

SOBORNOST

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American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese

*ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE
OF CONSTANTINOPLE*

SERVICES

Wed: Reader Vespers 6:30 PM

Saturday: Vespers 5 PM

Sunday: Matins 8:45 AM

Divine Liturgy 10 AM



June 16, 2024 – Seventh Sunday of Pascha | Holy Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council | Afterfeast of Ascension

By St. Luke the Surgeon, Bishop of Simferopol

On the Sunday before the great day of Pentecost, the Holy Church celebrates the memory of the Holy Fathers of the First Ecumenical Synod.

We need to know what an Ecumenical Synod is and what the significance of the First Ecumenical Synod was. The holy apostles told the bishops to hold an Ecclesiastical Synod, that is, a conference of bishops, who together had to decide on the affairs of the Church. It was decided that such Synods should be convened frequently, twice a year. This is how it was done, and such local Synods were convened to resolve not very important issues.

But the First Ecumenical Synod was convened because of the enormous importance of a problem unprecedented in the history of the Church. The First Ecumenical Synod was a great event in the history of the Church, because it was convened to condemn the heresy of Arius, about which Blessed Jerome said: "Arius was a spark, but he burned nearly the whole inhabited world." Do you see what it was!

And the Holy Father Dimitri of Rostov speaks with the following words: "O accursed spark, part of the eternal fire! O, the most horrible spark that burned countless temples of the Holy Spirit! O, the wretched and gloomy spark that fell from the fire of gehenna! The Holy Fathers, as soon as they could, extinguished it with the pure spring of the word of God, as well as the water of life, with which you may all fill the vessels of your hearts!"

You see how awesome this was in the history of the Church. What was the essence of the event? Until Arius there were the heretical Gnostics and the Manichaeans, but such a terrible heretic, like Arius, did not exist and may God never allow one like him again.

Arius was a priest in Alexandria, Egypt, and began to teach that the Lord Jesus Christ was not the True God, the true Son of God in essence and in nature, but only in a moral sense. He denied the eternity of the Lord Jesus Christ, said that the Lord came from nothing, while the whole Church believed that the Lord was begotten of the Father, that He was His pre-eternal Son. Arius managed to embellish his teaching with good ideas, and tried to base it on Holy Scripture, so that many were influenced by his lies and heresy.

It seemed as if Arius was speaking very correctly, because he had a great mind and a great ability to present the lie as true. And many followers of this terrible heretical teaching were found. And when it became clear that Arius was gaining more and more followers, the Archbishop of Alexandria became alarmed and, as soon as he was convinced that no matter how hard he tried to persuade him, despite the arguments, Arius remained steadfast in his heresy, he cut him off from the Church.

The unrest in the Church was so great that the emperor of Byzantium considered it necessary to convene an Ecumenical Synod, to which all the bishops had to come to condemn Arius. The Synod took place in the city of Nicaea in the year 325. At this Synod the Lord brought forward many great fathers, bishops and priests, illumined by the Spirit of God, who demolished all the false arguments of Arius. And in this Synod, Saint Eustathios of Antioch, Saint Markellos of Ankara and Saint Athanasius, the Deacon of the Church of Alexandria, who later became the great and holy hierarch Athanasius the Great, especially shone with their mind and the power of their eloquence.

Athanasius showed such power of mind and speech that together with the other bishops he completely rejected the heresy of Arius and the Synod cut off Arius from the Church, cursed him and, as you know, they wrote the first Symbol of Faith, which was completed with additions about the Holy Spirit during the Second Ecumenical Synod. We confess our faith in accordance to this Symbol of Faith.

On what did Arius base his denial of the divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ, of His equality with God the Father? He quoted the text of Holy Scripture: "I go unto the Father: for my Father is greater than I" (John 14:28). Christ Himself once said that He is inferior to the Father, so how do we consider Him equal to the Father, how do we consider Him God? The wise holy fathers answered, "Yes, the Father was superior to the Lord Jesus Christ, when Jesus was God-man, when He performed the work of salvation for the human race, in His human nature He was inferior to the Father. But only in His human nature, since in His divine nature He was always equal to the Father."

Numerous verses from Holy Scripture were presented, which unequivocally prove the Lord Jesus Christ was begotten of the Father. I will quote the most important at the end of the sermon, but now I will tell you about another argument, which was quoted by Arius: "I came down from heaven not to do my will, but the will of the Father who sent me" (John 6:38) And Arius said that the Lord Jesus Christ was therefore a servant of God, an apostle of God, therefore we are not allowed to consider Him the true God.

But in this case Arius acted as the devil had done, when he tempted the Lord Jesus Christ: he quoted from Holy Scripture, but hid the words that followed. He did this when he brought the Lord Jesus to the pinnacle of the temple in Jerusalem and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, cast yourself down; for it is written, 'He shall give his angels charge concerning you: and in their hands they shall bear you up, lest at any time you dash your foot against a stone'" (Matt. 4:6).

As you can see, the devil relied on Holy Scripture, but he hid the last words, "You shall tread upon the lion and asp: the young lion and the dragon you shall trample under feet" (Psalm 90 [91]:13). He hid them because it would be like admitting that the Lord Jesus Christ would crush the head of the snake, He would redeem the world from his authority.

Listen to what has been written by Saint John the Theologian: "For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. And this is the Father's will who sent me, that of all which he has given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one who sees the Son, and believes on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day"(John 6:38-40).

Who can resurrect except God, who can have such authority? But Arius hid this, extracting some words from Holy Scripture and interrupting their sequence with the ones that follow...

