

SOBORNOST

St. Thomas the Apostle Orthodox Church

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American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese

*ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE
OF CONSTANTINOPLE*

SERVICES

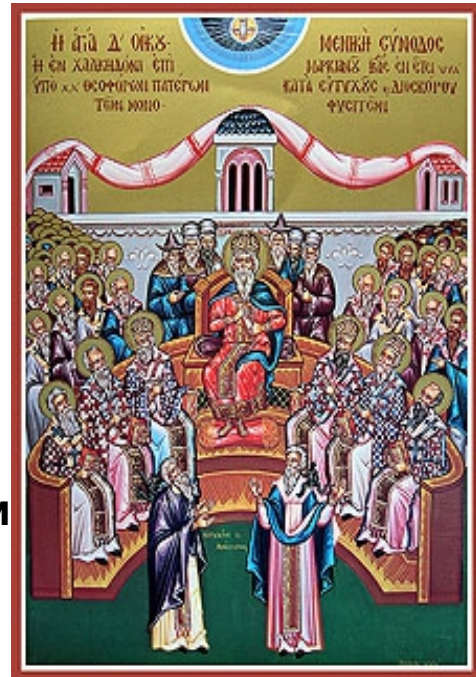
Wed: Moleben to the Theotokos 6:00 AM

Friday: Moleben to the Cross 6:00 AM

Saturday: Great Vespers 5:00 PM

Sunday: Matins (Orthros) 8:45 AM

Divine Liturgy 10:00 AM



***Please note that attendance is currently limited by restrictions dictated by local response to the COVID-19 pandemic; if you are currently not assigned to an attendance group, please contact outreach@apostlethomas.org for information on when you may attend.**

July 19, 2020 | 6th Sunday After Pentecost | Holy Fathers of the First Six Ecumenical Councils

Fr. Gabriel Rochelle

This is the weekend when we commemorate the Fathers of the first six Ecumenical Councils. As you know, we have a special day on which we commemorate the Fathers of the Seventh Ecumenical Council, which is the one which has to do with the restoration of the icons in the Church. But on this day we commemorate the first six Councils because they all deal basically with the same issue.

Many years ago, there was a meeting, an ecumenical meeting of ministers and that sort of thing, and the person who was in charge of the meeting for the day wanted to talk about things like giving your life to Jesus and all that sort of stuff, but he got up and he said, “Can you imagine back then, in the third or the fourth century—I don’t remember which—the Church actually argued over *one letter!*” And there were all these titters of laughter and guffaws that went up in the room at that particular point.

Okay, so, in the interest of honest confession, I did not leap up at that time with flames coming out of my mouth and my ears to say, “What kind of an idiot are you, to believe that that was inconsequential in the fourth century!? The difference was between whether or not Jesus Christ *was* of the essence of God or was some other kind of a creation. And if you buy that second half, then you can go to the Jehovah’s Witness convention which is happening as we speak, at New Mexico State University.”

These things *matter*, friends, and that’s why we commemorate them. The key issue here in all of these Councils, in all of these Ecumenical Councils... the key issue is: how can we save the Gospel in order to save the people—that’s the key issue. The results of these Councils are held universally by many churches: Roman Catholics, Orthodox, Anglicans, Episcopalians, Lutherans, Presbyterians, some others I guess as well—but these are of the very essence of what the faith is all about: the decisions of these Councils. They’re not stupid little things, arguments over one letter, “hee hee hee.” They have to do with your soul and with mine.

So what was the argument all about at that particular time? The argument was always about the Incarnation. It was about: was Jesus of Nazareth truly God and human at the same time, or was he not? And there were all kinds of conflicting opinions at that particular point. Some said, “Nah, he was a creature that’s sort of somewhere halfway between God and humanity.” That was Arius. There were others who said, “Well, he was human, but what happened was that he really didn’t have a human spirit. He had God’s spirit put within him.” And that was [Apollinaris]. Others said, “Well, this Holy Trinity thing, it’s sort of like God puts masks in front of his face, so now like one minute he’ll be God the Father and the next minute he’ll be God the Son and the third minute he’ll be God the Holy Spirit.” And the Church deliberated all of these views over the course of these centuries, not because they’re inconsequential or stupid or on an intellectual level only. It’s because they affect our faith. And if they didn’t, they would have never argued over these things.

