

St. Nicholas Orthodox Church

28 Cross Street - Auburn, New York, 13021 (www.stnicholasauburn.com)

Very Reverend Michael Speck – Parish Priest

(315) 246-6051 - mspeck100@gmail.com

Office Hours Thursday from 2PM to 4PM or by Appointment

Reverend Deacon David Donch Reverend Deacon Michael W. Speck

Reader Nathaniel Donch

Sr. Warden - Greg Michaels

Jr. Warden – Reverend Deacon David Donch

Secretary – Jane Kimak

Treasurer - Glenn Peters

Sunday, May 29, 2023

Sunday of the Holy Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council



Saturday, May 27 - 5:00 PM - Vespers

Sunday, May 28 – 9:30 AM – Divine Liturgy

Wednesday, May 31 – 8:30 AM Divine Liturgy

**Saturday, June 3 – 8:30 AM - Divine Liturgy – Soul Saturday
- 5:00 PM Vespers with Litya**

**Sunday, June 4 – 9:30 AM – Divine Liturgy of Holy Pentecost
followed by the Kneeling Vespers.**

There will be no Coffee Hour today.

1:30 PM - Panikhida at St Nicholas Cemetery

Please see Greg Michaels for tickets for our June 11 Pork Chop Dinner. They are now available for purchase.

Donations

\$100 for the Cemetery Driveway Fund by Claudia Bashta in Memory of the Bashta and Bandas Families.

\$50 By Nataliia Shynkarenko and Caryl Peck in Memory of Ann Peck For the Cemetery Driveway Fund.

\$50 by Beverly and Jacqueline Aversa in Memory of Nicholas Johnson for the Benevolence Fund

\$50 in Memory of Dominic Urciuoli and Ann Peck by Joan Panek for the Benevolence Fund

Please keep our parish and our Food Pantry Ministries in mind as you plan your charitable giving. God Bless you for your support!

REFLECTION

Only a proud man is always prepared to equate Christ with other great men. However, it is obvious at first glance that great men are one thing and the Lord Christ another, just as creation is one thing and the Creator is another. Christ is not only great but He is the Creator and Source and Inspirer of everything truly great in the history of mankind. While in exile and misery on the island of St. Helena, Napoleon, a man of transient greatness, uttered these words: "Alexander, Caesar, Hannibal, Louis XIV, with all their genius, are nothing. They have conquered the world and were unable to gain one friend. And behold, Christ calls and instantly entire generations are united in a bond closer and stronger than the bond of blood. Christ ignites the fire of love which consumes all egoism and surpasses any kind of love whatever." (St. Nicholi of Zhicha)

Commemoration of the Holy Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council



Commemorated on [May 28](#)

On the seventh Sunday of Pascha, we commemorate the holy God-bearing Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council.

The Commemoration of the First Ecumenical Council has been celebrated by the Church of Christ from ancient times. The Lord Jesus Christ left the Church a great promise, “I will build My Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Mt. 16:18). Although the Church of Christ on earth will pass through difficult struggles with the Enemy of salvation, it will emerge victorious. The holy martyrs bore witness to the truth of the Savior’s words, enduring suffering and death for confessing Christ, but the persecutor’s sword is shattered by the Cross of Christ.

Persecution of Christians ceased during the fourth century, but heresies arose within the Church itself. One of the most pernicious of these heresies was Arianism. Arius, a priest of Alexandria, was a man of immense pride and ambition. In denying the divine nature of Jesus Christ and His equality with God the Father, Arius falsely taught that the Savior is not consubstantial with the Father, but is only a created being.

A local Council, convened with Patriarch Alexander of Alexandria presiding, condemned the false teachings of Arius. However, Arius would not submit to the authority of the Church. He wrote to many bishops, denouncing the decrees of the local Council. He spread his false teaching throughout the East, receiving support from certain Eastern bishops.

Investigating these dissensions, the holy emperor Constantine (May 21) consulted Bishop Hosius of Cordova (Aug. 27), who assured him that the heresy of Arius was directed against the most fundamental dogma of Christ's Church, and so he decided to convene an Ecumenical Council. In the year 325, 318 bishops representing Christian Churches from various lands gathered together at Nicea.

Among the assembled bishops were many confessors who had suffered during the persecutions, and who bore the marks of torture upon their bodies. Also participating in the Council were several great luminaries of the Church: Saint Nicholas, Archbishop of Myra in Lycia (December 6 and May 9), Saint Spyridon, Bishop of Tremithos (December 12), and others venerated by the Church as holy Fathers.

