



# HOLY TRINITY

## ROMANIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

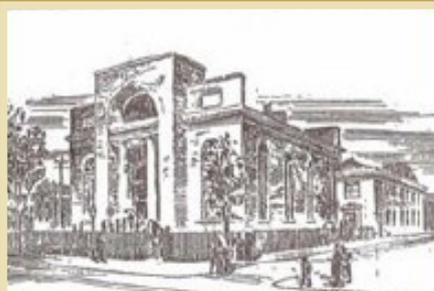


723 N BODINE ST PHILADELPHIA, PA 19123

# CHURCH BULLETIN

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## Sunday of the Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council



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### Gospel Reading John 9: 1-38

*At that time,* Jesus lifted up his eyes to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him power over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work which you gave me to do; and now, Father, you glorify me in your own presence with the glory which I had with you before the world was made. "I have manifested your name to the men whom you gave me out of the world; yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything that you have given me is from you; for I have given them the words which you gave me, and

they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you did send me. I am praying for them; I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are mine; all mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them. And now I am no more in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one. While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me; I have guarded them, and none of them is lost but the son of perdition, that the scripture might be fulfilled. But now I am coming to you; and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves."

### Apostle Reading Acts of the Apostles 20:16-18; 28-36

*In those days,* Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus, so that he might not have to spend time in Asia; for he was hastening to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost. And from Miletos he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church. And when they came to him, he said to them: "Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God which he obtained with the blood of his own Son. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore

be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears. And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. I coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities, and to those who were with me. In all things I have shown you that by so toiling one must help the weak, remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, 'it is more blessed to give than to receive.' " And when he had spoken thus, he knelt down and prayed with them all.

**Synaxarion.** Sunday May 31, 2020 - Sunday of the Holy Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council (the 7th Sunday after Pascha): Holy Martyrs Hermias, Eusebius and Haralambos

## Sermon for the Sunday of the Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council



My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, we hear our Lord pray in the Gospel today for the Father to “keep through Your own name those whom You have given me, that they may be one, as we are” (John 17:11).

Our Lord prays these words because He knows the attacks that the Church will undergo after His death, resurrection and ascension into heaven. He further confirms these struggles in the Gospel of Saint Matthew when he says, “Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves” (Matthew 7:15).

The Church commemorates the fathers of the First Ecumenical Council, today, that were victorious over one of these wolves that attacked the unity of the Church. This attack came from a priest of the Church of Alexandria by the name of Arius. What Arius had taught was that our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ was a creature created by God, from non-existence, when God created all of creation. In other-words, Arius denied that the divinity of Christ was the same as His Father’s. There are many that still believe this today and many other false teachings

about Christ and God. These false teachings are stated the decisions of the Seven Ecumenical Councils. As a result of these false teachings, these councils affirmed the teachings of the Church regarding Christ and the All-Holy Trinity. To affirm the Church’s teachings about Christ, the Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council formulated the first part of the Creed.

The Creed starts by confirming the person of God as Father. The Son of God taught us to pray to God with the following words: “Our Father, who art in heaven ...” (Matthew 6:9). This name of God and character of God was previously unknown to the world of the Old Testament. God was known in the Old Testament as God, was known in the Old Testament as God,

Creator, Lord, King and Judge. It is through His Son that we are given this intimate relationship with God.

As it says in today’s Gospel, this intimate relationship is confirmed by the words, “Yours they were, and You gave them me” (John 17:6). Through these words, we should be able to see the errors of Arius’ teachings that are still proclaimed to this day.

This confirms that Christ takes men, who were creatures and servants of God that knew God only as their Creator and Judge, making them His own. Through making men His own, Christ makes all men sons of God by adoption. As it says in the Epistle to the Galatians: "To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons" (Galatians 4:5). The second section of the Creed that was developed by the Holy Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council confirmed the person of the Son of God. In this portion of the Creed, the Son of God is shown to have both divine and human natures. It also confirmed that the divine nature of Christ was the same as the Father's.

Jesus refers to His divine nature in His prayer from today's Gospel when He says: "And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was" (John 17:5). Through this phrase, we can clearly see that Jesus is no ordinary man or creature of God. Our Lord tell us that He was with the Father before the worlds creation, as it says in the beginning of the Gospel of Saint John: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God (John 1:1). And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

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Saint Nikolaj Velimirovic reminds us that this prayer KEEP THEM is "not only for the apostles ... This prayer ... was also for the Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council ... And the Father kept them from the errors of Arius, and inspired, illumined and strengthened them ... to defend and confirm the Orthodox faith. This prayer is for all of us who are baptized in the Apostolic Church who have ... come to know the saving name of Christ the Savior," Jesus.

So, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, my prayer for you is the same as our Lord's, that you may be kept in the Orthodox Catholic faith so that you may be illumined and strengthened like the Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council, against all errors that surround you, and that you may worship the one True God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit - the Trinity consubstantial and undivided. Amen.

