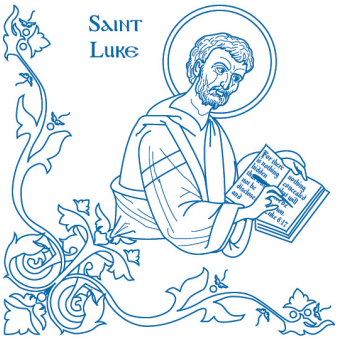
THE TRIUMPH
OF ORTHODOXY



St. Luke Orthodox Christian Church

Diocese of the South, Orthodox Church in America

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The Very Rev. Archpriest Father Basil Henry
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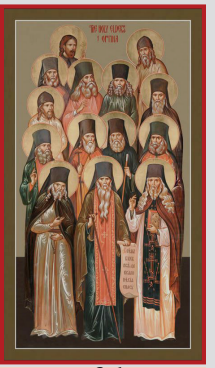
October 11th, 2026 • 19th Sunday after Pentecost
Sunday of the 7th Œcumenical Council

Holy Apostle Philip of the 70 Disciples, one of the seven deacons (1st century); Martyrs Zenaida (Zenais) and Philonilla, of Tarsus in Cilicia (1st century); Saints Nectarius (397), Arsacius (405) and Sinisius (427), Archbishops of Constantinople and Ecumenical Patriarchs; Venerable Theophanes Graptus ("the Branded"), Confessor and Hymnographer, Bishop of Nicaea (850); **Pre-Schism Western saints:** Saint Germanus of Besançon, Bishop of Besançon (c. 390); Saint Placidia, a holy virgin in Italy (c. 460); Saint Gratus, Bishop of Oloron in the south of France (c. 506); Saint Firminus, in the south of France, Bishop of Uzès (553); Saint Cainnech, Abbot, in Ireland, missionary in Scotland (600); Venerable Æthelburh of Barking, England (c. 676); Saint Agilbert, Bishop of Paris (c. 685); Saint Emilian, a hermit in Brittany; Saint Eufridus, a monk near Asti in Italy (7th century); Saint Ansilio, a monk in the north of France (late 7th century); Saint Juliana, abbess at Pavilly in France (c. 750); Saint Gummarus, Belgian hermit, Belgium (c. 774); Saint Bruno the Great, Bishop of Cologne in Germany (965); **Post-Schism Orthodox saints:** Saints Theophanes, Soleas and Jonah of Pergamos, Cyprus (12th century); Saint Theophanes, faster, of the Kiev Caves (12th century); Venerable Germanos "Maroulis" the Hagiorite (1336); Venerable Philotheus Kokkinos of Mount Athos, Patriarch of Constantinople (1379); **New Martys and Confessors:** New Hieromartyr Philaret Velikanov and Alexander Grivsky, Priests (1918); New Hieromartyr Juvenalius (Maslovsky), Bishop of Riazan (1937); **Other commemorations:** Commemoration of the Miracle from the Icon of Our Lord Jesus Christ in Beirut of Phoenicia (7th century); Commemoration of the Holy Fathers of the Seventh Ecumenical Council (the Sunday between October 11 and 17); Synaxis of the Saints of Kios (the Sunday between October 11–17); Synaxis of the Elders of Optina: Leonid of Optina (1841); Macarius (1860); Moses (1862); Anthony (1865); Hilarion (1873); Ambrose (1891); Anatole I the "Elder" (1894); Isaac I (1894); Joseph (1911); Barsanuphius (1913); Anatole II the "Younger" (1922); Nektary (1928); New Hieroconfessor Nikon (1931); New Hieromartyr Archimandrite Isaac II (1938)



The image on the previous page is of the Seventh Ecumenical Council. A detailed description of the icon can be found on our website, www.stlukeanniston.org

News & Announcements

- **We welcome our visitors.** Please join us for a potluck meal after Liturgy so you can get to know us. Communion is for Orthodox Christians who have fasted before Liturgy but everyone is welcome to the blessed bread an Altar Server will offer.
- Grant, O Lord, a prosperous and peaceful life, health, salvation, and furtherance in all good things to all Thy servants who are celebrating birthdays, namesdays and anniversaries, and preserve them for **MANY YEARS**!
- If you are interested in becoming a **catechumen or learning more**, please use the QR code to fill out an online form to receive more information. Catechism class continues today after Liturgy. Please bring a Bible and a notebook for our classes.
- Today is the 40-Day memorial for the repose of a founder of our parish, **Linda Susanna**. We will have a Pannikhida after Liturgy. May her **Memory be Eternal**!
- Next Sunday we will have a **St. Luke Day BBQ.** Bring special sides to share and meat to grill for your family and to share if you wish.
- Our sister parish in Birmingham, St. Symeon's, has their **Annual Food and Culture Festival** next Saturday 9 am to 3 pm. There is a special presentation on church architecture, the ever-popular choir concert, church tours throughout the day, a full range of delicious ethnic foods and treats, and shopping at the open-air, multi-ethnic bakery and marketplace and a great bookstore.
- On Wednesday, October 28th, at 6:30 p.m. there will be a **Holy Unction** service at St. Symeon's for the health of their priest, Fr. Alexander Fecanin, who has liver cancer. This is a rare and special service when seven priests participate as the rubrics call for. Everyone is encouraged to attend.