With Patriarch Alexander of Alexandria came his deacon, Athanasius [who later became Patriarch of Alexandria (May 2 and January 18)]. He is called "the Great," for he was a zealous champion for the purity of Orthodoxy. In the Sixth Ode of the Canon for today's Feast, he is referred to as "the thirteenth Apostle."

The emperor Constantine presided over the sessions of the Council. In his speech, responding to the welcome by Bishop Eusebius of Caesarea, he said, "God has helped me cast down the impious might of the persecutors, but more distressful for me than any blood spilled in battle is for a soldier, is the internal strife in the Church of God, for it is more ruinous."

Arius, with seventeen bishops among his supporters, remained arrogant, but his teaching was repudiated and he was excommunicated from the Church. In his speech, the holy deacon Athanasius conclusively refuted the blasphemous opinions of Arius. The heresiarch Arius is depicted in iconography sitting on Satan's knees, or in the mouth of the Beast of the Deep (Rev. 13).

The Fathers of the Council declined to accept a Symbol of Faith (Creed) proposed by the Arians. Instead, they affirmed the Orthodox Symbol of Faith. Saint Constantine asked the Council to insert into the text of the Symbol of Faith the word "consubstantial," which he had heard in the speeches of the bishops. The Fathers of the Council unanimously accepted this suggestion.

In the Nicene Creed, the holy Fathers set forth and confirmed the Apostolic teachings about Christ's divine nature. The heresy of Arius was exposed and repudiated as an error of haughty reason. After resolving this chief dogmatic question, the Council also issued Twelve Canons on questions of churchly administration and discipline. Also decided was the date for the celebration of Holy Pascha. By decision of the Council, Holy Pascha should not be celebrated by Christians on the same day with the Jewish Passover, but on the first Sunday after the first full moon of the vernal equinox (which occurred on March 22 in 325).

Why Don't Christians Repent Today?



Why do nations crumble and new nations arise? Why have many Christian nations disappeared, being replaced by pagan ones? In the last times, when the entire world will plot against the Lord and His Christ, Christianity will struggle for survival. This will require adherence to the true faith in Jesus Christ.

Why is God abandoning His people? Perhaps because He's a vengeful God? Certainly not! Rather, He is the perfect God Who desires perfect sons, who yearn to reach perfection; sons who keep His commandments faithfully and hold on to the faith that was placed in their hands. Our God wants only one thing from His people: faithfulness. That is, He desires that they obey Him with faith and not lie to Him; that they not feign devoutness while living in sin; that they not talk about self-denial while living egotistically with lust of power and vainglory; that they not take pride in Orthodoxy while betraying it in their dialogues.

The Lord asks that His people be faithful to Him, and only one thing preserves this faithfulness in the human soul: repentance. Repentance is the unceasing return toward God. Its signs are a contrite and a humble spirit which has abandoned all earthly things and single-mindedly seeks the mercy of God. When the people stray from God, He chastises them, not as an act of vengeance, but in order to make them aware of their sin, that they may repent of it. Since the times of the Old Testament, God has been telling His people: *Return ye now every man from his evil way, and amend your doings, and go not after other gods to serve them* (Jer. 35:15).

The Christian goes after other gods in two ways: when he accepts heresy as truth, and when he follows the spirit of the world and surrenders to its way of thinking.

God has always desired that we have pure faith in Him—the wholesome faith which He revealed to His people and which leads to their salvation. However, some have distorted this faith and toyed with it. The birth of heresies and dogmatic innovations correlates strongly with the corrupt human passions, especially pride. Out of this cursed pride and disobedience came forth all these so-called “churches.” Passions filled with evil and arrogance, such as pride—which feeds on self-love—and the passions of lust of power and vainglory which are inflated with the love of earthly things and darken the soul entirely, causing it to interpret the dogmas of the faith through the lens of its own will and thoughts. This spiritual darkness distances the soul from the spirit of contrition and repentance. It’s precisely for this reason that God despises heresy and condemns it, calling it an unforgivable blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. It’s reminiscent of that primordial pride that disfigured the path of salvation; it also prevents the soul from repenting and being saved.

The spirit of the age has weakened man’s will and scattered his mind, rendering it unable to remember God in the heart. This spirit has substituted the values and virtues which were used to rear children (such as self-control) with vices (such as surrendering to filthy passions, and obeying the body’s desires and animalistic tendencies). These vices have become gods for man, replacing the one true God. When man adopts the spirit of the modern age and allows it to dominate his thought, his will is shattered and his mind paralyzed: He ceases to be mindful of the Truth and is unable to acquire the spirit of repentance.

