

Saint Nicholas Serbian Orthodox Church
971 St. Clair Rd, Johnstown, PA 15905
Rev. Presbyter Dragan Vukovic
(814) 244-4063

The Sunday of Orthodoxy
(03.24.2024.)

John 1:43-51

The day following Jesus would go forth into Galilee, and findeth Philip, and saith unto him, Follow me. Now Philip was of Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph. And Nathanael said unto him, Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth? Philip saith unto him, Come and see. Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and saith of him, Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile! Nathanael saith unto him, Whence knowest thou me? Jesus answered and said unto him, Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee. Nathanael answered and saith unto him, Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel. Jesus answered and said unto him, Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig tree, believest thou? thou shalt see greater things than these. And he saith unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man **(KJV)**

God's Holy Church is celebrating the Sunday of Orthodoxy. Orthodox believers join together around the world. The restoration of icons is a major part of the celebration.

Each person is an icon. Each person is created in the image and likeness of God.(Gen.1:26). The Lord Jesus Christ took on human flesh. The Church depicts images of Jesus, the Mother of God and the Saints in Holy Icons.

Today the hunger of the soul is nourished in the Divine Liturgy. Today believers hear the Holy Gospel and partake of the Precious Body and Blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Divine services are enriched with the presence of icons. Believers' souls shine forth the Light of Christ. Believers' hearts, minds and souls benefit from the presence of Holy Icons in the Church.

The Holy Gospel reading for today reveals the Lord Jesus Christ's ability to see all things in ways beyond comprehension. Jesus saw Nathaniel in advance of their meeting.

The Gospel verifies the value of Moses and the Prophets foretelling the coming of Jesus. Nathaniel recognized Jesus and identified Jesus as the "Son of God and King of Israel."

At Holy Baptism, believers profess belief in Jesus Christ as King and as God.

Believers begin officially following Jesus Christ at Baptism just as Philip and Nathaniel began following Jesus.

Jesus made a profound impression on Philip and Nathaniel. Jesus makes a profound impression on believers at the time of Holy Baptism. At Baptism believers assume and accept the responsibility of following Jesus Christ.

The Gospel is to be taken to heart by believers. The Gospel message is to lead to the transformation of believers. Believers are to continue to embrace the way of Christ and be renewed in Christ with each reading of the Gospel.

The Gospel readings nourish believers' souls. The Gospel guides and directs believers along the narrow path to God's Kingdom. Believers learn the value of repentance from the Gospel.

Believers learn forgiveness and love from the Gospel. Jesus Christ's love for each person is proclaimed in the Gospel. Jesus' complete love is verified with His Death on the Cross and His Resurrection.

During Great Lent believers unite and reunite with Jesus Christ. Increased prayer, fasting and almsgiving facilitate the unification and reunification with Christ.

Repentance, Holy Confession and Communion result in the forgiveness of sins and the presence of joy in the heart, mind and soul. Jesus welcomes believers choosing to repent.

God's Holy Church throughout the world participates in Great Lent. Great Lent has a profound effect on the world. Great Lent changes the world. Great Lent directs the world's attention to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Each believer seriously adhering to the journey to Pascha has an impact. The collective impact of believers throughout the world journeying to Pascha creates great change.

Communities improve when believers fast and pray. Parishes become stronger when believers actively participate in Great Lent. Family members are enriched when each member fasts and prays during Great Lent.

The hunger in the soul is nourished at the Liturgy of Presanctified Gifts and the Divine Liturgies during Great Lent. The daily content in the Church services during Great Lent which focus on repentance strengthens serious believers.

Great Lent leads to joy in the hearts, minds and souls of believers. Christ's joy exceeds all joy. Repentance gives peace to the heart, mind and soul. Relationships improve with the increase of forgiveness in homes and parishes.