This Week's Fasting, Services and Scripture Readings						
Mon., 10/12	**Tues., 10/13**	**Wed., 10/14**	**Thurs., 10/5**	**Fri.,10/16**	**Sat., 10/17**	**Sun., 10/18**
						Divine Liturgy 10 a.m.
					Great Vespers 4 p.m.	*Brunch & Fellowship*
Philippians 2:12-16	Philippians 2:17-23	Philippians 2:24-30	Philippians 3:1-8	Philippians 3:8-19	2 Corinthians 1:8-11	Galatians 1:11-19
Luke 7:36-50	Luke 8:1-3	Luke 8:22-25	Luke 9:7-11	Luke 9:12-18	Luke 6:1-10	Luke 8:5-15

If you have any questions feel free to text Subdeacon Nicholas @ (256) 343-1141 or email @ nmbailey@me.com.
You can also visit stlukeanniston.org for the latest schedule.

Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom

Troparia/Kontakia

Troparion for the Resurrection (Tone 2)

When Thou didst descend to death, O Life immortal, * Thou didst slay hell with the splendor of Thy Godhead. * And when from the depths Thou didst raise the dead, * all the powers of heaven cried out: ** "O Giver of life, Christ our God, glory to Thee!"

Troparion to the Holy Fathers of the 7th Ecumenical Council (Tone 8)

Thou art most glorious, O Christ our God! * Thou hast established the Holy Fathers as lights on the earth. * Through them Thou hast guided us to the true Faith *** O greatly compassionate One, glory to Thee!

Kontakion for the Resurrection (Tone 2)

Hell became afraid, O almighty Savior, * seeing the miracle of Thy Resurrection from the tomb! * The dead arose! Creation, with Adam, beheld this and rejoiced with Thee, ** and the world, my Savior, praises Thee forever.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit…

Kontakion for the Holy Fathers of the 7th Ecumenical Council (Tone 6)

The Son who shone forth from the Fathern * was ineffably born, two-fold in nature, of a woman. * Having beheld Him, we do not deny the image of His form, * but depict it piously and revere it faithfully. * Thus, keeping the True Faith, *** the Church venerates the icon of Christ Incarnate.

Both now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.

Kontakion for our Steadfast Protectress (Tone 6)

Steadfast Protectress of Christians, * constant Advocate before the Creator; * despise not the entreating cries of us sinners, * but in thy goodness come speedily to help us who call on thee in faith. * Hasten to hear our petition and to intercede for us, ** O Theotokos, for thou dost always protect those who honor thee!

Scripture Readings

Prokeimenon

Tone 2 ***(for the Resurrection)***

The Lord is my strength and my song; / He has become my salvation.

V. The Lord has chastened me sorely, but He has not given me over to death.

Tone 4 ***(Song of the Three Holy Children)***

V. Blessed art Thou, O Lord God of our fathers, / and praised and glorified is Thy Name forever!

The Epistle Reading

2 Corinthians 11:31-12:9 *(for the Resurrection)*

Brethren, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is blessed for evermore, knoweth that I lie not. In Damascus the governor under Aretas the king kept the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desirous to apprehend me: And through a window in a basket was I let down by the wall, and escaped his hands.

It is not expedient for me doubtless to glory. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord. I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven. And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter. Of such an one will I glory : yet of myself I will not glory, but in mine infirmities. For though I would desire to glory, I shall not be a fool; for I will say the truth: but now I forbear, lest any man should think of me above that which he seeth me to be, or that he heareth of me. And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory

Hebrews 13:7-16 *(for Holy Fathers)*

Brethren, remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God; consider the outcome of their lives, and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever. Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings; for it is well that the heart be strengthened by grace, not by foods, which have not benefited their adherents. We have an altar from which those who serve the tent have no right to eat. For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp. So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood. Therefore let us go forth to him outside the camp and bear the abuse he endured. For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city which is to come. Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

Alleluia

Tone 1 *(for the Resurrection)*

v: God gives vengeance unto me, and subdues people under me.

v: He magnifies the salvation of the King and deals mercifully with David, His anointed, and his seed forever.

Tone 1 *(for Holy Fathers)*

v: The Lord, the God of gods, speaks and summons the earth from the rising of the sun to its setting.

The Gospel Reading

Luke 7:11-16 *(for the Resurrection)*

At that time: **Jesus went to a city called Nain, and his disciples and a great crowd went with him. As he drew near to the gate of the city, behold, a man who had died was being carried out, the only son**

of his mother, and she was a widow; and a large crowd from the city was with her. And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, "Do not weep." And he came and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, "Young man, I say to you, arise." And the dead man sat up, and began to speak. And he gave him to his mother. Fear seized them all; and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has arisen among us!" and "God has visited his people!"