The First Ecumenical Synod did a great job, weakening all heresies, because Arius was a spark, but he burned almost the whole inhabitable world. The Holy Church

immediately resisted the momentum of the Arian heresy. After the Synod of Nicaea, when they deposed Arius and drafted the Symbol of Faith, not everyone obeyed the decisions of the Synod for long. Those who accepted the teachings of Arius, followed him and did not want to give up, therefore they continued furiously to seek the triumph of heresy; a controversy broke out between the Orthodox and the Arians, which continued for another 55 years. These were the years of the great martyrdom of the Church, of the unspeakable enmity within the Church itself, because the number of the followers of Arius was growing.

Some Byzantine emperors believed that Arius was right not to submit to the Synod of Nicaea and demanded that everyone confess the faith which Arius taught. There was a series of Arian emperors who, having state authority but also enormous ecclesiastical authority, afflicted the Church. For 55 years the intense controversy spread. The Arians began to modify the teaching of Arius in order to moderate it, to make it more acceptable, they introduced substantial modifications and thus Semi-Arianism was born.

And the controversy with the Semi-Arians was extremely serious and had enormous losses for the Church. The emperor Julian handed over all the churches to the Arians, the Orthodox bishops and priests were sent into exile, their churches were closed.

During the last period of the Church's dispute with the Arians, the three great hierarchs flourished: Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian and John Chrysostom. They waged a decisive battle against the Arians. How serious this controversy was is shown by the fact that, when Gregory the Theologian was elected Archbishop of Constantinople, he did not find a single orthodox church - they all belonged to the followers of Arius.

He had to start doing the Divine Liturgy and giving the sermon in a simple house, but his sermons were so strong that after 2-3 years all the people followed Saint Gregory the Theologian and the churches were returned to the Orthodox.

Behold how serious, how long the controversy with the Arians lasted and there were peoples, like the Goths, who forever remained Arians. You now understand all the power of Arius, you understand why the blessed Jerome called him a spark and Saint Dimitri talks about the cursed spark that came from the fire of hell.

You see how great an event we celebrate today, because we celebrate not only the memory of the First Ecumenical Synod, but we celebrate and glorify the memory of the 318 Fathers of the Synod of Nicaea, we celebrate the triumph of Orthodoxy over heretics, expressed by the great Synod in the first Symbol of Faith.

I told you that the Byzantine emperors played an important role in this controversy. When the Arian emperors took the throne, then the Orthodox Church was persecuted, when again, after their death, other emperors, rivals of the Arians, ascended the throne, life in the Church was reborn and revived.

If the involvement of emperors in the affairs of the Church was of such great importance, do we approve of imperial power, of state power over the Church? By no means, because not only in this time of conflict with the Arians but also in an even more difficult, terrible period, the period of persecution of those who honored the holy icons, did the emperors afflict the Church even more than the Arian emperors.

Is it beneficial, when the Church is dependent on such state power, to be forced to accept something it does not want? Certainly not. We know of other such examples from history, where the interference of state power in ecclesiastical affairs has been extremely damaging.

Can we not say that it would be much better if the Church was left alone, if no one put pressure on it, if it faced its problems with the synod of bishops? On the other hand, we cannot deny that the Church sometimes needs the help of state power. It would be great if the Church enjoyed absolute recognition and, where necessary, the contribution of authority.

There are cases when the Church is weak, that only state power can restore the proper order. I will give a small example. I deposed a priest who was given over to drunkenness and many insults. That's why I had to remove him from office. So what happened was, the one who was deposed continued to liturgize as a priest, did not take off the cassock, the cross, continued to have long hair and dared to perform sacraments. He went to the villages and performed the sacrament of baptism, the sacrament of marriage, performed supplications and memorials. I could do nothing at this point, he could only be tamed by the state power. Behold, in such cases the help of state power in the Church is necessary.

Therefore, the separation of the Church from the State is favorable for the Church, if on the part of the state there is an attitude of sympathy towards ecclesiastical affairs and it helps when necessary.

There is an important commandment of the Lord Jesus Christ to the Church. The Lord says it is incumbent upon us, in these moments, when we are weak, to place all our hopes in God. Because, despite all the persecutions by the Arians, the Orthodoxy that was restored and consolidated, completed the drafting of the Symbol of our faith and triumphed over all the heretics. So let us believe only as the Symbol of Faith teaches us.

Let us believe that the Lord Jesus is the True God, the True Son of God, because there are deep foundations for this. The Lord Himself revealed it many times in His words, as did His holy apostles:

Apostle John: "He is the true God and eternal life" (1 John 5:20).

Apostle Jude: "Denying the only Lord God our Lord Jesus Christ" (Jude 1:4).

The apostle Paul, addressing Titus, speaks of the hope of the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ (Titus 2:13).

The apostle Paul to the Romans: "Christ, the everlasting God blessed forever" (Rom. 9:5).

The apostle Paul to the Colossians: "That in him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (Col. 2:9).

And the Lord Himself: "Before Abraham was born I am" (John 8:58). "And now You, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world existed" (John 17:5).

* * *

[On the Ascension] I will not preach to you for a long time today because of my weakness, I will only try to explain to you the significant kontakion of this feast. Listen, listen with deep attention to this kontakion (the choir sings): "O Christ our God, upon fulfilling Your dispensation for our sake, You ascended in Glory, uniting the earthly with the heavenly. You were never separate but remained inseparable, and cried out to those who love You, I am with you and no one is against you."