Jesus Christ is the pathway to peace. Jesus Christ is the personification of peace. May this Sunday of Orthodoxy be the doorway for believers into the joy and peace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

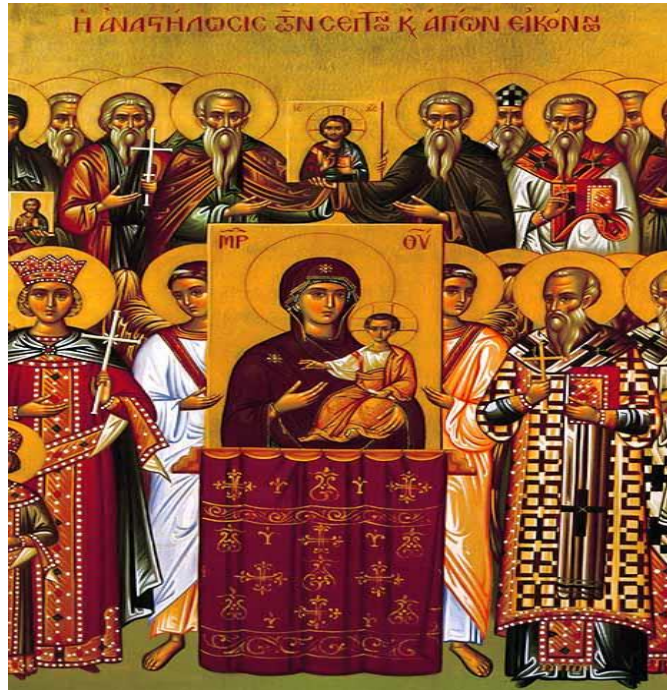
The Sunday of Orthodoxy. St. Cyril of Jerusalem. March 18/31, 2024. Hidden Valley, Pennsylvania. Father Rodney Torbic

Sunday of Orthodoxy

The Sunday of Orthodoxy is the first Sunday of Great Lent. The dominant theme of this Sunday since 843 has been that of the victory of the icons. In that year the iconoclastic controversy, which had

raged on and off since 726, was finally laid to rest, and icons and their veneration were restored on the first Sunday in Lent. Ever since, this Sunday has been commemorated as the "Triumph of Orthodoxy."

Historical Background



The Seventh Ecumenical Council dealt predominantly with the controversy regarding icons and their place in Orthodox worship. It was convened in Nicaea in 787 by Empress Irene at the request of Tarasios, Patriarch of Constantinople. The Council was attended by 367 bishops.

Almost a century before this, the iconoclastic controversy had once more shaken the foundations of both Church and State in the Byzantine empire. Excessive religious respect and the ascribed miracles to icons by some members of society, approached the point of worship (due only to God) and idolatry. This instigated excesses at the other extreme by which icons were completely taken out of the liturgical life of the Church by the Iconoclasts. The Iconophiles, on the other-hand, believed that icons served to preserve the doctrinal teachings of the Church; they considered icons to be man's dynamic way of expressing the divine through art and beauty.

The Council decided on a doctrine by which icons should be venerated but not worshipped. In answering the Empress' invitation to the Council, Pope Hadrian replied with a letter in which he also held the position of extending veneration to icons but not worship, the last befitting only God.

The decree of the Council for restoring icons to churches added an important clause which still stands at the foundation of the rationale for using and venerating icons in the Orthodox Church to this very day: "We define that the holy icons, whether in colour, mosaic, or some other material, should be exhibited in the holy churches of God, on the sacred vessels and liturgical vestments, on the walls, furnishings, and in houses and along the roads, namely the icons of our Lord God and Saviour Jesus Christ, that of our Lady the Theotokos, those of the venerable angels and those of all saintly people. Whenever these representations are contemplated, they will cause those who look at them to commemorate and love their prototype. We define also that they should be kissed and that they are an object of veneration and honour (timitiki proskynisis), but not of real worship (latreia), which is reserved for Him Who is the subject of our faith and is proper for the divine nature. The veneration accorded to an icon is in effect transmitted to the prototype; he who venerates the icon, venerated in it the reality for which it stands".



An Endemousa (Regional) Synod was called in Constantinople in 843. Under Empress Theodora. The veneration of icons was solemnly proclaimed at the Hagia Sophia Cathedral. The Empress, her son Michael III, Patriarch Methodios, and monks and clergy came in procession and restored the icons in their rightful place. The day was called "Triumph of Orthodoxy." Since that time, this event is commemorated yearly with a special service on the first Sunday of Lent, the "Sunday of Orthodoxy".

Orthodox teaching about icons, as defined at the Seventh Ecumenical Council of 787, is embodied in the texts sung on this Sunday.

