the blasphemer on the cheek in order to silence his torrent of filthy doctrines.

QUESTION 9

What 3 commemorations are observed in the services for the Sunday of the Holy Fathers of the First ecumenical council? Explain.

ANSWER 9

The Sunday of the Holy Fathers of the First Ecumenical falls within the festal period of the Ascension. Therefore, three things are spoken of in the services: The Resurrection (as always on a Sunday), The Ascension, and The Holy Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council.

QUESTION 10

Explain what being "guided by the Holy Spirit" means for an Orthodox Christian and contrast this with others who express belief in Christ who are not Orthodox.

ANSWER 10

The church is guided by the Holy Spirit, and the members of her are also guided by this same spirit. Since the Holy Spirit never contradicts Himself, the individual must agree with the corporate consensus of the One Holy and Catholic Church. The mistake that sectarians make is that they have lost the consciousness of this consensus, and depend unwisely on their own private interpretations.

"The Holy Spirit provides all things; He gushes forth prophecy; He perfects the priesthood; He has taught wisdom to the illiterate. He has shown forth the

fishermen as theologians. He holds together the whole institution of the Church. Wherefore, O Comforter, one in essence and throne with the Father and the Son, glory be to You." (Lord I have Cried, Vespers of Pentecost) (adapted from orthodox.net)

Today's Epistle Lesson – The Acts of the Apostles 20:16-18, 28-36

In those days, Paul decided to sail past Ephesus, so that he would not have to spend time in Asia; for he was hurrying to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the Day of Pentecost. From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church. And when they had come to him, he said to them: "Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of the Lord and God which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears. "So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. I have coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. You yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me. I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all.

Today's Gospel Lesson – Saint John 17:1-13

At that time, Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: "Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He shall give eternal life to as many as You have given Him. And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do. And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was. "I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world. They were Yours, You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word. Now they have known that all things which You have given Me are from You. For I have given to them the words which You have given Me; and they have received *them*, and have known surely that I came forth from You; and they have believed that You sent Me. "I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours.

And all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine, and I am glorified in them. Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep them through Your name which You have given Me, that they may be one as *We are*. While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name. Those whom You gave Me I have kept; and none of them is lost except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. But now I come to You, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves.

A Word From the Holy Fathers

In Christ and the coming of the Holy Spirit God gave us the full and final revelation of Himself. His Being now for us is the First Reality, incomparably more evident than all the transient phenomena of this world. We sense His divine presence both within us and without: in the supreme majesty of the universe, in the human face, in the lightning flash of thought. He opens our eyes that we may behold and delight in the beauty of His creation. He fill our souls with love towards all mankind. His indescribably gentle touch pierces our heart. And in the hours when His imperishable Light illumines our heart we know that we shall not die. We know this with a knowledge to prove in the ordinary way, but which for us requires no proof, since the Spirit Himself bears witness within us.

"For us, Christians, Jesus Christ is the measure of all things, divine and human. "In Him dwells the fulness of the Godhead" (Col 2:9) and of mankind. He is our most perfect ideal. In Him we find the answer to all our problems, which without Him would be insoluble. He is n truth the mystical axis of the universe. If Christ were not the Son of God, then Salvation through the adoption of man by God the Father would be totally incomprehensible. With Christ man steps forward into divine eternity.

St. Sophrony of Essex

Creating New Memories Together

Sure, camp, the altar boy retreat and young women's encounter are going to be virtual this year-- but so is everything else! Now, organizers of these events are working extra hard to create an extraordinary online experience, but they need our children to participate. So, please watch the short videos previewing these events and mark your calendars! On the front page of the Diocesan website, the videos are listed under Spotlight.

Virtual Young Women's Encounter

Registration is now open for the Annual Young Women's Encounter which will take place from Monday, June 29th until Wednesday, July 1st, 2020. As we are all aware, the Covid-19 pandemic has brought about many changes to the things that we are used to. The Young Women's Encounter is one of those. The Retreat will be virtual this year, on Facebook and Zoom and perhaps other platforms. However, this is still a time for our faithful young women ages 12 to 18 to join other young women from all over our Diocese for fun and fellowship. You may register for the retreat at the following link:

<http://events.r20.constantcontact.com/register/event?oeidk=a07eh0nmdms2d4de57a&llr=oblwu7zab>

Following registration, you will receive an email with forms that will need to be filled out and emailed back. Your daughters will also receive a package prior to the retreat that will contain materials to use during the retreat as well as the retreat T-shirt.

All parishes of the Diocese are urged to underwrite the reduced participation fee of \$30.00 for their young women, recognizing their service to the Church today and inspiring them to continue to serve the Church in adulthood. Those parishes which pay the registration fees for their young women are asked to **PAY ONLINE OR SUBMIT THEIR CHECK BY THE DEADLINE - JUNE 19TH.**

All checks should be made payable to "Young Ladies Encounter" and sent to Pani Eleni Stagon. Forms needing to be filled out will be sent to each home in a packet of things to use for the YWE. Electronic Registration and payment must be made no later than Friday, June 19th. Registrations not received or paid for by then cannot be guaranteed a t-shirt.

See <https://www.acrod.org/news/2020-press/abr2020> for similar information regarding the Altar Boys' Retreat.

Follow Our Diocese On-Line

Diocesan Website: <http://www.acrod.org>

Camp Nazareth: <http://www.campnazareth.org>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/acroddiocese>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/acrodnews>

You Tube: <https://youtube.com/acroddiocese>

In Your Prayers – Please Remember... His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch BARTHOLOMEW, His Eminence Metropolitan 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, Presbytera Katie Baker and family, Dn. Steve Hall, Santiago Alzugaray, 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, Howl Family, 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, Robinson Family, Samson Family, Sharon Sheptak, Bernie Takabayashi & family, Dawn & Faith Ulmschneider, Christine, Marshall, Nathaniel, Dcn. Nectaros and Ia, the Syrian Christians displaced by war, Mother Virginia Marie and the Carmelite Nuns of Port Tobacco, the newly reposed handmaiden of God Lydia Vita, and all those in need of our prayers. (Please advise Fr. Joseph of changes.)