What does it mean: "fulfilling Your dispensation for our sake"? When the Lord Jesus Christ, with all the deeds of His earthly life and His death on the Cross, fulfilled what was destined for us in the pre-eternal Council of God, when He united what is on earth with the heavenly — He united the people who are on earth with heavenly angels. He united us with His angels. He made it possible for us to be partakers of heavenly life.

There were many people who on earth have already become angels in the flesh. You know that Holy Scripture calls the great John the Baptist an angel. There were many people for whom real life was of no interest, who cleansed their hearts, who were so exalted and perfected that they became like angels in spirit - already on earth they became angels in the flesh.

Weren't all the saints like that? Wasn't Mary of Egypt an angel in the flesh, weren't many of the fathers - such as the greatest hermits, like Anthony the Great, Euthymios the Great, Savvas the Sanctified, like our greatest Saint Seraphim of Sarov, our Saints Anthony and Theodosius of the Caves?

They all became angels in the flesh, of course, already on earth they were united with heaven. They talked with angels, the Most Holy Theotokos appeared to them. And there were many, many such whom our Lord Jesus Christ united with the heavenly - with all the heavenly powers.

“You ascended in Glory, uniting the earthly with the heavenly. You were never separate but remained inseparable, and cried out to those who love You, I am with you and no one is against you.”

Our Lord Jesus Christ ascended in great glory from the Mount of Olives. And His disciples, as you have heard in the current Apostolic and Gospel readings, having parted from Him, did not lose heart. Not only did they not mourn, but they went home with joy, with great joy.

Why, how can we understand this, how could they rejoice and be glad, being separated from Christ? This was possible because the Lord told them that He would send another Comforter, the Holy Spirit, Who would remind them of everything He had said and would be with them forever.

And in the kontakion it says: "You were never separate but remained inseparable." This means that having ascended, He did not leave us, but always abides, relentlessly with us.

We must remember the words of the Lord Jesus and never forget them: “Whoever loves me, he will be loved by my Father; and We will come to him and make our abode with him.” Look, this is Christ’s promise, which says that to all who love Him and fulfill His word He will come together with His Father, and they will make an abode with Him - they will enter into the heart and will dwell in it, in the temple of the Holy Spirit.

“And cried out to those who love You, I am with you and no one is against you.” Whoever loves Christ with all his heart, whoever lives according to His word, fulfilling all His commandments, will be in constant communion with Him, will be under His constant protection, will always be guarded by Christ Himself and the angels of God; it will not be touched by any true evil, for Christ will be relentlessly with them.

But think about it, didn’t the great saints experience persecution, weren’t there those who rebelled against them, weren’t there many, many thousands of Christ’s martyrs?

Remember how the great Venerable Seraphim of Sarov was beaten half to death by robbers. But did this serve to the detriment of Seraphim himself, serve to the detriment of the Church of Christ? No, this served to our greatest benefit, which we received through the Venerable Seraphim, for when the Mother of God herself,

who appeared to him, healed his broken skull and his broken ribs, and the robbers were brought to justice, the Venerable Seraphim, learning about this, with tears asked on their behalf: "No way, I don't want them to be judged! If they condemn them, I will leave the Sarov wilderness."

You see how this act of the Saint should serve as a lesson to us, what a great example we have received, a great example of how we should relate to the suffering inflicted on us.

And to the holy martyrs, how are the words of the hymn applied "I am with you and no one is against you"?

Yes, many rebelled against them, emperors rebelled, rulers rebelled, subjected them to cruel, harsh torments. But the words of Christ came true, and when they were tormented, Christ Himself was with them, making the suffering they endured light.

Often, often they did not burn in terrible furnaces, the flame of which scorched the tormentors themselves. Why? Because Christ was with them, He did not leave anyone. He sent His angels and He Himself came into prisons to the martyrs tormented to death, and healed them, and the next day the tormentors saw them recovered.

You see, these words came true. Believe that everyone who loves Christ and fulfills His word will be loved by His Father, and He will come and make His abode with them.

So love Christ, so follow Him, so fulfill His commandments! And now listen to the kontakion of the feast, explained just now, and I hope that you will perceive it much deeper than you perceived it before (the choir sings).

"O Christ our God, upon fulfilling Your dispensation for our sake, You ascended in Glory, uniting the earthly with the heavenly. You were never separate but remained inseparable, and cried out to those who love You, I am with you and no one is against you."

Remember, remember this kontakion. Remember, always remember this great day of the Ascension to heaven of the Lord Jesus. Direct your hearts towards Him, for we too must ascend to heaven after Him. Amen. (*from johnsanidopoulos.com*)

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

In those days, Paul had determined to sail past Ephesus in order not to spend time in Asia because he was in a hurry: if possible he wanted to be in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. From Miletus, Paul sent a message to Ephesus and called to himself the presbyters of the Church. When they arrived, he told them, "You

yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you all the time. Keep watch over yourselves and over the flock among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers! Be shepherds of the Church of God which he has purchased with the blood of his own [Son]. For I know that after my departure, vicious wolves will enter in among you and they will not spare the flock. From among your own group, men will arise who will speak perverse things in order to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore, keep watch! Remember that for a period of three years, I did not cease night and day to warn everyone with tears. Now, brethren, I entrust you to God, and to the word of his grace which is able to build up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. I coveted no one's silver, or gold, or clothing. You yourselves know that these, [my] hands, served my needs and those who were with me. In all things, I have given you an example, that by this kind of hard work you should support the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, as he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive!'" After saying these things, Paul knelt down and prayed with them all.

