

## Homily for the Sunday of Orthodoxy

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. In the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> century, for more than one hundred years, the Church of Christ was troubled by the persecution of the Iconoclasts (those who hated Icons), beginning in the reign of Leo III (d. 741) and ending in the reign of Theophilus (d. 842). After Theophilus' death, his widow the Empress St. Theodora, together with the Patriarch St. Methodius, established Orthodoxy anew. This ever-memorable Queen venerated the icon of the Mother of God in the presence of the Patriarch and the other confessors and righteous men, and openly cried out these holy words: "If anyone does not offer relative worship to the holy icons, *not* adoring them as though they were gods, but venerating them out of love as images of the archetype, let him be anathema." Then with common prayer and fasting during the whole *first week* of the Forty-day Fast of Great Lent, she asked God's forgiveness for her husband. After this, on the first Sunday of the Great Fast, she and her son, Michael the Emperor, made a procession with all the clergy and people and restored the holy icons, and again adorned the Church of Christ with them.

Since time immemorial, the Church has venerated and loved the image of Her beloved Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ. We see this born out in early Church historical accounts to the present day, for the Icon is a testimony and confirmation that "God was manifest in the flesh...seen of angels, preached on in the world and received up into glory." Indeed, the Icon reveals that it was THIS world that the Lord made His flesh, sanctifying it, restoring it (from the inside out,) filling it with His incorruptible Divinity, and raised to the Throne of the Godhead. This is the dignity which you and I

share through (being made in His Image and through) baptism and must enter more deeply into through living our life for Him Who gave His life for us.

St. John of Damascus tells us that “in times past, God, without body and form, could in no way be represented (Hence, the prohibition of the OT of Images.) But now, since God has appeared in the flesh and lived among men, I can depict that which is visible of God....[for Christ is “the image of the invisible God. (Col. 1:15.)] He continues in saying: “I do not venerate the matter but I venerate the Creator of matter, Who became matter for me, Who condescended to live in matter, and Who, through matter accomplished my salvation; I do not cease to respect the matter through which my salvation is accomplished.” (PG 94:1245AB.) In Christ we find the fullest affirmation of the innate goodness of matter which now can be the medium of Divine Energy and Grace.

Icons of Christ, of the Saints, and of the Mother of God are a pledge of the coming victory of a redeemed cosmos over a fallen one and show forth a restoration of the world back to its original purpose which is to glorify its Creator. In the Icon we see a concrete example of matter restored through Grace in the life of the Church to its original harmony and beauty, now serving as a vessel of the Grace of the All Holy Spirit.

As we commemorate the Sunday of Orthodoxy, we are not merely remembering an event of ages past but rather we are professing the triumph of Truth over heresy which the Icon proclaims. Theological, what is heresy but a distortion of the true and correct Vision of God which is salvation? And what is dogma, but the Words that describe that Vision of Who God is and what He is really like? Again, for the Orthodox,

salvation is this Vision of God. Many of the Saints of our Church, from St. Paul to St. Silouan saw Christ in Glory and were completely altered down to the very fabric of their existence, being saved through it.

We represent in image Christ our God and Lord not only so that the incarnation is shown forth as real and true and not a phantasm or ghost, but even more so, to show forth the Face of God which reveals the pledge of this Vision of God which is salvation; We hear in the Canons of the Council of 867 we hear “If one does not venerate the Icon of Christ the Savior, let him not see His Face at the Second Coming.” The veneration of the Image of Christ is the pledge and our beginning to our own personal experience of the Vision of the Glory of God in the Face of Jesus Christ.

Therefore, my brethren let us venerate the Icon of the Savior, of the Saints, and of the Mother of God and thereby proclaim the inherit goodness of the entire Creation and of its redemption, restoration, and transfiguration through the incarnation of Christ. It is now our turn to offer our own personal world as a Eucharistic sacrifice, redeeming and transfiguring the material world which we inhabit through our prayer, our fasting, and our thanksgiving to our Creator Who sustains us, enlightens us, and saves us through the incalculable Treasury of our Orthodox Faith which we have been given and which we celebrate today. The Triumph of Orthodoxy happens in my personal life when Christ becomes incarnate through my keeping of the commandments. Orthodoxy triumphs when I become an Icon of Christ through my love and kindness to all those whom I encounter, being a vessel of His Presence. Orthodoxy triumphs when the falsehood of my passions is denounced and demolished and Christ is enthroned as King and God in

my heart. Today is the first day of the rest of Great Lent. Let us fortify ourselves by abstaining from meat, from sin, and from devouring our neighbor with our criticism. Let us glorify God in the short time we have remaining in our life by doing works of charity, alms, and prayer. Let us build up the Church and one another, placing our time and talents into those things which will benefit us eternally and let us give thanks to God Who has brought us here today, given us the Treasury of the Orthodox Faith, of that Gift of the Undistorted Vision of God which is salvation for the world. The Triumph of Orthodoxy is the Triumph of the Only True and Living Way which leads the entire race of Mankind to salvation. Let us enter more deeply into it, embrace it, confess it, and fervently live our Orthodoxy through the grace and mercy of our God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, to Whom belongs all glory, now and forever, world without end. Amen.