John 17:1-13 ***(for Holy Fathers)***

The Lord said, **I am the door; if any one enters by me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. He who is a hireling and not a shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hireling and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd; I know my own and my own know me, as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. And I have other sheep, that are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will heed my voice. So there shall be one flock, one shepherd.**

Raising the Son of the Widow of Nain

Luke 7:11-16

From *The Explanation of the Gospel of St. Luke*
by Blessed Theophylact, Archbishop of Ochrid and Bulgaria

11-16. And it came to pass the day after, that He went into a city called Nan; and many of His disciples went with Him, and much people. Now when He came nigh to the gate of the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow: and much people of the city was with her. And when the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not. And He came and touched the bier: and they that bare him stood still. And He said, Young man, I say unto thee, Arise. And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And He delivered him to his mother. And there came a fear on all: and they glorified God, saying, that a great prophet is risen up among us; and, that God hath visited His people. Because the Lord, while not even present, had healed the centurions servant, He now performs another even more remarkable miracle. He does this so that no one could say, "What is remarkable about the healing of the centurions servant? Perhaps the servant would not have died in any case." This is why the Lord now raises up the dead man as he was being carried out for burial. He does not perform the miracle by His word alone, but also touches the bier, teaching us that His very Body is life. Because God the Word Who gives life to all things Himself became flesh, therefore His flesh itself is likewise life-creating, and takes away death and corruption. The dead man sat up and began to speak, so that some would not think that his rising was only an apparition.

Sitting up and speaking are definite proofs of resurrection from the dead—how can a lifeless body sit up and speak? You may also understand the *widow* to mean the soul which has suffered the loss of its husband, the Word of God Which sows the good seed. The son of such a widow is the mind which is dead and is being carried outside the city, that is, outside the heavenly Jerusalem which is the land of the living. The Lord then takes pity and touches the bier. The bier which carries the dead mind is the body. And indeed the body is like a tomb, as the ancient Greeks said, calling the body [*sma*] a burial mound [*sma*], which means a tomb. Having touched

the body, the Lord then raises the mind, restoring its youth and vigor. And after the young man, meaning the mind, has sat up, raised from the tomb of sin, he will begin to speak, that is, to teach others. While he is in the grip of sin, he cannot speak or teach—who would believe him?

Visions

II Corinthians 11:31-12:9

From *The Explanation of Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians*
by Blessed Theophylact, Archbishop of Ochrid and Bulgaria

11:30. If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities. He calls persecutions *infirmities.* For in suffering hunger, blows, shipwreck, and all these other afflictions, human frailty is made manifest. Here, he does not mention signs and wonders, for those were the gift of God. But these afflictions, though endured with God's help, also revealed his own fortitude.

11:31. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is blessed forever, knoweth that I lie not. Up until this point, he had not made any affirmation to confirm the things he had said. But here, he affirms it with an oath, perhaps because this part had happened long ago and was less well known. The other matters, such as his concern for the churches and his sufferings, were already familiar to them.

11:32. In Damascus, the governor under Aretas the king kept the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desirous to apprehend me. See how great the conflict was, if indeed the ruler set a guard over the city on his account. Certainly, the governor would not have been so disposed unless Paul's zeal had set everything ablaze. *Aretas* was the father in-law of Herod.

11:33. And through a window in a basket was I let down by the wall, and escaped his hands. He *escaped,* fulfilling the Lord's instruction—for the Lord himself would with draw from place to place. For one must not recklessly expose oneself to trials. Where evils are unavoidable, one must rely solely on God and seek deliverance from him alone. But where the trial is not so great, one must also devise means of escape, yet still entrust everything to God. Thus, Paul fled by means of a basket. For though he longed to be with Christ, he also desired the salvation of others and preserved himself for the sake of the gospel.

12:1. It is not expedient for me doubtless to glory. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord. Paul now turns to another kind of boasting-one that truly set him apart, namely, *revelations-he* says, *"It is not expedient for me doubtless to glory,* lest I be inflated with pride." But you might ask, "What does it matter if you do not speak of them? Do you not still know them?" Indeed, we know these things, yet we are not equally puffed up by merely knowing them ourselves as when we proclaim them to others. He says these things not because he himself was in danger of such arrogance, but to instruct us to guard our selves against this very pride. Moreover, he means this also in another sense: "It is beneficial not to boast, lest anyone should think of me beyond what he sees me to be." He thus humbles himself. For the false apostles boasted, though they had nothing; yet Paul, though he possessed many visions and rev elations of the Lord, mentions only one-and even that reluctantly. Notice, further, that a revelation is greater than a vision. For a vision only provides something to see, whereas a revelation discloses something deeper and more profound than that which is merely seen.

12:2. I **knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago.** Paul does not always mention the time of his revelations (for that would have been tiresome, as they were many), nor yet does he fail to mention it at all. But even though he does not wish to speak, he still mentions one, in order to show that even in this area he speaks reluctantly. He adds ***in Christ*** so that the false apostles might not say that he was possessed by

demons, as Simon the Magician was. The mention of the time is not arbitrary, but to demonstrate that after remaining silent for fourteen years, he would not even now have spoken unless compelled by necessity. And if he was deemed worthy of such things fourteen years ago, how much greater must he be now after so many dangers endured for Christ! **(Whether in the body,** I **cannot tell; or whether out of the body,** I **cannot tell: God knoweth), such a one caught up to the third heaven.** Note his humility-how he confesses that he does not know whether he was in the body or out of the body when he was caught up. As for ***the third heaven,*** this is what it means: Scripture calls the sky ***heaven,*** as in ***the fowls of the heaven*** and ***the dew of heaven-—*** is the first heaven. It also calls the firmament ***heaven,*** as it is written, ***and God called the firmament heaven—this*** is the second heaven. And beyond this, the one created in the beginning along with the earth-this is the third heaven.