Epistle Lesson for Ascension – The Acts of the Apostles 1:1-12 EOB

The first book I wrote, Theophilus, dealt with all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning, until the day in which he was taken up, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. After he suffered, he also presented himself alive to them by many proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days, and speaking about God's Kingdom.

Being assembled together with them, he commanded them, "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which you heard from me. Indeed, John baptized in water, but not many days from now, you will be baptized in the Holy Spirit." Therefore, when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, are you now restoring the kingdom to Israel?" Jesus told them, "It is not for you to know the times or seasons which the Father has set by his own authority. However, you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

After saying these things, as they were watching, Jesus was taken up and a cloud took him out of their sight. While they were gazing into the sky as he was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood by them. They said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing into the sky? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into the sky will come back in the same way as you saw him going into heaven."

Then, they returned to Jerusalem from the mountain called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away.

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

At that time, Jesus, lifting up his eyes to heaven, said, “Father, the time has come! Glorify your Son, so that your Son may also glorify you. Even as you gave him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. This is eternal life: that they should know you, the only true God, and him whom you have sent, Jesus Christ. I have glorified you on the earth! I have accomplished the work which you have given me to do! Now, Father, glorify me with yourself with the glory I had with you before the world existed. I have revealed your Name to the people whom you have given me out of the world. They were yours, and you have given them to me; they have kept your word. Now, they have known that all things you have given me are from you. The words you have given me, I have given to them. They have received them and they have known for certain 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. All things that are mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them. I am no longer in the world, but these are [still] in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them through your Name which you have given me, so that they may be one, even as we are [one]. While I was with them in the world, I protected d them in your Name. Those whom you have given me I have kept. None of them is lost, except the son of destruction, so that the Scripture might be fulfilled. But now I come to you, and I say these things in the world, so that they may have my joy made full in themselves.

Gospel Lesson for Ascension – Saint Luke 24:36-53 EOB

At that time, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, “Peace be to you!” But they were startled and frightened, supposing that they had seen a spirit. He said to them, “Why are you troubled? Why do doubts arise in your hearts? See my hands and my feet, that it is truly me. Touch me and see! A spirit does not have flesh and bones, as you see that I have.” When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. While they still did not believe for joy and were perplexed, he said to them, “Do you have anything here to eat?” They gave him a piece of a broiled fish and a honeycomb from a beehive. He took them, and ate in front of them.

He said to them, “This is what I told you, while I was still with you, that everything written in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms, e concerning me must be fulfilled.” He then opened their minds, so that they might understand the Scriptures. He said to them, “This is what is written, that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his Name to all the nations, beginning at

Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things! Behold, I send forth the promise of my Father on you. But wait in the city of Jerusalem until you are clothed with power from on high.”

He led them out as far as Bethany, lifted up his hands, and blessed them. It happened, while he was blessing them, that he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. They expressed adoration to him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and they were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God. Amen.

A Father's Task – Communicate!

When the Creator of all things required anything of His intelligent creatures, He communicated His expectations to them by one device or other. He was specific in advising Adam and Eve of that which He expected of them and that which they could expect from Him in return. He spelled out with great care the things He expected of Noah and his family in the days immediately preceding and in the years following the Great Flood. The eyes of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were always opened to God's wishes.

The Scriptures make it clear that the relationship between father and children is clearly established by the relationship of God to His creatures. Our Heavenly Father did not allow us to grow by accident nor did He take us for granted but He always spelled out with great care how we, as His children, should comport ourselves in every area of our lives, spiritually, physically, emotionally, and intellectually.

Therefore, it seems reasonable to conclude that one of the fundamental tasks of a human father who considers himself to be a son of God, in his concern for raising his offspring as children of God, is to communicate with them lovingly and as patiently as possible. A father should not and cannot expect the moral and godly upbringing of his children to be successful if he ascribes this upbringing to the accidents of fate and makes no positive contribution to that upbringing. If a father relates to his children honestly, with integrity and with love, communicating to them his hopes and expectations yet never imposing upon them to the extent that he stunts their growth or strives to mold them into character patterns which are inconsistent with their personalities, if a father communicates to his children a genuine sense of awareness, compassion, expressions of pleasure and approval when merited and concerned disapproval when it is called for, if a father is willing to instruct his children, to praise them and to punish them when praise and punishment are called for, but never to impose praise or punishment in a manner that is unfair or lacking in justice, mercy or compassion, and especially if a father reinforces these lessons to his children primarily by his example as he relates to his

spouse and to other members of society, he will then have successfully emulated the loving concerns of the Original Father Who established the patterns of fatherhood for us all.

The Book of Proverbs is filled with advice and admonitions to fathers as to how they should relate to their children. Some of this advice applies literally today. Others must be applied in the context of our modern society. I should like to emphasize that none of these proverbs is based on action alone, but they grow out of an implied example which is to be set by fathers for their children. It is eminently unfair for any parent to impose disciplines upon his children that he is not willing to impose upon himself and it is equally unfair for a parent to expect his children to live up to standards in childhood which the parent has only been able to achieve in adulthood. The idea that children are little adults is fallacious and it might be more accurate to say that adults are really grown up children in many areas of their personalities.