Throughout the Scriptures, Christ insisted on separating the spirit of the world from the Spirit of God. The spirit of the world sows seeds of disdain for the eternal Truth and its holy things while subliminally inciting sin and atheism in the mind of man. Therefore, those who strive to modernize the Church, its *phronema* (mind) and its *praxis* (way of life), are the first enemies of Christ, since they mix truth with delusion, which Christ strived to separate.

The Church itself, which has possessed this deep sense of transmitted Divine Truth throughout its history, has been surrendering to the spirit of the world lately. How many, even among the faithful, are encouraging the adoption of the doctrinal and moral reforms produced by the spirit of the age! The likes of those do not

acknowledge the existence of heresies, innovations, or even demons, nor do they believe in One Church or even One God.

Whoever claims that the Truth is found everywhere, even outside of Christianity, is truly blind, deadened to the Truth; he has become an adulterous instrument for the demon of delusion. How can such a man repent? When the sense of the one Truth dies in us, God Himself dies in us.

Repentance requires much humility, so that man may be aware of his sinfulness and behold Divine Truth. This is why St. John of the Ladder says that it's impossible to find humility in heretics: All heresy, minute or flagrant, is a fruit of pride and demonic arrogance. The primary danger of the modern ecumenical movement is that it reinforces in the human soul its pride and convictions, rather than encouraging it to repent and seek the truth. The gift of truth is granted by the God of Truth to penitents who abandon their self-will and their own thoughts, and seek the true faith with unceasing prayer.

The Church doesn't lie. Rather, the liars are those who attempt to mix truth with falsehood while justifying their violations of the faith. The prideful don't repent, no matter how praiseworthy their earthly deeds or how great their benevolence, because they render glory to themselves, and not to God. As for the humble, they repent because they know themselves truly, and unconditionally commend themselves to Christ by faith. Man's great sin lies not in transgressing any one commandment, but in his pride and insubordination to the Church and its truthful teachings.

Not all prideful people are heretics, but is it possible for all heretics to be prideful? The Lord doesn't let the humble sink in delusion or suffer eternal damnation, but He provides them with the means to know the Truth and remain steadfast in it. All heresies throughout history, and all teachings opposed to those handed down to the one Church, are nothing but an annihilation of the true God, replacing Him with a false one. And what communion can exist between Christ and these demonic false gods? When our Christ returns to the earth, He will find a plethora of falsely-called "churches" possessing a crooked faith, so He asks: *Shall [the Son of man] find faith on the earth?* (Lk. 18:8) This is because a disfigured and distorted faith is no faith at all. A faith outside the One Apostolic Church can never lead to a living knowledge of the true, living God.

God has forsaken His people in these last times; He is abandoning His flock, which He shepherded, strengthened, and multiplied in the past, even in the darkest ages of persecution and the tyranny of the workers of the devil. Our land is becoming devoid of Christ and His true anointed ones; this land, whose soil was sanctified by the unceasing worship of the Lord and His Christ, has become the land of apostasy. Why? Because the people have abandoned the faith of their forefathers and the simplicity of the life of piety. They thought survival in this land depends on making alliances with the gods of foreign nations, rather than holding fast to the true faith.

This people has sinned before God. They are melting gradually into the spirit of the world and that of globalization, and they don't want to repent. Where are the Church leaders who are repenting for all these transgressions? Repenting for themselves and for their people? Where are those who wear sackcloth and add fasts upon fasts to be an example for their people in repentance, holiness, and Orthodoxy? The heretics—descendants of Balaam—prophecy for our people and drown them further in the delusions to come, while the leaders remain silent.

And there is none that calleth upon Thy Name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of Thee: for Thou hast hid Thy face from us, and hast consumed us, because of our iniquities... Be not wroth very sore, O Lord, neither remember iniquity for ever: behold, see, we beseech Thee, we are Thy people. Thy holy cities are a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation. Our holy and our beautiful house, where our fathers praised Thee, is burned up with fire: and all our pleasant things are laid waste. Wilt Thou refrain Thyself for these things, O Lord? Wilt Thou hold Thy peace, and afflict us very sore? (Is. 64:7, 9-12)

Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the Lord of hosts (Mal. 3:7, Zech. 1:3). Genuine repentance, which inspires us to weep for our sins, is always a sign of unwavering steadfastness in the true faith; repentance alone is able to make us a blessed offspring whom God will multiply.

[Archimandrite Gregorios \(Estephan\)](#)

**Abbot of Holy Dormition of the Theotokos Monastery, Bkeftine, Lebanon
Translation by Brother Joseph**

[Archbishopric of Tripoli](#)

5/23/2023