12:3-4. **And** I **knew such a man (whether in the body,** I **cannot tell, or whether out of the body,** I **cannot tell: God knoweth), that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.** Paul was caught up again from the third heaven into paradise. He was taken up so that in this, too, he might not seem inferior to the other apostles who had been with Christ. And why does he mention paradise? The name of that place was well known and highly esteemed-the Lord had even promised it to the thief on the cross. As for the *unspeakable words* that he heard, they are not permitted to be spoken to those who think in a human way and have nothing spiritual in them. From this, it is evident that the so called *Apocalypse of Paul* is a forgery-for how could it be authentic if these things were *unspeakable?* Now, according to the literal meaning, the third heaven and paradise are distinct places; but according to the anagogical sense, they may be either the same or different. Since there are many possible anagogical interpretations, we will mention only a few that are easier to grasp. The first heaven is the limit and height of ethical perfection, when a per son has regulated his own moral character. Then comes the natural contemplation, the second heaven, when one attains knowledge of the nature of all things, as far as is possible. Finally, the theological contemplation, the third heaven, is when one reaches the high est measure of understanding divine realities beyond human knowledge through contemplation. Paul, then, was certainly caught up into those places concerning the Trinity, sur passing all created things. He was neither *in the body—for* he was not operating according to bodily senses—nor *out of the body,* for even his reasoning faculty was suspended. For in divine things, all human thought ceases, as man is carried away and received by God, so that he is moved and energized by him. Since there are different stages of ascent even within theology, he is again caught up into paradise, dwelling among the most hidden mysteries of divinity-things unknown and unspeakable, which no one could ever receive unless he surpasses the entirety of human perfection.

12:5. On behalf of such a one will I glory. Note how free from pride he is, speaking of these things as though they concerned an other. For *on behalf of such a one I will glory.* "But why should you boast if it were an other who was caught up?" Clearly, then, he is speakixng about himself. **But on my own behalf** I **will not glory.** That either means, "since there is no necessity, I do not speak such things simply and without reason," or else, "I will say these things as guardedly as possible." **Except in my infirmities.** That is, "in tribulations and persecutions."

12:6. For if I should desire to glory, I shall not be a fool, for I **will speak the truth.** How is it that, having previously said that boasting is foolishness, he now says that he will not be a fool if he boasts? It is not the act of boasting itself that he claims is not foolish, but rather the fact that he would not be lying. For he adds, *I will speak the truth,* meaning that since he speaks truthfully, he will not be a fool.

But I **forbear, lest any man should think of me above that which he seeth me to be, or that he heareth of me.** This is the stated reason-lest men deify him. This is why he al ways remained silent about himself, and even when compelled to speak, he veiled his words so that people would not think more highly of him than they ought. For he does not say, "Lest any should say something about me," but rather, *"Lest any man should think of me above* my worth." For if they tried to offer sacrifices to him because of his miraculous signs, what would they not have done had he also disclosed his revelations?

12:7. **And lest** I **should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the angel of Satan, to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.** Some have thought that ***the angel of Satan*** and ***the thorn*** refer to a pain in his head inflicted upon him by the devil. But let this not be! For Paul's body would not have been delivered over to the devil, since Paul himself had the greater authority over him and even set boundaries for him, as when he delivered the fornicator to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, yet Satan did not exceed those limits. What, then, is ***Satan?*** It is the term for "the adversary" in the Hebrew tongue. So then, ***an angel of Satan*** refers to all those who opposed him-Alexander the coppersmith, Hymenaeus, Philetus, and all who afflicted and harmed him, as if doing the works of Satan. He means to say that God did not allow his preaching to advance without dangers and hardships, lest he be exalted on account of the many revelations he had received. Why, then, does he not say, ***angels of Satan were given to me,*** but rather ***an angel?*** Because in each place, there was perhaps one particular adversary who stirred up the crowd, and once he took the lead, the rest followed. Or better yet, he calls the very opposition to his preaching and the trials he endured by the name ***angel of Satan.*** By whom was this given? ***From God,*** he says, "for it was permitted by him." This is what ***was given*** means. And this was not so that he might be buffeted once, but continually. Some have taken ***lest I should be exalted above measure*** to mean, "lest I be glorified by men." But this is not Paul's meaning here, even though he said something similar earlier. Rather, here he speaks of the matter itself, meaning, "lest I grow vain," for he was human like any other.