With the increase of "peer pressure", we are discovering that young people are most easily influenced by the standards, rules and morals set by their "friends" and by their idols in the world of entertainment when fathers abandon their roles as pace-setters, fail to communicate their expectations and are either overly-strict or overly-permissive, thereby transmitting an "I don't really love you" message to their children and receiving a similar reply, usually in the self-destructive or uncreative actions we see abounding in our youth today. This process will change only when the process of positive communication between parent and child becomes a reality.

So many fathers I know do not bother to equip themselves to have even an elementary dialogue with their kids. While they might teach their sons to play sports and spoil their daughters with all sorts of "goodies", they cannot explain even the most basic matters of life and living such as love, morality, respect and sex. When asked, they too often hedge or side-step the issue one way or other.

Father's job — communicate! If you love your children, tell them so and show them. Raising your kids is not "Mama's" job or an accident of fate ... **You are the main man!**

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A Word From the Holy Fathers

Prooimion 1: When you had fulfilled your dispensation for us, and united things on earth with things in heaven, You were taken up in glory, Christ our God. In no

way parted, but remaining inseparable, you cried to those who loved you, 'I am with you and there is no one against you.'

Prooimion 2: When you had sanctified the Disciples on the mount of Olives You were taken up into heaven, Lord, having promised them teaching and having cried to them: 'I am not parting from you. I am with you and there is no one against you.'

Abandoning on earth the things of earth, leaving to the dust the things of ash, come, let us come to our senses and raise on high our eyes and minds. Mortals, let us make our sight together with our senses fly to heaven's gates. Let us imagine we are standing on the Mount of Olives and that we bend our gaze on the Redeemer as he rides upon a cloud. For, from where the Lord has hastened back to heaven, there too the One who loves to give has distributed his gifts to his apostles, cherishing them as a father and crying out to them, "I am not parting from you. I am with you and there is no one against you."

The One who came down to earth, as he alone knows how, as he ascended from it, again as he knows how, took those he loved and led those he had gathered to a high mountain, so that, having mind and senses aimed on high, they might then abandon all that seeks the ground. And so, having climbed the Hill of Olives, they surrounded the Benefactor, as Luke, the initiate, recounts, while the Lord, raising his hands like wings, sheltered them, as an eagle the nest which it was warming, and says to the nestlings, "I have sheltered you from all evils. As I have cherished you, do you love me? I am not parting from you. I am with you and there is no one against you."

"High over you, my disciples, as God and maker of the whole world I stretch out my palms, which the lawless stretched out, bound and nailed. And so, as you bow your heads beneath my hands, understand, know, my friends, what I command. For, as though baptizing, I lay my hands upon you now, and, having blessed you, send you out enlightened, and made wise. Upon your heads, praise and majesty, upon your souls, illumination, as it is written, for I shall pour upon you of my Spirit, and you will be accepted by me, taught and chosen, faithful and my own. I am not parting from you. I am with you and there is no one against you."

In saying this, the Savior caused the apostles much great grief. At once they wept and, groaning deeply, said to the teacher, "Are you leaving us, O Compassionate One? Parting from those who love you? You spoke to us like someone going on a journey. These words indicate a departure, and this is why we are troubled, since we long to be with you; we seek your face, for it delights our souls. We have been wounded, bound by the most sweet sight of you. There is no God but you. Do not

take yourself far away from those who love you. Stay with us and say to us, 'I am not parting from you. I am with you and there is no one against you.'"

"We have abandoned our whole way of life and fled it like violence. To gain you, we have become strangers and aliens on earth. The first of us, Peter, when he became your friend, disposed of everything that he had before. Andrew, his own brother, when he found you, immediately left the things of the world and took your cross on his shoulders. Do you wish to abandon, Master, such a renunciation? And are you hurrying to leave us as though you had forgotten us? Let it not be, O King. Let us not become a laughing-stock for those who hate us. Let them not cry out to us, 'Where then is he who said, "I am not parting from you. I am with you and there is no one against you.'"

"Do you despise, Redeemer, and do you reckon nothing to the friendship of the sons of Zebedee? Remember, Lover of mankind, how they heard and did not disobey your divine word. They did not say in their hearts, 'Who is this who calls us?' But they chose you even over their own father. Matthew again considered the profit of the customs house as a total loss, since he longed for your wealth. Thomas the Twin also hated life itself. And in a word we have all said, 'We love you more than all.' Then do not leave us. Take us in your arms, the One who fills all things. Enfold us and say to us, 'I am not parting from you. I am with you and there is no one against you.'"

When the Savior had listened to the Apostles and seen the sorrow of those who loved him, then he supported them as a father his sons. He took pity and cried out, "Do not weep, my friends, for this is not a moment for tears, nor is it a day of sorrow; it is an hour of joy. For I am taking wings to go towards my Father and I am coming to rest in my tent. For I made the firmament of heaven a tent, not a tent which circumscribes, but which surrounds me, as Isaiah cried, 'God has established heaven as a vault, and dwells there as in a tent', he who says to his own, 'I am not parting from you. I am with you and there is no one against you.'"

"So now, be joyful and radiant, and adopting an air of gladness, sing a new song. For everything that may happen, happens for your sake. It was for you I came down and went through all, that I might please you, and you might receive me. It is for you again that I ascend to heaven, to prepare the place where I must be with you. For there are many dwelling places on high with my Father, some contain the fathers, others are filled with the just and others with the Prophets. But your dwelling no one yet knows. I shall prepare it and take you. I am not parting from you. I am with you and there is no one against you."