From Vespers: *"Inspired by your Spirit, Lord, the prophets foretold your birth as a child incarnate of the Virgin. Nothing can contain or hold you; before the morning star you shone forth eternally from the spiritual womb of the Father. Yet you were to become like us and be seen by those on earth. At the prayers of those your prophets in your mercy reckon us fit to see your light, "for we praise your resurrection, holy and beyond speech. Infinite, Lord, as divine, in the last times you willed to become incarnate and so finite; for when you took on flesh you made all its properties your own. So we depict the form of your outward appearance and*

pay it relative respect, and so are moved to love you; and through it we receive the grace of healing, following the divine traditions of the apostles.”

“The grace of truth has shone out, the things once foreshadowed now are revealed in perfection. See, the Church is decked with the embodied image of Christ, as with beauty not of this world, fulfilling the tent of witness, holding fast the Orthodox faith. For if we cling to the icon of him whom we worship, we shall not go astray. May those who do not so believe be covered with shame. For the image of him who became human is our glory: we venerate it, but do not worship it as God. Kissing it, we who believe cry out: O God, save your people, and bless your heritage.”

“We have moved forward from unbelief to true faith, and have been enlightened by the light of knowledge. Let us then clap our hands like the psalmist, and offer praise and thanksgiving to God. And let us honor and venerate the holy icons of Christ, of his most pure Mother, and of all the saints, depicted on walls, panels and sacred vessels, setting aside the unbelievers' ungodly teaching. For the veneration given to the icon passes over, as Basil says, to its prototype. At the intercession of your spotless Mother, O Christ, and of all the saints, we pray you to grant us your great mercy. We venerate your icon, good Lord, asking forgiveness of our sins, O Christ our God. For you freely willed in the flesh to ascend the cross, to rescue from slavery to the enemy those whom you had formed. So we cry to you with thanksgiving: You have filled all things with joy, our Savior, by coming to save the world.”



The name of this Sunday reflects the great significance which icons possess for the Orthodox Church. They are not optional devotional extras, but an integral part of Orthodox faith and devotion. They are held to be a necessary consequence of Christian faith in the incarnation of the Word of God, the Second Person of the Trinity, in Jesus Christ. They have a sacramental character, making present to the believer the person or event depicted on them. So the interior of Orthodox churches is often covered with icons painted on walls and domed roofs, and there is always an icon screen, or iconostasis, separating the sanctuary from the nave, often with several rows of icons. No Orthodox home is complete without an icon corner (iconostasion), where the family prays.

Icons are venerated by burning lamps and candles in front of them, by the use of incense and by kissing. But there is a clear doctrinal distinction between the veneration paid to icons and the worship due to God. The former is not only relative, it is in fact paid to the person represented by the icon. This distinction safeguards the veneration of icons from any charge of idolatry.

The theme of the victory of the icons, by its emphasis on the incarnation, points us to the basic Christian truth that the one whose death and resurrection we celebrate at Easter was none other than the Word of God who became human in Jesus Christ.

Before the Triumph of Orthodoxy came to be celebrated on the first Sunday of Lent, there was on this day a commemoration of Moses, Aaron, Samuel and the prophets. Traces of this more ancient observance can still be seen in the choice of the Epistle reading at the Liturgy and in the Alleluia verse appointed before the Gospel: “Moses and Aaron among His priests, and Samuel among them that call upon His Name.”

Icon of the Feast



The icon of the Sunday of Orthodoxy commemorates the “restoration” of icons in the churches and to their use in Orthodox worship. The focal point of the icon is an icon itself, the Virgin Hodegetria, a popular depiction of the Theotokos as “Directress,” or literally “She who shows the way to God.” The icon is carried by two angels.

To the left of the icon is the Empress Theodora and her son Michael III. To the right of the icon are the Patriarchs Methodios and Tarasios. The icon is surrounded by numerous saints who struggled against the Iconoclastic heresy.

The icon also represents the triumphant procession that was made on Sunday, March 11, 843, from the Church of the Theotokos in Blachernai to Hagia Sophia, where a Liturgy was celebrated to mark the restoration of icons.

Orthodox Christian Commemoration of the Sunday of Orthodoxy



The Sunday of Orthodoxy is commemorated with the Divine Liturgy of Saint Basil the Great, which is preceded by the Matins service. A Great Vespers is conducted on Saturday evening. The hymns of the Triodion for this day are added to the usual prayers and hymns of the weekly commemoration of the Resurrection of Christ.