12:8-9. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee. *Thrice* means, "I besought him many times." Even in this, Paul displays humility, openly confessing that he could not bear the assaults and tribulations and thus prayed for deliverance. "But he said unto me, *my grace is sufficient for thee,* meaning, 'You have received such extraordinary grace that you raise the dead and perform all manner of miracles. Do not seek for your preaching to advance with out danger, for this is unnecessary; what you have received is sufficient."' **For my strength is made perfect in weakness.** That is, "Per haps, Paul, you grieve, fearing that the many adversaries who oppose your word might seem to reflect my own weakness. But take courage, for my power is revealed even more fully when, though persecuted, you prevail over your persecutors." Observe how Paul said that he was given over to tribulations to pre vent him from being exalted, yet God provided another reason: that his power might be revealed in its fullness when *in weakness,* meaning, "in persecutions and dangers." **Most gladly, therefore, will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.** Since, he says, I have heard this-that the power of God is made perfect in weakness-I will now take pride in my infirmities. For the more they increase, the more abundantly they bring me the power of God. Do not, therefore, think that I spoke about the thorn as one who was distressed, but rather as one who rejoices and glories, knowing that by the intensification of my tribulations, I draw down even more of God's power upon myself.

The Holy Icons

Disputes concerning the Person of Christ did not cease with the Council of 681, but were extended in a different form into the eighth and ninth centuries. The struggle centered on the Holy Icons, the pictures of Christ, the Mother of God, and the Saints, which were kept and venerated both in churches and in private homes. The Iconoclasts or icon-smashers, suspicious of any religious art which represented human beings or God, demanded the destruction of icons; the opposite party, the Iconodules or venerators of icons, vigorously defended the place of icons in the life of the Church. The struggle was not merely a conflict between two conceptions of Christian art. Deeper issues were involved: the character of Christ's human nature, the Christian attitude towards matter, the true meaning of Christian redemption.

The Iconoclasts may have been influenced from the outside by Jewish and Moslem ideas, and it is significant that three years before the first outbreak of Iconoclasm in the Byzantine Empire, the Mohammedan Caliph Yezid ordered the removal of all icons within his dominions. But Iconoclasm was not simply imported from outside; within Christianity itself there had always existed a "puritan" outlook, which condemned icons because it saw in all images a latent idolatry. When the Isaurian Emperors attacked icons, they found plenty of support inside the Church. Typical of this puritan outlook is the action of Saint Epiphanius of Salamis (315?-403), who, on finding in a Palestinian village church a curtain woven with the figure of Christ, tore it down with indignation. This attitude was always strong in Asia Minor, and some hold that the Iconoclast movement was an Asiatic protest against Greek tradition. But there are difficulties in such a view; the controversy was really a split *within* the Greek tradition.

The Iconoclast controversy, which lasted some 120 years, falls into two phases. The first period opened in 726 when Leo 3 began his attack on icons, and ended in 780 when the Empress Irene suspended the persecution. The Iconodule position was upheld by the seventh and last Ecumenical Council (787), which met (as the first had done) at Nicaea. Icons, the Council proclaimed, are to be kept in churches and honored with the same relative veneration as is shown to other material symbols, such as "the precious and life-giving Cross" and the Book of the Gospels. A new attack on icons, started by Leo V the Armenian in 815, continued until 843 when the icons were again reinstated, this time permanently, by another Empress, Theodora. The final victory of the Holy Images in 843 is known as "the Triumph of Orthodoxy," and is commemorated in a special service celebrated on "Orthodoxy Sunday," the first Sunday in Lent. During this service the true faith — Orthodoxy — is proclaimed, its defenders are honored, and anathemas pronounced on all who attack the Holy Icons or the Seven General Councils:

> **To those who reject the Councils of the Holy Fathers, and their traditions which are agreeable to divine revelation, and which the Orthodox Catholic Church piously maintains, anathema! anathema! anathema!**

The chief champion of the icons in the first period was Saint John of Damascus (675-749), in the second Saint Theodore of Studium (759-826). John was able to work the more freely because he dwelt in Moslem territory, out of reach of the Byzantine government. It was not the last time that Islam acted unintentionally as the protector of Orthodoxy.

One of the distinctive features of Orthodoxy is the place which it assigns to icons. An Orthodox church today is filled with them: dividing the sanctuary from the body of the building there is a solid screen, the iconostasis, entirely covered with icons, while other icons are placed in special shrines around the church; and perhaps the walls are covered with icons in fresco or mosaic. An Orthodox prostrates himself before these icons, he kisses them and burns candles in front of them; they are censed by the priest and carried in procession. What do these gestures and actions mean? What do icons signify, and why did John of Damascus and others regard them as important?

We shall consider first the charge of idolatry, which the Iconoclasts brought against the Iconodules; then the positive value of icons as a means of instruction; and finally their doctrinal importance.

The question of idolatry. When an Orthodox kisses an icon or prostrates himself before it, he is not guilty of idolatry. The icon is not an idol but a symbol; the veneration shown to images is directed, not towards stone, wood, and paint, but towards the person depicted. This had been pointed out some time before the Iconoclast controversy by Leontius of Neapolis (died about 650):

> **We do not make obeisance to the nature of wood, but we revere and do obeisance to Him who was crucified on the Cross…. When the two beams of the Cross are joined together I adore the figure because of Christ who on the Cross was crucified, but if the beams are separated, I throw them away and burn them** (Migne, *Patrologia Graeca* [*P.G.*], xciv, 1384d)..