"Now rise upright, stand firm and contemplate with blameless eye this taking up. As you see it, understand it as of the body, not the Godhead. For the flesh that you

see is reaching the things on high. For every place is full of my Godhead. But nevertheless this visible body, which is being lifted up, is conjoined to that of me which is not apparent. For I was united to that which is apparent. I am one, unseen yet at the same time seen, I am really the one you look on, and I have not been changed, as the Scripture said. I am both immortal and like you, over above you and in your midst. I am not parting from you. I am with you and there is no one against you."

When Christ had said these things to his friends, he then made a sign to the archangels, to prepare for his pure steps an impassable ascent. And no sooner had they been ordered, than the first of the angels cried to all the principalities on high, "Lift up the gates and fling wide the heavenly and glorious doors, for the Master of glory comes. Clouds, spread out your backs beneath the One who mounts. Bright air, prepare yourself for the One who journeys through you. Stand open, heavens. Heaven of heavens, receive him, because he is coming to you, he who says to his own, 'I am not parting from you. I am with you and there is no one against you.'"

Those in the height immediately obeyed, and opening at once all the heights, thrones, dominions with principalities and powers ran to meet him, and, swiftly spreading the cloud as a chariot, sent it to the Mount of Olives. It came down and took into its bosom the One who drives the clouds and makes them give birth to showers. Taking him then, it carried him, or rather it was carried - for he who was borne bore the cloud which carried him, as Mary once did. For Scripture prophetically calls her cloud, she who is guarded by him who dwelt in her, who said to his friends, "I am not parting from you. I am with you and there is no one against you."

Not one of the apostles was slothful, but together they were attentive to what was being accomplished, and all raised their faces to the heights as they watched his taking up. Immediately the cloud, lowering its back, became a chariot for his unblemished foot. The heaven was rent apart like a tunic, and the One born from Mary ascended on high, as fiery choirs preceded him, crying out, "Come, Master, for your throne is ready; mount, be lifted up on the wings of the winds, and come to the Father's bosom. For he is clearly your throne for ever, where you dwell and which you do not leave, even as you cry out to those below, 'I am not parting from you. I am with you and there is no one against you.'"

So when the faithful saw what had taken place, at once, like David, they chanted and said, "Truly God has gone up with a shout, the Lord to the sound of the trumpet." As they chanted together and looked on high, a pair of Angels came towards them, in the way that the book of Acts teaches: When the Creator had been taken up and the saints were gazing intently, there came upon them two beings,

like men, resplendent by their raiment, who cried out, "Why are you standing here? On what are you gazing? What do you wish to look on? See, God is seated on his throne. He was our King, the One who cried out to you, 'I am not parting from you. I am with you and there is no one against you.'"

Be amazed no longer, Galileans, for Jesus Christ, as he has been taken up, so too he will come, as you have seen him arriving on high. For he has been clearly taken up and has not been translated. It is not the same for Christ as it was for Enoch of old. For the well-known Enoch passed over from things of earth; he was not found worthy of those of heaven, but was placed in the tents of the just, while Elijah, seated on the fiery chariot, ascended, yet did not reach heaven, as it is written, but 'as towards heaven'. But the God of Enoch and the God of Elijah, on ascending to heaven, declared to you, 'I am not parting from you. I am with you and there is no one against you.'"

But immediately after they heard these words the disciples said to one another, "These are surely faithful witnesses of Christ's assumption, for they are heavenly beings, for had they not seen him on high in heaven, they would not have come down to proclaim it to us. He is Master of angels and through angels makes known his loving dispensations for mankind, he who dawned from the Virgin. He was born, and angels revealed his nativity. He was raised, and again angels revealed his rising. He has ascended into heaven, and has revealed to us his divine and radiant assumption through good angels, 'I am not parting from you. I am with you and there is no one against you.'"

Let us nerve ourselves then against the deceivers. Let us be armed as a company against the calumniators. Let us all toil, let us wrestle steadfastly, until we have thrown them. Let us say with boldness to the sons of perdition, "Where is he, whom you held as a corpse in a tomb? Where is the one whom the soldiers were guarding, and your seals protecting? How was he stolen? How was he taken up? Who spirited him away? Who carried him off? He was stolen, was he, from the grave? How then from the firmament has he sent now to us and declared to us, 'Do not be afraid of them. They will not overcome you, for I said to you, "I am not parting from you. I am with you and there is no one against you."?'"

With thoughts such as these the Disciples of the Deliverer, Christ and God who had been taken up, then came down from the mount with gladness and rejoicing. And arriving below, as the Scripture teaches, bowing down they worshiped the God on high, and addressed words full of praise to the mountain as they extolled the Mount of Olives, because it had been found worthy of such honor. "Mount Sinai", they said, "you have surpassed. For it received the steps of Moses, but you, those of God himself. On the former was the law, but on you the grace which both

fashioned Moses and said to us, 'I am not parting from you. I am with you and there is no one against you.'

"Now you too are far above Lebanon; Tabor and Hermon are less than you, because on them the Lover of mankind did not do what he has done on you." When they had spoken thus, the Creator's Disciples limited their words to these, and raising their eyes and hands on high, they besought the King of things in heaven and on earth, crying out, "Sinless One, give us your peace and through us to your world at the prayers of her who gave you birth. For the foe cannot bear to look on the fair deeds done by us. But drive him from us, for you said, 'I am not parting from you. I am with you and there is no one against you.'"