So the question is really: how did they affect our faith? Since the beginning of Christianity, since the very beginning of Christianity, the issue has been: did God really enter into the human mainstream in order that humans might once again return to God? Athanasius expressed it in a simple formula: God became man in order that man might become god. It was a really simple, straightforward formula. It needs a bit of nuancing these days, perhaps, because it’s not meant that you become God in the sense of some particular churches, but it’s meant that you once again reenter into the divine realm with Christ because Christ became everything you are in order that he might return you to God.

That's what's missing in the heresies. What's missing in the heresies is the completeness of the faith, and that's why people like Basil of Caesarea, Cyril of Alexandria, St. Athanasius, St. Gregory—why these people rose up at that particular time in history to defend the faith.

It wasn't for the sake of intellect; it was for the sake of salvation. It wasn't for the sake of looking good; it was for the sake of you—that you and I might find the true pathway to God through Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Why these things went on so long is because of a secondary issue, which is intellectual pride. These guys were not about to give up the viewpoints that they had invented. Arius was stuck in the mud. He was not ready to give up his position. He said, "No, no. I'm right, and the rest of the whole Church is wrong." And that's why councils were called, and the Holy Spirit was invoked upon those councils, in order that they might find what the truthfulness in the situation was. So they were led forward by that Spirit, and we have continued to pray through the centuries that we would be held up and upheld by that same Spirit as well.

So there's a big "so what?" in this, you know. I prepared a little paper that I'll give out tomorrow after the Divine Liturgy, but I wanted to approach it sort of personally tonight, to say that this is of the *guts* of the faith. I mean, if you give this stuff up, you have given up what Christianity is all about. That's what's so important about it. God is love, and we receive God as love, but there has to be a way for God to get to us, because we cannot rise to God on our own. We are broken people. We live under the sign of sin, even if that's a difficult word in these days. So we need that which Christ brought among us.

Over the course of the centuries it was argued about in so many different ways: what does it really mean that God became human? And those who held onto the faith delivered it to us in order that we might keep it whole and intact for another generation. Yeah, there was that subsidiary issue of intellectual pride on the part of those who refused to see the truthfulness of their opponents, and those who did not and walked away and gathered other people with them then became schismatics and invented other alternative churches to what we know today and call Orthodoxy.

That's the story for this particular weekend. Perhaps, as over the course of the next week you think about this story and think about the four major problems in the early Church of figuring out how Christ was related to God and related to humanity at the same time, you can give thanks to those Fathers of those six Ecumenical Councils, because they did deliver "the faith once delivered to the saints," as it says in Scripture. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Christ is in our midst! (*from ancientfaith.com*)

Today's Epistle Lesson – St. Paul's Letter to the Romans 12:6-14

Brethren, having gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, *let us use them*: if prophecy, *let us prophesy* in proportion to our faith; or ministry, *let us use it* in *our* ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness. *Let love be* without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. *Be* kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.

Today's Gospel Lesson – Saint Matthew 9:1-8

At that time, Jesus got into a boat, crossed over, and came to His own city. Then behold, they brought to Him a paralytic lying on a bed. When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, "Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you." And at once some of the scribes said within themselves, "This Man blasphemes!" But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, "Why do you think evil in your hearts? For which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Arise and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins"—then He said to the paralytic, "Arise, take up your bed, and go to your house." And he arose and departed to his house. Now when the multitudes saw *it*, they marveled and glorified God, who had given such power to men.

A Word From the Holy Fathers

Then again the priest declares to the God and Father the mysteries of Christ's incarnation, His ineffable and glorious birth from the holy Virgin Theotokos, His dwelling and life in the world, the cross, the death, the liberation of the souls in bondage, His holy resurrection from the dead on the third day, His ascension into heaven, His sitting at the right hand of the God and Father, His second and future glorious coming again to us. And the priest expounds on the unbegotten God, that is the God and Father, and on the womb which bore the Son before the morning star and before the ages, as it is written: "Out of the womb before the morning star have I begotten you" (Ps. 109:3). And again the priest asks God to accomplish and bring about the mystery of His Son – that is, that the bread and wine be changed into the body and blood of Christ God – so that it might be fulfilled that "Today I have begotten you" (Ps. 2:7). Then the Holy Spirit, invisibly present by the good will and volition of the Father, demonstrates the divine operation and, by the hand of the priest, testifies, completes, and changes the holy gifts which are set forth into the body and blood of Jesus Christ our Lord,