Scripture readings for the Sunday of Orthodoxy are: At the Orthros (Matins): The prescribed weekly Gospel reading. At the Divine Liturgy: Hebrews 11:24-26,32-40; John 1:43-51.

At the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy, a service is conducted in commemoration of the affirmations of the Seventh Ecumenical Council in 787 and the restoration of the use of icons in 843. Orthodox faithful carry icons in a procession, while the clergy offer petitions for the people, civil authorities, and those who have reposed in the faith. Following is a reading of excerpts from the Affirmation of Faith of the Seventh Ecumenical Council and the singing of the Great Prokeimenon.



It is becoming a common practice that the Procession of the Icons is conducted as part of a Pan-Orthodox Vespers service on the evening of the Sunday of Orthodoxy. This is a service when Orthodox Christians of the various jurisdictions in America come together for worship and in a united affirmation of the Truth of the Orthodox Faith.

On the Saturday before this Sunday, the third of three Saturdays of the Souls are held. This is a special commemoration when the Church offers a Divine Liturgy and Memorial Service for the departed faithful. This is considered a universal commemoration of the dead. Through the memorial services, the Church is commending to God all who have departed and who are now awaiting the Last Judgment.

This specific Saturday is a special commemoration of the Great Martyr Theodore of Tyre and the miracle of the kolyva. In 361, Julian the Apostate was doing his utmost to restore pagan customs. Knowing that the Christians were accustomed to sanctify the first week of Lent by fasting and prayer, the wily tyrant told the Prefect of Constantinople to have all of the food set out for sale in the markets sprinkled with the blood of animals sacrificed to the gods, so that no one in the city would escape the contagion of idolatry. However, the Lord did not abandon His chosen people, but sent His servant Theodore to outwit the tyrant. Appearing in a vision to Patriarch Eudoxius (360-364), the holy Martyr informed him of what was happening and told him to instruct the Christians not to buy food from the markets but instead to eat kolyva made from grains of boiled wheat. Thus, thanks to the intervention of the holy Martyr Theodore, the Christian people were preserved from the stain of idolatry. The Church has commemorated this miracle ever since on the first Saturday of Great Lent, in order to remind the faithful that fasting and temperance have the power to cleanse all the stains of sin.

Hymns of the Feast

Apolytikion (Tone Two)

O Christ our God, begging forgiveness of our sins, we venerate your pure image O Good One. Of Your own will You condescended to ascend upon the Cross in the flesh and delivered those you created from the bondage of the enemy. Wherefore, thankfully we cry out: When You came to save the world You filled all things with joy, O our Savior.

Kontakion (Plagal Fourth Tone)

The undepictable Word of the Father became depictable when He took flesh of you, O Theotokos; and when He had restored the defiled image to its ancient state, He suffused it with divine beauty. As for us, confessing our salvation, we record it in deed and word.

References

The Lenten Triodion. translated by Mother Mary and Kallistos Ware (South Canaan, PA: St. Tikhon's Seminary Press, 1994), pp. 51-52, 299-313.

Schememann, Alexander. Great Lent: Journey to Pascha (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1969), pp. 73-75.

Barrois, Georges. Scripture Readings in Orthodox Worship (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1977), pp. 61-62.

Farley, Donna. Seasons of Grace: Reflections on the Orthodox Church Year (Ben Lomond, CA: Conciliar Press, 2002), pp. 100-102

Icon of the Triumph of Holy Icons provided by Theologic and used with permission.

Photographs from the Procession of Holy Icons provided by Hellenic College Holy Cross.

The Great Blessing of Water and the Home

The Great Blessing of Water in our homes takes place after the Feast of Theophany, the Baptism of Christ, bringing the holy water & prayer in which Christ was baptized to our homes, as a blessing upon our families.

Traditionally, in most Orthodox parishes, the priest personally visits all his parishioners each year to pray with them in the place where they live, and to bless their surroundings with the newly sanctified water of Theophany (January 19).

We also bring the blessed water to our homes to use throughout the year to bless our homes and to drink whether we are ill or as part of our daily prayer life.

"There are many occasions in family life when a sip of holy water can help to remind us of the blessing that was given 'to bestow sanctification', 'unto healing of soul and body', 'to be a fountain welling forth unto life eternal', as the priest prayed in the litany of Epiphany day."