– St. Romanos the Melodist, *Kontakion 32 "On the Ascension"*

Saint Tychon of Amathus as a Model for our Lives

By Protopresbyter Fr. George Papavarnavas

Saint Tychon came from the ancient city of Amathus in Cyprus and lived in the fourth century. His parents were pious and raised him "in the education and admonition of the Lord." From childhood he was a philanthropist and merciful. Since he was little he helped his father in the bakery he owned, and would give bread to the poor without receiving payment. One time his father observed this, because he "overdid it" during a crisis, and he took him to the warehouse to show him that the wheat was continually lessening. However, he was surprised to find that when they arrived the warehouse was full of wheat, and from that time on he allowed Tychon to generously give as much as he wanted to the poor. To young Tychon all this seemed very natural, because he full heartedly believed what he had heard, namely that whoever has mercy on the poor lends to God, and it will be reciprocated back many times over. And now he found these words were absolutely true.

Saint Tychon initially became a Reader and then Deacon and Presbyter. Finally, he was made worthy to become a shepherd of the Diocese of Amathus. Through his fiery sermons and the Mystery of Baptism, he included within the Church many pagans, leading them from the darkness of sensuality and impassioned living to the light of the life according to Christ. In his days his baptismal font became a womb that bore many children. This enraged the fanatical idolaters, the priests of the idols, and some who were affected in their economic interests, and they fought with ferocity. However, God did not allow him to be martyred, but he was "perfected in peace."

Of the countless miracles of the Saint, one can be distinguished as unusual. "While the Saint was alive he planted a dry vine and fervently prayed that it would sprout and bear fruit. Since then every year the miracle is repeated. On the day of his

commemoration, the vine presents grapes that are ripe and sweet, which are offered as a blessing to the faithful."

Because Saint Tychon was full of the Holy Spirit, he knew very well what true freedom and spiritual slavery meant, and to what tragic situation those who are enslaved to the idols, or demons, are led. Because the worship of idols implies the worship of the devil, since "the idols of the nations are demons," this is why he struggled against idolatry, out of his love for people, to help them have a taste of peace, joy, love and all the other virtues, which in their original form are not just emotions, but the fruit of the Holy Spirit. The creation of idols and ascribing to them worship constitutes spiritual immaturity, the existence of internal emptiness and the lack of fullness in life. The determination of an idol worshiped by a pagan, depended on the passion they were enslaved to. Some were related to sensuality, others to avarice, another to vanity, etc., and all together they were related to pride, which leads a person even to the idolization and worship of themselves, just like Nebuchadnezzar. As Saint Paul writes: "For although they knew God, they neither glorified Him as God nor gave thanks to Him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles. Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen. Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones" (Rom. 1:21-26).

The gods of the idols are non-existent. In actuality they represent the deification of human passions. Pagans insist on worshiping false gods, and in creating new idols, because they want to act on their passions without being rebuked by the law of God, or their conscience, both of which they try to silence....

The worship of the true God helps a person become free from enslavement to the created things of "this present age of deception," in order to experience spiritual pleasure, which is free from bitterness and sorrow. *(from johnsanidopoulos.com)*

Venerable Tikhon the Treedweller of Medin and Kaluga

Saint Tikhon of Medin and Kaluga, in his youth received monastic tonsure at the Chudov monastery in Moscow, but through his love for solitude he settled at an isolated spot near Maloyaroslavl. He lived in asceticism in a deep dense forest, on the bank of the River Vepreika, in the hollow of an ancient giant oak. Once, during a hunt, Prince Basil Yaroslavich (grandson of Vladimir the Brave), came upon St Tikhon, angrily ordered him to leave his property immediately, and dared to raise

his whip against the monk. At once, the hand of the prince grew numb. Taken aback by such punishment, the prince repented of his conduct and with humility asked forgiveness.

He received healing through the prayer of St Tikhon. The prince entreated the monk to remain always on his property and to build a monastery there for monks, promising to provide it with everything necessary. St Tikhon built a monastery in honor of the [Dormition of the Most Holy Theotokos](#), which he headed. He guided the monastery until he reached a great old age, and he died in the year 1492, after receiving the great schema.

St Tikhon's body was buried at the cathedral church of the monastery he founded. The celebration of St Tikhon was established at the Council of 1584. His holy relics at first were openly exposed in the monastery's main cathedral. But, due to frequent raids on the monastery and the monastery's final destruction, the monks buried the holy relics in the earth where they remained until the time of the Russian revolution. In time, on the spot where St. Tikhon was buried, the magnificent cathedral of the Transfiguration was erected with five altars, and over his very grave was built an artistically designed reliquary, on which there was placed a large icon of St. Tikhon. A large canopy was constructed over the reliquary, three sides of which were adorned with silver hanging lampadas. The reliquary was located on the right side of the cathedral near the cliros of the main Transfiguration altar. The inside of the five domed Cathedral had a marble-like finish, and was decorated in a rich and ornate manner.

Orthodox Russian people loved St. Tikhon's monastery very much and hundreds of thousands would visit it every summer. Many of our hierarchs would visit there too. In the fall of 1911 the monastery was visited by the righteous one of the twentieth century, Grand Duchess Elizabeth Feodorovna. Kaluga bishops visited the monastery every year on the sixteenth of June, the feast day of St. Tikhon. Bishop Nikodim, Vicar of the Kursk Diocese (of Belgorod), also greatly loved to visit frequently St. Tikhon's monastery. It was he who was later martyred by the Bolsheviks in 1918. All the monks loved this humble, meek, and kind hierarch of God, Nikodim, and would say: "Fortunate indeed will be that diocese which will have as its head Bishop Nikodim."

