

Archbishop Elpidophoros Homily for the Sunday of the Fathers of the Seventh Ecumenical Council



Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I rejoice to worship with you today in this Magnificent Temple, which you have raised up to the glorification of our Holy God! In just the past few weeks, I have had the privilege to preside at the consecration of two equally beautiful Temples, enshrining Sacred Relics of your Heavenly Patron within the Holy Altars upon which the Holy Mysteries are celebrated.

And of course, I speak of the Great Hieromartyr Saint Haralambos, for the Ἀσώματοι Ἄγγελοι have no physical form that we can retain. Rather, these ministers are the flames of fire that the Scriptures speak of, who do only the will of the Lord and leave no trace in their wake. *

But as I look around your Temple, and behold the place where the glory of the Lord dwells, I marvel at the mystery of this Sunday – the Sunday of the Holy Three Hundred and Fifty Fathers of the Seventh Ecumenical Council.

For as we gaze at the impressive and excellent iconography, with which you have adorned this sacred space, we must also consider that there was a time when such magnificence was forbidden by imposters who ruled over the Church. For nearly one hundred and fifty years, literal generations had to worship as pious and Orthodox Christians in secret, or risk real persecution. I think of our country today, and the voices who lament their religious privileges. They know nothing of

persecution, but only invent stories for their own exaltation and oftentimes, enrichment. They know nothing of the exaltation of the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ!

The Orthodox suffered under the Emperors and the Church officials who foisted iconoclasm upon the Church. But in the fullness of time, under the leadership of the great Saint and Patriarch of Constantinople, Tarasios, this Seventh Ecumenical Council met in Nicaea –where the very first Council was held – and proclaimed the doctrine of the Holy Icons.

For these Fathers recognized the saintliness of such spiritual giants as the Holy Patriarch Germanos, Saint John of Damascus, Saint George of Cyprus, and all those martyrs and confessors of the true and unalloyed Orthodox Faith. They understood that the very basis for our faith is the Incarnation – as Saint Athanasios so elegantly stated:

Αὐτὸς γὰρ ἐνηνθρώπισεν, ἵνα ἡμεῖς θεοποιηθῶμεν

“For He became a human being, so that we might be made divine.”†

All of creation is redeemed in the Divine Humanity of our Lord Jesus Christ; for He is the Creator of all, and He is the Redeemer of All. He chose to become matter for our sake, that we might become like Him, by grace. This, above all else, not only justifies the making of icons and their adornment of every aspect of our lives, but truly, it necessitates them.

In truth, there can be no Christianity without the possibility of the icon. For our Lord’s Human Nature – which he received from the Holy Theotokos – was real. It was concrete. As the Evangelist John says in his First Epistle;

Ὁ ἦν ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς, ὃ ἀκηκόαμεν, ὃ ἐώρακάμεν τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς ἡμῶν, ὃ ἐθεασάμεθα καὶ αἱ χεῖρες ἡμῶν ἐψηλάφησαν, περὶ τοῦ λόγου τῆς ζωῆς.

The One Who Was from the Beginning – Whom we did hear, Whom with our eyes we did see, Whom we beheld, Whom with our hands we did touch – concerning Him – the Logos, the Word of Life! ‡

Here is the proof of the icon, that the Fathers recognized and pronounced. And although it would be another 56 years until the final Triumph of Orthodoxy – which we observe every year on the First Sunday of the Holy Fast of Lent – the teachings and dogmas of this Seventh Ecumenical Council paved the way for the splendor we behold today in this glorious Temple. We have been given so much by our spiritual

ancestors. Let us always hold fast to the traditions that they have bequeathed to us.

Through the prayers, then, of the 350 Fathers of the Seventh Ecumenical Council in Nicaea, may we always hold to the Faith that shines forth in the Divine Nature of our Lord Jesus Christ, and share this faith to uttermost parts of the earth. Amen.

* Cf. Psalm 103:5 (LXX).

† De Incarnatione Verbi 54, J. P. Migne, Patrologia Graeca, Paris 1857-66, 25.192B.

‡ I John 1:1.

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