Because icons are only symbols, Orthodox do not *worship* them, but *reverence* or *venerate* them. John of Damascus carefully distinguished between the relative honor or veneration shown to material symbols, and the worship due to God alone.

Icons as part of the Church's teaching. Icons, said Leontius, are "opened books to remind us of God" (*P.G.* xciv, 1276a); they are one of the means which the Church employs in order to teach the faith. He who lacks learning or leisure to study works of theology has only to enter a church to see unfolded before him on the walls all the mysteries of the Christian religion. If a pagan asks you to show him your faith, said the Iconodules, take him into church and place him before the icons (*Ad Constantinum Cabalinum*, *P.G.* xcv, 325c. Icons are a part of Holy Tradition [see p. 214]).

The doctrinal significance of icons. Here we come to the real heart of the Iconoclast dispute. Granted that icons are not idolatrous; granted that they are useful for instruction; but are they not only permissible but necessary? Is it *essential* to have icons? The Iconodules held that it is, because icons safeguard a full and proper doctrine of the Incarnation. Iconoclasts and Iconodules agreed that God cannot be represented in His eternal nature: "*No man hath seen God at any time*" (John 1:18). But, the Iconodules continued, the Incarnation has made a representational religious art possible: God can be depicted because He became man and took flesh. Material images, argued John of Damascus, can be made of Him who took a material body:

> **Of old God the incorporeal and uncircumscribed was not depicted at all. But now that God has appeared in the flesh and lived among men, I make an image of the God who can be seen. I do not worship matter but I worship the Creator of matter, who for my sake became material and deigned to dwell in matter, who through matter effected my salvation. I will not cease from worshipping**

the matter through which my salvation has been effected (*On Icons,* i, 16, *P. G*. xciv 1245a).

The Iconoclasts, by repudiating all representations of God, failed to take full account of the Incarnation. They fell, as so many puritans have done, into a kind of dualism. Regarding matter as a defilement, they wanted a religion freed from all contact with what is material; for they thought that what is spiritual must be non-material. But this is to betray the Incarnation, by allowing no place to Christ's humanity, to His body; it is to forget that man's body as well as his soul must be saved and transfigured. The Iconoclast controversy is thus closely linked to the earlier disputes about Christ's person. It was not merely a controversy about religious art, but about the Incarnation and the salvation of man.

God took a material body, thereby proving that matter can be redeemed: "The Word made flesh has deified the flesh," said John of Damascus (*On Icons,* i, 21 [*P.G*. xciv, 1253b]). God has "deified" matter, making it "spirit-bearing"; and if flesh became a vehicle of the Spirit, then so — though in a different way — can wood and paint. The Orthodox doctrine of icons is bound up with the Orthodox belief that the whole of God's creation, material as well as spiritual, is to be redeemed and glorified. In the words of Nicholas Zernov (1898-1980) — what he says of Russians is true of all Orthodox:

> **Icons were for the Russians not merely paintings. They were dynamic manifestations of man's spiritual power to redeem creation through beauty and art. The colors and lines of the [icons] were not meant to imitate nature; the artists aimed at demonstrating that men, animals, and plants, and the whole cosmos, could be rescued from their present state of degradation and restored to their proper "Image." The [icons] were pledges of the coming victory of a redeemed creation over the fallen one…. The artistic perfection of an icon was not only a reflection of the celestial glory — it was a concrete example of matter restored to its original harmony and beauty, and serving as a vehicle of the Spirit. The icons were part of the transfigured cosmos** (*The Russians and Their Church*, pp. 107-108).

As John of Damascus put it:

> **The icon is a song of triumph, and a revelation, and an enduring monument to the victory of the saints and the disgrace of the demons** (*On Icons,* 2, 2 [*P.G*. xciv, 1296b]).

The conclusion of the Iconoclast dispute, the meeting of the seventh Ecumenical Council, the Triumph of Orthodoxy in 843 — these mark the end of the second period in Orthodox history, the period of the Seven Councils. These Seven Councils are of immense importance to Orthodoxy. For members of the Orthodox Church, their interest is not merely historical but contemporary; they are the concern not only of scholars and clergy, but of all the faithful. "Even illiterate peasants," said Dean Stanley, "to whom, in the corresponding class of life in Spain or Italy, the names of Constance and Trent would probably be quite unknown, are well aware that their Church reposes on the basis of the Seven Councils, and retain a hope that they may yet live to see an eighth General Council, in which the evils of the time will be set straight" (*Lectures on the History of the Eastern Church* [Everyman Edition], p. 99). Orthodox often call themselves "the Church of the Seven Councils." By this they do not mean that the Orthodox Church has ceased to think creatively since 787. But they see in the period of the Councils the great age of theology; and, next to the Bible, it is the Seven Councils which the Orthodox Church takes as its standard and guide in seeking solutions to the new problems which arise in every generation.

From The Orthodox Church, by †Metropolitan Kallistos Ware.

The Holy Optina Elders

Over the course of one century—from Elder Leonid's arrival in 1829 until the Monastery's forced closure by the Communists in 1923—Optina, with its Skete of St. John the Forerunner, was at the center of a tremendous spiritual revival in Russia.