Who says: “For their sake I sanctify myself, that they also may be sanctified” (Jn. 17:19) so that “He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me and I in him” (Jn. 6:56). Thus becoming eyewitnesses of the mysteries of God, partakers of eternal life, and sharers in divine nature, let us glorify the great, immeasurable, and unsearchable mystery of the dispensation of Christ God, and glorifying Him let us cry: “We praise you” - the God and Father - “We bless you” - the Son and Word - “We give thanks to you” - the Holy Spirit - “O Lord our God” - the Trinity in unity consubstantial and undivided, marvelously possessing both the distinction of persons and the unity of the one nature and divinity. The priest's performing the divine mystery while bowing down manifests that he converses invisibly with the only God: for he sees the divine illumination, he is made radiant by the brightness of the glory of the face of God, and he recoils in fear and shame like Moses, who, when he saw God in the form of fire on the mountain, trembled, turned away, and covered his face, fearing to contemplate the glory of God's face.

– St. Germanus, Patriarch of Constantinople, *On the Divine Liturgy*

Also Commemorated Today: Venerable Macrina the Younger

By Protopresbyter Fr. George Papavarnavas

The venerable Macrina lived in the fourth century and was the sister of Basil the Great and Saint Gregory of Nyssa. The latter wrote her life, which is worth studying by all, because there is much to benefit from it. She was the first in a series of ten children by her parents and was the model and support for her younger siblings. Her father betrothed her, but before the wedding her fiance suddenly departed from this earth. Then the Saint thought it right to devote herself to God, and "her decision was more firm than her age".

Saint Gregory of Nyssa calls her "great", not because she was older in age, but because she had great spiritual stature. She was truly great in all things - in humility, in love, in discernment, in prudence and in bravery. This is why she was shown to be a teacher and spiritual guide of her siblings, and even of her mother, Saint Emmelia, who at the end of her earthly life became a nun in the monastery where Saint Macrina was abbess.

Saint Gregory of Nyssa writes in detail the conversation he had with her before her departure from this temporary life while she was sick in bed, as well as the events that followed her departure. Namely, the mourning of himself and the nuns, who were full of pain and sadness, as well as the hope of eternal life.

The life and disposition of the Venerable One gives us the opportunity to highlight the following: First, the way Saint Macrina faced her sickness, the last moments of her earthly life and her impending death, shows the great value of the Orthodox

faith, which is a way of life. It is the way of the life of the saints, as well as all those who desire and strive to achieve their personal sanctification.

When a person is sick and near the end of their earthly life, then their inner world is revealed, and all the hidden and closed things are brought to the surface. And if they had inner purity and those hidden things were virtues, which were not seen due to their humility, then the last moments before their departure will be calm, peaceful and tranquil and they will depart praying. But if they pass their earthly life without repentance and dominated by their passions, then before their impending death they will be fearful, sad, disturbed, and instead of praying and preparing for the great journey, they will be occupied and speak of things that are related to this present "false" age, namely with their passions and sins, because "from the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks".

The people of God abandon this life having prayed and prepared properly with Confession and Divine Communion and especially with the hope of eternal divine life. Saint Macrina was calm in the last moments of her earthly life, and she prayed while her face was so bright that it resembled that of an angel. "With a high mind she philosophized about those things that concern this life from the beginning to her last breath ... and she said it must have been an angel who by economy took on a human form ... and she made known to all her disposition and haste to go towards her desired One and to reach near Him quicker free from the shackles of the body ... and having stopped speaking with us, she spoke prayerfully with God ... Her prayer was such, that we do not doubt that she addressed God and He heard her" (St. Gregory of Nyssa).

Second, as we said above, Saint Gregory of Nyssa had a conversation with his sister Saint Macrina, that referred primarily to the mystery of death, the resurrection and eternal life. However, before this conversation began, Saint Gregory reports: "I then told her all about the personal troubles I had, earlier when the emperor, Valens, had driven me into exile for the faith and later when confusion reigned in the churches and drew me into disputes and wearisome effort. 'Will you not put an end', she asked, 'to your failure to recognize the good things which come from God? Will you not compare your lot with that of your parents? And yet it is true that according to the standard of this world we can have great pride most of all in this that we were well born and from noble



stock." She put him in his place, as we commonly say, saying that he should not complain, but to be grateful to God for His grace and the gifts he had been given.