Weaving Christ into Our Lives

The blessing of homes by these holy waters maintains the spiritual association between the 'family church' and the parish, as well as again providing for the sharing of God's spiritual gifts. ... This annual blessing is not as elaborate as the blessing of the new dwelling, but because of this it should not be overlooked, for it is in this way that the grace of God is extended to individual dwellings.

When the children are present, they have the opportunity to see the parish priest in a different and personal situation. If the priest permits, they can lead the way through the house, or hold a candle. They can show him their rooms or pets or favorite toys. They receive a blessing with water. For children, the house blessing shows the connection of the Church to the home. This is a perfect time to introduce your small children to having their bedrooms blessed as a 'shield of armor' to protect them when they sleep and all the fears they may have as children do so often.

In Summary

What does it mean to ask God to bless something? All things in the world have been spoiled right along with us. God must bless His world again in order for it to be the way that He wants it to be. For this reason God sent His Son Jesus and the Holy Spirit to the world: to bless everyone and everything that He made, to make all things good again. When the priest comes to bless our homes, he asks God to have mercy on the house, to rid it of every evil and to fill it with every blessing.

***What a wonderful way to begin the New Year!
Schedule your Visit with Fr. Dragan Vukovic directly
by calling your parish priest 814-244-4063
God bless you all!***

Services this Week

- **Saturday
(03.30.2024.)**
Venerable Father Alexius, Man of God
- *Divine Liturgy starts at 09:30 AM*
- **2nd Sunday of Lent – St Gregory Palamas
(03.31.2024.)**
- **Please bring the Icons for the procession**
- **St Gyril of Jerusalem -*Divine Liturgy
starts at 10:00 AM***

Donations March 17, 2024

Offering - \$ 2,035.00 Candles - \$60.00
Building Fund - \$1000.00 From Ann (Raich) Luy in Memory of
Husband Thomas Luy

Large Candles

IMO Mary Ellen Locher-Byrd from Helene Gleason
IMO Mike & Mildred Tumbas from Milica Knepp
IMO Grandparents Amelia & Pete Mastovich from Rick Kondas
IMO brother Joseph Kondas from Rick Kondas

FISH FRIES

Friday, February 16th thru Friday, March 29th.
Special shout out to our Maddie Zahurak for her help at
Friday's Fish Fry!

Sunday, March 24th – Sunday of Orthodoxy 4:00 PM
St. John the Baptist Orthodox Church
427 1st St. Conemaugh – 15909
Choir rehearsal Tuesday, March 19th
Following the Great Canon of Saint Andrew beginning at 6 PM,
rehearsal to follow at St. John

Sunday, March 31st – 5:00 PM
Vespers at St. Nicholas Monroeville– Speaker Father Dragan

Saturday, April 13th (Rain Date Wednesday, April 17th)
Church Grounds Clean-Up – 8:30 AM

UPCOMING EVENTS

**Sunday, April 21st – 5th Sunday of Lent
Lenten Vespers at Our St. Nicholas
Speaker Fr. Stefan Djoric – 5 PM**

**Lazarus Saturday – Saturday, April 27th – Divine Liturgy – 9:30 AM
6:00 pm – Vrbica – Vesper Service - Sanctification of palms and pussy
willows and procession following Vespers.**

**Palm Sunday – Sunday, April 28th – Divine Liturgy – 10:00 AM
GREAT and HOLY THURSDAY - *May 2nd* - 9:30 am – Divine Liturgy
7:00 pm – Great Vigil (The reading of the 12 Gospels)**

**GREAT and HOLY FRIDAY - *May 3rd*
7:00 pm – Vespers Service Veneration of Platanica (Epitaphios)**

**GREAT and HOLY SATURDAY - *May 4th* -9:30 am – Divine Liturgy
Egg coloring and Lunch Following Divine Liturgy
9:00 pm – Paschal Matins
RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST - PASCHA *May 5th*
10.00 am – Divine Liturgy**

Anniversary Celebration – Sunday, May 19th !!!!

**Cemetery Blessings
Saturday June 8th St. Nicholas & Grandview
Saturday June 15th Mercury Ave and St Petka**

Polka-Fest – Friday May 31st to Sunday, June 2nd

Band of Brothers – July 11-13th and 17 – 20th

TASTE OF SERBIA – Saturday, August 10th

Johnstown Slavic Festival – September 20-21st