As a result of anti-clerical legislation during the reigns of Emperor Peter I and Empress Catherine II, a general decline in monastic life had taken place across Russia from the middle of the 17th century through the end of the 18th century. While several spiritually well-ordered monasteries still existed, such as Valaam and Sarov, the strict new regulations often forced those desiring to follow the Gospel commandments within the God-ordained monastic life to choose one of two alternatives: either to leave Russia in search of a monastery in one of the neighboring Orthodox countries, or to live this life in the depths of forests, hidden from view. The greatest example of those who chose the first path was St. Paisius Velichkovsky (+ 1794), who labored ascetically on Mount Athos and ended his days at the head of a vast monastic army centered in Moldavia, Romania.

A number of his disciples later returned to Russia, bringing with them priceless patristic writings on the spiritual life which had been painstakingly translated by St. Paisius, and which became instrumental in bringing about a new blossoming of sanctity in Russia. An example of those who chose the second way was the community of ascetics who dwelt in the Roslavl Forest of the Bryansk Province in Russia. These ascetics were also nourished by St. Paisius by means of his patristic translations, which reached them through Elder Athanasius, one of St. Paisius' disciples.

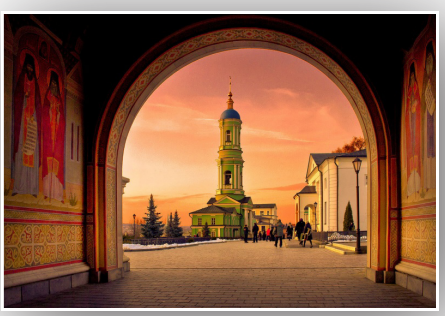
When, at the beginning of the 19th century, a more propitious time for monasticism arrived, and the run-down Optina Monastery was being restored, it was by these ascetics that true monasticism was instituted in Optina. From the Roslavl Forest came the Putilov brothers, Elders Moses and Anthony, who took the reins of the Optina Monastery and established the Optina Skete nearby. They, in turn, brought in Elder Leonid, a disciple of Elders Theodore of Svir and Cleopas of Valaam, both of whom were direct disciples of St. Paisius.

With the arrival of Elder Leonid, the practice of eldership was introduced in Optina. This is the prophetic ministry of the Church, which has existed since apostolic times, and through which God's will is directly revealed to those seeking guidance. An elder is one who, through inward purification, has become a vessel and conduit of the action of the Holy Spirit. This ministry was passed on in Optina from one Elder to the next, in a remarkable chain of sanctity that lasted a full century.

The succession of Optina Elders had a profound effect on all levels of Russian society. Guidance by eldership—marked by a life of simplicity, unquestioning obedience to the Elder, and frequent revelation of one's thoughts—was a source of spiritual rebirth, not only for Optina's monks and monastics of other monasteries, but also for the thousands of lay folk who came to Optina in a steady stream day after day for spiritual direction. Famous Russian authors, such as Gogol, Dostoyevsky, and Tolstoy, were deeply affected by their contact with the Elders.

The Optina Elders also had a profound effect on the spirituality of Russia by fostering the publication of

a significant body of patristic literature concerning the ascetic, spiritual life. The books that Optina Monastery published were sent out free to all monasteries in Russia, and were read by great numbers of laypeople, as well. This labor of love began under the leadership of Elder Macarius (Elder Leonid's disciple) and continued until the forced closure of Optina Monastery.