Indeed, the prayers of parents are very important and play a prominent role in the life of each person. In one of the prayers said during the Mystery of Marriage this fact is emphasized when it specifically says: "The prayers of the parents support the foundation of the household." Of course, this takes place especially when the parents are upright and true, because parents in fact are not those who give birth biologically, since this is done even by wild irrational animals, but true parents are those who regenerate their children, which means they raise them in "the education and admonition of the Lord" and take care for their spiritual rebirth, which is achieved by integrating them into the Church and empowering them with the way of life it provides. Such prayers of parents have great weight and are the cause for great Grace and rich gifts and blessings by the gift-giving Lord.

Saint Macrina emerged as a holy child of holy parents, a bright signpost and a true model for all those who desire their own personal sanctification and humbly seek her intercessions. *(from johnsanidopoulos.com)*

St. Roman, Prince of Riazan

The son of Oleg the Red, who was raised among the poor of his native land, kept in himself his love for the holy faith and for his suffering fatherland. Grieving about the oppression of his native land, he with all his powers cared for the welfare of his subjects, protected them from the violence and robbery by the tax collectors of the Khan. This has stirred up their hatred for him and they slandered him before the Tatar Khan Ming-Timur (Tamerlane) in censure of faith of the Khan. The holy prince was called to the horde, where he firmly confessed himself a Christian and for this he was subjected to severe torture: they cut off his tongue, gouged out his eyes, cut off his ears and lips and, finally cut off his head (July 19, 1270). The body of St. Roman was carried away by his compatriots to the city of Riazan and there was given an honorable burial (from Handbook for Church Servers, 2nd ed., by S. V. Bulgakov (Trans. Archpriest Eugene D. Tarris))

Follow Our Diocese On-Line

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



Office of the Metropolitan

*312 Garfield Street
Johnstown, PA 15906*

July 16, 2020

Protocol No. 28/2020

Glory to Jesus Christ!

Dear Reverend Clergy and Faithful Laity of our God-Protected Diocese,

I am writing today to update you on several items as we continue to be challenged with the effects of the Coronavirus on our Church and its activities. Many of our people have become ill due to the virus and several (too many of course) have succumbed to it and have fallen asleep in the Lord. May their memories be eternal! The Diocese has continued to distribute an updated list of the sick, the dead, and those who provide care such as healthcare professionals and support staff, along with first responders and so many others. Let us continue to pray for all of our brothers and sisters.

We have tried diligently to follow the advice and pronouncements of local, state and federal government officials in thirteen states and a province in Canada. It has been very challenging and difficult as we have negotiated our way through the situation, some would say "the mess". We reluctantly closed the doors of the Church to the public for several weeks, including Holy Week. Eventually we opened up again with just a few parishioners attending services at first and gradually increasing the numbers as allowed. We initiated policies and procedures such as hand sanitizing, social distancing, wearing masks (which is highly recommended), stopped choirs from singing, cancelled coffee hours, etc. It was difficult, but we did it. At this time most, but not all, of our Churches have returned to public services for all.

Now we are facing the prospect of re-closing our Churches because of the continuing presence of the Coronavirus. Several Governors are making pronouncements reversing the progress made so far. For example, yesterday the Governor of Pennsylvania announced that "gatherings would be limited to 25 individuals". This was important and could have had an enormous impact on our Diocese in that 42% of our parishes are in Pennsylvania. It turns out that it does not apply to religious institutions. However, it took a question from a reporter to get the Secretary of Health and the Governor to admit that it did not apply to churches. That information should have been announced at the very beginning of the news conference, not at the end. My point is to not jump to conclusions too quickly, but to study all aspects of these governmental pronouncements before making changes in how we operate our Churches.

There has been much discussion, articles written, opinions expressed, ideas forwarded concerning the distribution of the Eucharist/Communion, specifically the use of one spoon. For the most part it created confusion, doubts, and distress for the people.

The American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese of North America

ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE OF CONSTANTINOPLE

The issue even reached the various Patriarchates and Autocephalous Churches in the Orthodox world. In the end most of the Orthodox Churches retained their traditional method of distribution. As a reminder, in our Diocese the method of the distribution of the Eucharist has not changed from the traditional method of one spoon, one chalice. I have not given permission to anyone to modify the method as of yet. If you have any different methods to be considered, please send me your ideas and we can discuss them.

Let us continue to practice all the mitigation procedures offered by the healthcare professionals in order to keep our people as safe as possible until the pestilence lessens. God bless all of you.

Working in His Vineyard,



+Metropolitan Gregory of Nyssa

This Protocol is to be distributed by all means available including the emailing of parishioners as soon as possible.

The American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese of North America

ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE OF CONSTANTINOPLE

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, Presbyteria 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. Nectarios 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.)