

The Sunday of Orthodoxy

The First Sunday Of Great Lent

Sermon by Archbishop Averky

"This is the Apostolic faith, this is the faith of the Fathers, this is the Orthodox faith "

Beloved brothers and sisters in the Lord, you will hear these solemn and significant words in the Rite of Orthodoxy which the Holy Church has established to be served on this day. The first week of Holy and Great Lent has ended a week of intensified prayer and ascetical repentance. Now the Holy Church, desiring to encourage and console us, has established for us in this first week of Great Lent, on its first Sunday, a spiritual celebration, one most dear and close to our hearts - The Triumph of Orthodoxy.

This celebration was first performed in 842 in Constantinople in the presence of the Blessed Empress Theodora by His Holiness Patriarch Methodius in memory of the overthrow of the last terrible heresy to shake Christ's Church, the heresy of iconoclasm. But in this celebration the Holy Church marks the triumph of the holy Orthodox faith in general, her victory over all

impious heresies, false teachings and schisms.

Our Lord Jesus Christ the Saviour founded His Church on earth so that all belonging to her could be saved, could elude the nets of the devil and enter into the Heavenly Kingdom prepared for them.

The devil exerted all his strength to overthrow and destroy the Church of Christ and, through this, to hinder the salvation of men, At first he raised up terrible persecutions against the Church on the part of the Jews and pagans. For almost three centuries the blood of Christian martyrs flowed without ceasing. But the devil did not succeed in his task. The blood of the martyrs, according to the apt statement of the Christian apologist Tertullian, became the seeds of Christians. Christianity triumphed over its persecutors. The meek lambs of Christ's flock transformed the wolf-like rage of their persecutors into lamb-like meekness.

But the devil did not resist after the defeat he suffered at the hands of the martyrs .When the Church of Christ triumphed in the world he raised up a new, even more dangerous persecution against her: from within the Church, as the Holy Apostle Paul had foretold in his conversation with the Ephesian presbyters: "men arose speaking perverse things". Paul called such men grievous wolves. [Acts 20:29,30]. These were so-called heretics who tried to pervert the true teaching of Christ concerning faith and piety in order to make this teaching

ineffective for men.

When this happened, the Holy Church, in the person of its best servants, took up arms against these heretics in order to defend its true, undistorted teaching. There began to be convoked first local and then ecumenical councils. Bishops came together from all the corners of the earth and through the Holy Spirit they gave voice to the pure and undistorted Truth, following the example of the First Apostolic Council of Jerusalem [Acts 15:6-29]. They also cut off heretics from the Church and anathematized them.

This was in accordance with the clear commandment of Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself who said, If he neglect to hear the Church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican. [Matthew 18:17]. And in accordance with the commandment of the Holy Apostle Paul, that great apostle to the nations who said, But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed [Galatians 1:8]. And in another place he states: If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema. Maranatha [1 Cor. 16:22].

Thus our moving, majestic and solemn Rite of ORTHODOXY takes its beginning from our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and from his great Apostle, called by Him to be the apostle to the nations, i.e. of the whole pagan world.

From the ninth century on the Holy Church has established that this rite should be served on the first Sunday of Holy Great Lent and that it be named Orthodox Sunday. The rite, brothers and sisters, is particularly important and significant in the evil times we are experiencing, times in which the Orthodox : faith is wavering and shaking.

This wavering and shaking of the Orthodox faith is due to those very persons who ought to be strengthening and supporting it in the souls of the faithful. Those who should be pillars of Holy Orthodoxy high ranking hierarchs including the heads of certain Local Churches are departing from the Truth of HOLY ORTHODOXY. It is terrible to have to say that even the head of the Constantinopolitan Church, which is known as the Ecumenical Church, the man considered to be the first hierarch of all ORTHODOXY, has set out this path! On all of this there undoubtedly lies the print of the Apostasy about which the Holy Apostle Paul foretold [11 Thess. 2:3] the apostasy of Christians from Christ.

We are now face to face with this Apostasy. The major threat to true Christian faith, the Orthodox faith, is the so called "Ecumenical Movement", headed by what is known as the "World Council of Churches", a body which denies the doctrine of the unity and infallibility of the True Church of Christ and attempts to create from all the presently existing and distorted the faith, a new false Church which, from our point of view, will

without any doubt be the Church of Antichrist, that false church which the Antichrist, whose coming is now being rapidly prepared in the world, will head.

From the teaching of the Word of God and the Holy Fathers of the Church we know that the Antichrist will be both the religious and political leader of all humanity: he will stand at the head of a new universal false church which the Antichrist, whose coming is now being rapidly prepared in the world, will head. From the teaching of the Word of God and the Holy Fathers of the Church, we know that the Antichrist will be both the religious and political leader of all humanity: he will stand at the head of the new universal false Church; he will also be the director of one new world government and will attempt to submit all to his absolute power.

The Orthodox faith ” this is the faith of the Apostles, the faith of the Fathers, it is that faith which the Apostolic Fathers, the direct disciples of the Holy Apostles, and the Holy Fathers and Teachers of the Church and their lawful successors, established by the Holy Spirit, interpreted for us in their marvellous and inspired writings.

Brothers and sisters, we must hold this faith steadfastly if we desire eternal salvation!

Now we shall perform with you this deeply instructive, moving and highly solemn rite which consists of two

parts: the first part is the prayer of the Holy Church for all those who have gone astray or fallen away from the true Orthodox faith; in the second part the Holy Church pronounces dread anathema against all false teachers, heretics and schismatics who have grown stubborn in their malice and who do not wish to reunite with the true Church of Christ but instead struggle against her.

Then we shall sing Eternal Memory for all departed defenders of Holy Orthodoxy and Many Years for those defenders of the Holy Orthodox faith and Church who are still among the living.

Amen.

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