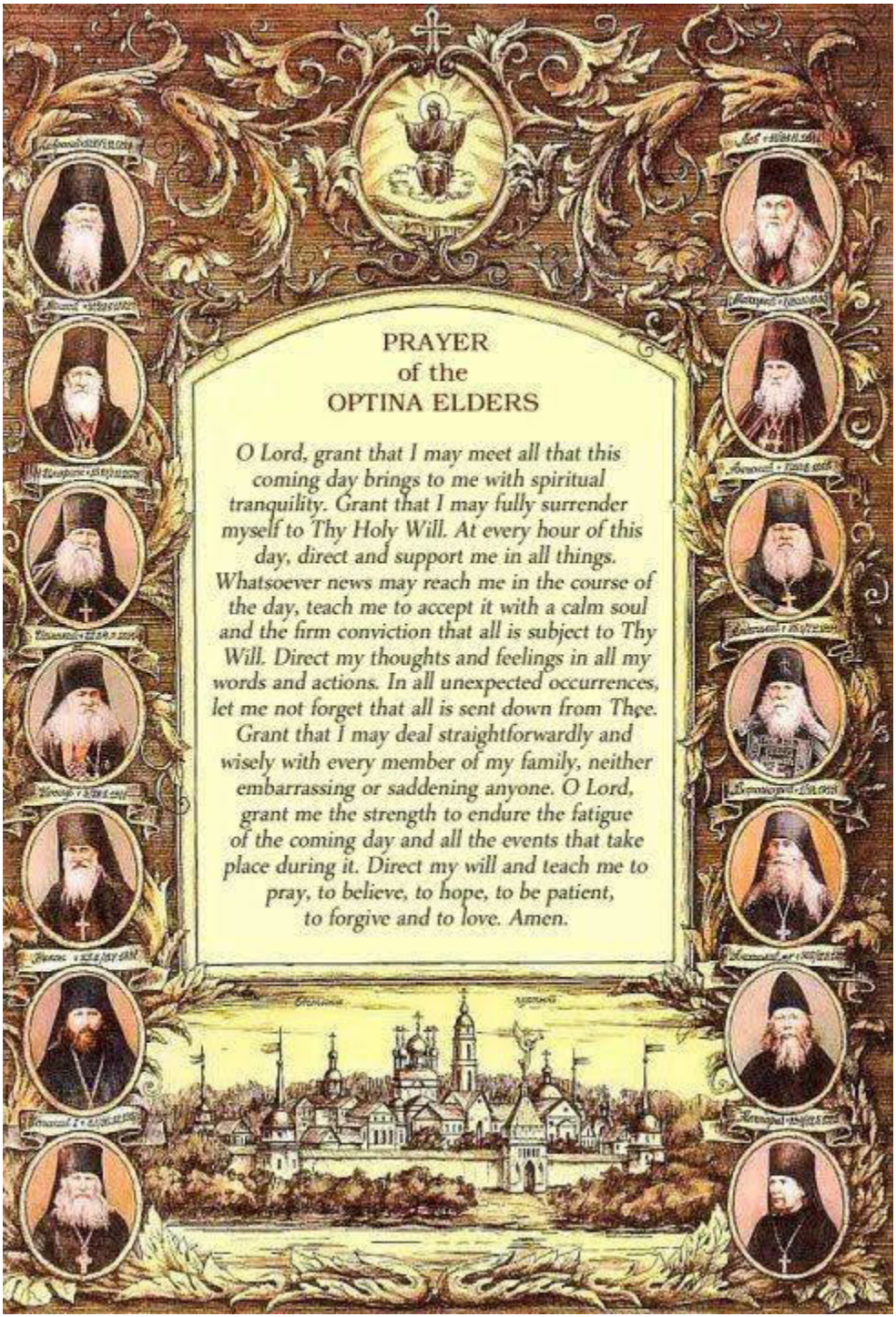


Through God's mercy, in spite of seventy years of Communist enslavement, "prima vitae" of many of the Elders have been preserved. Written by their immediate disciples, these rare biographies contain a multitude of priceless details and anecdotes that shed light into the secret corners of lives totally dedicated to Jesus Christ.

In the twelve years since the first English printing of Elder Leonid of Optina, interest in and veneration of the God-bearing Elders of Optina Monastery have grown tremendously, both in Russia and in the West. Since the 1988 reopening of Optina, numerous men, inspired by the Lives of the Elders and thirsting for the kind of monastic life inspired by them during the 19th and early 20th centuries, have found shelter within the walls of this great monastic citadel. The Monastery and Skete, after years of neglect and destruction under the Communist regime, have gradually been restored by loving hands, and are already beginning to regain their former magnificence. At this time there are over forty monks settled in the Monastery and Skete, as well as many others in the Monastery's metochia in Moscow and St. Petersburg.

In 1990 only Elder Ambrose had been glorified by the Orthodox Church in Russia (1988), while in April of 1990 all the Optina Elders were glorified by the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad. With the fall of Communism in Russia and the consequent freedom experienced by the Church there, preparations were undertaken for the glorification of all the Elders by the entire Russian Orthodox Church. During the restoration work on the Optina Church of the Kazan Icon of the Theotokos, which had been almost totally destroyed, the relics of Elders Moses and Anthony and those of Archimandrite Isaac (Antimonov) were uncovered and later placed in that church.

At about the same time the relics of Elder Nectarius, which had been uncovered in 1989 in the village of Kholmishche and brought to Optina, were placed in the Optina Church of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple. The local canonization of all fourteen Elders took place in Optina on June 13,1996. Two years later, in June of 1998, the relics of the remaining Elders were uncovered (except those of Elder Nikon, who reposed in exile in the far north, and those of Archimandrite Isaac [Bobrikov], who was executed by the Communists and whose relics have not been found) and later that year placed in the newly rebuilt Optina Church of the Vladimir Icon of the Theotokos. Finally, on August 7, 2000, in connection with the glorification of the New Martyrs and Confessors of Russia, all the Optina Elders were universally canonized by the Russian Orthodox Church in the newly rebuilt Cathedral of Christ the Savior in Moscow.



PRAYER
of the
OPTINA ELDERS

O Lord, grant that I may meet all that this coming day brings to me with spiritual tranquility. Grant that I may fully surrender myself to Thy Holy Will. At every hour of this day, direct and support me in all things. Whatsoever news may reach me in the course of the day, teach me to accept it with a calm soul and the firm conviction that all is subject to Thy Will. Direct my thoughts and feelings in all my words and actions. In all unexpected occurrences, let me not forget that all is sent down from Thee. Grant that I may deal straightforwardly and wisely with every member of my family, neither embarrassing or saddening anyone. O Lord, grant me the strength to endure the fatigue of the coming day and all the events that take place during it. Direct my will and teach me to pray, to believe, to hope, to be patient, to forgive and to love. Amen.

ST. LUKE
THE EVANGELIST
Feast Day

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 18TH

BARBECUE
after Liturgy outside

Everyone is invited!

Please bring side dishes and meat to grill for your family.