

## **Patriarch Daniel: The icon is a call to pray with the Saints and foresight of the Kingdom of Heaven**



Patriarch Daniel presided over the Divine Liturgy at the Patriarchal Cathedral on the Sunday of Orthodoxy. In his sermon, His Beatitude highlighted the three roles of an icon: to profess the truth of the Incarnation of the Son of God; to call Christians to prayer discreetly but insistently, and to offer a “prophetic, anticipated view, a foretaste of the Kingdom of Heaven.”

“This Sunday of the true faith, or of Orthodoxy, is the first Sunday of Lent because it shows us the great truth, namely that one cannot gain salvation without confessing the true faith,” said the Patriarch of Romania.

And “the true faith is the profession of the truth of the incarnation of the eternal Son of God, Who became Man so that man may become god by grace,” he added.

Spiritual sight is based on truth

The Patriarch quoted a comment in which St. John Chrysostom notes that when the Saviour told Nathanael that people would see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man, He wanted to show that He is

also the king of angels, not just the king of Israel.

“He is not a simple man, He is not the Son of God in the sense of a servant of God or an obedient to God, He is the eternal God Himself, Who in heaven is surrounded and served by the bodiless angelic powers, by the angels,” Patriarch Daniel explained March 21.

The truth of faith is essential because “the right faith, the profession of the right faith, opens the heavens to us, opens to us the sight of the Kingdom of Heaven,” he added.

Therefore, “the true faith is not only a verbal confession of the truth of the Incarnation but also a spiritual sight of the glory of Christ in the Kingdom of Heaven.”

“Therefore, in the Orthodox icon, by the name of the icon, because the name of the respective saint is always said, and the glory of the Kingdom of Heaven, where the saints are,” His Beatitude also specified.

This explains why “the Orthodox icon always has a halo around the saint’s head, that is, glory, the light of glory in the Kingdom of Heaven. And sometimes the very background of the icon is golden, to show us that the saints are in the unfading, uncreated, unending, eternal light of the Kingdom of Heaven.”

The icon calls for prayer

Thus, “the Orthodox icon, which is painted according to the order required by the Church, is the complete confession of the true faith, namely by name, that is, by word, and by face or image,” said the Patriarch.

“What we believe in our mind and soul is shown in the icon by colour, by image. That is why the icon is the complete confession by word and face. The icon is also a confession of the state in which the saints are – namely, they are in heaven, they are alive. It is in the glory, joy and peace of the Most Holy Trinity.”

Through this, Patriarch Daniel explained, “the Orthodox icon is also a call to prayer. The icon is not placed in the Church mainly to admire how beautiful it is. It is placed in the Church to meet the saints in prayer.”

“The saints always pray for us – the saints in the icons – and they call us to prayer. When we pray in a painted Orthodox church, we feel that we are not praying alone, but praying with the saints,” he added.

“The icon is a permanent silent call, without noise, without pressure; it is a discreet

but insistent invitation to pray to God, to thank Him for the fact that we exist, that life is a gift from God, that health and all good things gifts are received from God.”

The icon as a foresight of the Kingdom of Heaven

“And through this, the icon shows us his third ministry in the Church, namely the icon is a prophetic, anticipated view, a foretaste of the Kingdom of Heaven,” the Patriarch continued, quoting Patriarch Germanos of Constantinople, who said that the painted Church is heaven on earth and thus elevates us from earth to heaven.

“We, in the Church, are oriented towards the Kingdom of Heaven; we are not going to an unknown. Before ascending to heaven, the Saviour said, “I am going to prepare a place for you in heaven, that where I am you may be with Me.”

“So the Kingdom of Heaven is in the Church as a provision through the Holy Sacraments, but also through the Holy Icons, which lead us to the Kingdom of Heaven, to beauty and an unfailing glory. The light in the icons symbolizes the unfading light of the glory of the Most Holy Trinity in the Kingdom of Heaven.”

Therefore, “the Sunday of Orthodoxy, of the true faith and of the holy icons, is the Sunday of the truth of faith, but also the Sunday of the glory of the heavenly light”, concluded the Patriarch.

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