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The Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America issues its Encyclical for the Sunday of Orthodoxy



The Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America has released its Encyclical for the Sunday of Orthodoxy. Read the full text below:

Sunday of Orthodoxy 2020

"Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened,
and the angels of God ascending and descending
upon the Son of Man" (John 1:51)

To the Reverend Clergy, Monastics, and Pious Faithful of our Holy Orthodox Church in the God-protected Land of America:

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Greetings and blessings to all of you on this bright feast of the Sunday of Orthodoxy!

We hear in the Holy Gospel, Our Lord proclaiming that the heavens are opened through the union of the human and divine, the created and uncreated, in His Person. This central kerygma of our Faith was upheld by the Holy Fathers of the Seventh Ecumenical Council and finally restored on this day by the God-crowned Empress Theodora when the veneration of the icons triumphantly returned to the Church.

While we process with the icons in our churches, our celebration should not be merely a remembrance of a past event with significance only for those who inherited it as a cultural tradition. We must remember that the valiant martyrs and confessors that struggled in defense of the icons did not do so to defend an esoteric theological formula but to proclaim the Faith that “established the universe.” They recognized that those struggling against the veneration of the icons were confining God in the heavens instead of recognizing the sanctification of creation ushered in by the incarnation of Christ.

The Holy Patriarch Tikhon, when he was the Archbishop of San Francisco, mournfully spoke on the Sunday of Orthodoxy in 1903 of “many who were born, raised and glorified by the Lord in the Orthodox faith, yet who deny their faith, pay no attention to the teachings of the Church, do not keep its injunctions, do not listen to their spiritual pastors, and remain cold towards the divine service and the Church of God.” God has given so much to American Orthodoxy since 1903 – parishes, monasteries, seminaries, ministries, and programs – but have we grown in the spiritual sense that St. Tikhon longed for?

We are tempted by the secularism of our contemporary society to confine Christ into the heavens in a new type of iconoclasm. We are pressured to accept the Church as one more ethnic-religious organization vying for influence with the powers of this world to make a muted influence in our society instead of living up to our calling to sanctify creation and bring it into communion with the God-Man, our Great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. During this season of abstinence and repentance, we as your shepherds commit ourselves to the building up of not just administrative

aspects of our Church but its holiness. We ask you to join us in the holy labors of prayer, fasting, and service that God will restore His pure image in each of us in order to offer that image to a world in need of seeing that pristine beauty with each and every human person has been created.

We also ask your fervent prayers for us as we work to overcome every obstacle standing in way of the unity of the Holy Orthodox Church here and in the world. As we look forward to commemorating the Life-Giving and Saving Passion and Glorious Third-day Resurrection of Christ, let us strive to attain the image of that love and unity that He shares with His Father for which He prayed fervently in the garden.

With fervent prayers and great love in the Lord, and on behalf of my brothers making up the Assembly,

† Archbishop ELPIDOPHOROS of America

Chairman