St. Tikhon was a great miracle worker. From all corners of the wide Russian land people would gather at his grave. There were many miracles which took place at the shrine of his relics and also at his spring. Even during my stay there the Lord worked great miracles at his relics and at the spring. A twelve year old paralyzed peasant girl who was carried there in her mother's arms was miraculously healed. During the moleben, when the hieromonk placed the Holy Gospel on the head of

the sick girl, she stood on her feet and loudly exclaimed: "Mother! Mother, I can walk! I am now healthy." Everyone in the church saw the miracle and wept. Many newspapers wrote about this miracle.

Here is another great miracle which I shall never forget. I do not remember the exact year but the details of that miracle I well recall. During the days of Great Lent a sick young girl was brought to the monastery whose arms and legs were paralyzed. She had to be wheeled around the church. Pascha was late that year. It was warm and green everywhere. On the third day after Pascha the sick girl was brought to the spring of St. Tikhon and the women, having placed her on a sheet, immersed her into the cold running spring water. And what do you think happened? The girl, already condemned by the luminaries of the medical sciences, stood up on her legs and by her self came out of the water. In 1914, on the eve of April, I myself saw her in one of the convents absolutely healthy, rosy-cheeked, and working in the garden. In gratitude for her healing she dedicated her whole life to the service of God by joining the ranks of monastics. There were also a great multitude of other miracles. I was the cell-attendant of the archimandrite and I know for sure that people would write; some would ask for holy water, holy oil, and prosphoras, while others would ask that a vigil or moleben would be served to Saint Tikhon. During the summertime the requested vigils to St. Tikhon would be held quite often, but then 1918 arrived and the beautiful monastery of St. Tikhon was taken over and defiled by the godless ones. The monks were forced to leave, the holy things were desecrated, the bells and crosses taken down. (*adapted from johnsanidopoulos.com*)

Holy Martyrs Actinea and Graecina of Volterra

The Holy Martyr Actinea of Volterra in Italy was beheaded during the persecutions under Diocletian around 304. Her companion Graecina was also martyred. Their relics were discovered buried under the altar of the Camaldolese monastery church of Saints Justus and Clement in Volterra in 1140. No further information is extant. (*adapted from abitofohistory.net*)

Also Commemorated Today

Venerable [Tikhon](#) of Kaluga or Medin (1492).

Venerable [Tikhon](#) of Lukhov (1503).

Venerable [Moses](#) of Optina, founder of the Optina Skete (1862).

New Martyr [Hermogenes](#) ([Germogen](#)), bishop of Tobolsk, Ephraim, Michael and Peter priests and laymen Constantine, Nicholas, Mstislav Henry, & Sergius (1918).

[Translation of the relics](#) (2002) of St. [Theophan](#) the Recluse, bishop of Tambov (1894).

Martyrs [Tigrius](#) and [Eutropius](#) of Constantinople (404).

New Hieromartyr [Neophyte](#) the Cretan, Metropolitan of Wallachia (1753)

Venerable [Tikhon](#), founder of Krestogorsk Hermitage (Vologda) (17th c.).
St. [Mark](#) the Just of Apollonias, nephew of the Apostle Barnabas.
[Five Martyrs](#) of Nicomedia (*Greek*).
[Forty Martyrs](#) of Rome (*Greek*).
St. [Kaikhosro](#) the Georgian (1612) (*Georgia*).
St. [Ismael](#), bishop of Menevia (6th c.)
St. [Colman](#) Mac Roi, deacon, monastic founder (Ireland)(6th c.)
St. [Aurelian](#), Archbishop of Arles (551)
Hieromartyr [Aureus](#), Bishop of Mainz, his sister Justina and companions (5th c.)
St. [Cettin](#) (Cethagh), bishop of Oran (Ireland)(5th c.)
St. [Curig](#), bishop of Llanbadarn (Wales)(6th c.)
Sts. [Felix](#) and Maurus of San Felice (Italy)(6th c.)
Hieromartyrs [Ferreoilus](#) (bishop?) & Ferrutio (deacon) of Besançon (France) (c. 212)
St. [Similian](#) (Sambin), bishop of Nantes (310)
St. [Simplicius](#), bishop of Bourges (France)(477)
Martyr [Ursicinus](#) of Ravenna (c. 67)
St. [Berthaldus](#) (Bertaud), hermit-priest in the Ardennes (France)(c. 540)

Social Team for June 23

Team 3 – Pani Stacy, Victor Barzykin, Tatiana Chumak. Thank you!

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In Your Prayers – Please Remember... His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch BARTHOLOMEW, His Eminence Metropolitan GREGORY, Fr. Joseph & Family, His Grace Bishop Neofitos of Nyeri & Mt. Kenya, Bennett family, Tatyana & Slava Chumak & family, Luke & Marlena Cooper, Roberta Corson, Tina Crull, Marlene Doukas, Linda A. Georgiev, Sandi Hebel, Howl family, Helen P. Janowiak, John M. Janowiak, Johnson family, Andrew Kinn, Kopan family, Helen, Brian, Luke and Mia Mahony, Valentina Makowelski, Susan Matula, David & Kathryn Newman, Bobby Nutter & family, Nicholas Pavlik, Weston Perry & family, John Reece, Mary Reed, Marge Rusnak, Rose Song, Fr. Nectarios & Ia, Mother Virginia Marie & the Carmelite Nuns of Port Tobacco, the suffering people of Ukraine & the Holy Land, and those in need of our prayers. (Please advise Fr. Joseph of changes.)