**Fr. Milan Medakovic**

# HOLY TRINITY'S

## Liturgical Schedule

### from May 31 to June 8, 2020

#### **Sunday May 31 (Sunday of the First Ecumenical Council Fathers):**

9:00 am - Matins

10:00 am - Divine Liturgy

#### **Saturday June 6 (Soul Saturday):**

9:00 am - Matins

10:00 am - Holy Liturgy

11:00 am - Memorial Service

#### **Sunday June 7: (Holy Pentecost - Descent of the Holy Ghost):**

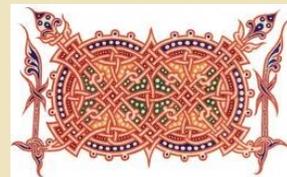
9:00 am - Matins

10:00 am - Holy Liturgy

#### **Monday June 8: (Holy Trinity Day):**

9:00 am - Matins

10:00 am - Holy Liturgy



## It is More Blessed to Give than to Receive

This is the seventh Sunday of Pascha. We remember the Fathers of the First Ecumenical Synod held at Nicæa in the year 325 ad. We also find ourselves in the days between the Lord's Ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

Today's lesson from the Book of Acts (20: 16-18; 28-36) reads like a farewell speech, a final admonition, from St. Paul to the elders of the Church at

Ephesus, but its message speaks to us as well. St. Paul is on his way to Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost. He says (in verses not included in this reading), "I am going to Jerusalem, bound in the Spirit, not knowing what shall befall me there; except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me" (Acts 20:22-23). The authorities in Jerusalem have wanted to imprison and even kill St. Paul since his acceptance of our Lord Jesus Christ as the Messiah. He believes he will never see the Church of Ephesus again. He is correct; he never does.

He is primarily concerned for the future well-being of the Church. He directs his remarks specifically to the "elders" of the Church — that is, the *episcopi* or "overseers." (In part this explains why this lesson is chosen for today when we remember the Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council.) He tells the "episcopi" to, "Keep watch over yourselves and over all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of the Lord that he obtained with his own blood" (v. 28).

There are two aspects to this "oversight." The first is that if you are given leadership in the Church you need to "keep watch over yourself." You should keep yourself right with the Lord. You have to be self-disciplined and resolute. St. Paul says something similar to St. Timothy: "Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; continue in these things, for in doing this you will save both yourself and your hearers" (1 Timothy 4:16). When following God's call to shepherd Christ's Church, our first duty is to be watchful over ourselves.



The second important duty is to "Keep watch ... over all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit has made you guardians]" (v. 28). We do not set ourselves up as "leaders" in the Church. People do not (or should not) take this responsibility on themselves. The Holy Spirit chooses. He is the one who anoints leaders in God's Church. We are to behave as shepherds, guarding and protecting the flock. It is God's flock. It is God's Church. We have been enlisted into the Lord's service for His people,

"that He obtained with his own blood."

Keeping with this image of shepherd and sheep, St. Paul says, "I know that after I have gone, savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Some even from your own group will come distorting the truth in order to entice the disciples to follow them" (v. 29-30). Anyone with experience in the Church knows the truth of what St. Paul is forewarning. The Evil One is constantly working to divide the Church, to divide the parish. Each of us needs to be vigilant. We need to strive to discern the source of our thoughts, feelings, and actions, and sometimes help our brothers and sisters to do the same.

The objective is to remain firmly planted in God's truth. Each Christian generation has faced its particular challenges. The Apostles had theirs. The Church of the fourth century had Arius, whom the Synod of Nicæa confronted directly. We have ours, perhaps an even more difficult challenge: indifference and secularism. Surrounded by material comforts, we resist God who is the only one who can truly comfort us. This is the seventh Sunday of Pascha. We remember the Fathers of the First Ecumenical Synod held at Nicæa in the year 325 ad. We also find ourselves in the days between the Lord's Ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

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This reading highlights the question of leadership in the Church, and of course, in the parish. In America, we ‘elect’ parish councils and diocesan congresses to provide assistance and direction to the Church’s leadership. Sometimes, but not always, the lay representatives find themselves in conflict with the ordained leadership, the bishops and presbyters, as well as the deacons and the other clergy. Each member of Christ’s Body needs to remember that the Holy Spirit is the one who calls us for service. No one should serve him or her self; each of us should serve God.

When you read this passage take special note of the closing verses. St. Paul admonishes them with tears and kisses. He prays with them and over them. He grieves for the words he has spoken, particularly that he would not see them again. He commends them “to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build [them] up and to give [them] the inheritance among all those who are sanctified” (v. 32). By his love for them he shows God’s Word works in us when we keep the Word close to our hearts; this is what will build us up.

Finally, Paul gives us a saying of the Lord that appears nowhere else in the New Testament, not the Gospels nor the other Apostolic writings: “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (v. 35). It is often quoted because the truth of the Lord’s words resonates in our hearts. It also reminds us that not everything the Lord said and did was written down. As the Evangelist John says: “Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name.” (John 20:30-31) The simple truth, that “it is more blessed to give than to receive,” can guide our lives even as it strengthens our faith.

Christ has Ascended! ... He has Ascended in Glory!

**Fr. Nicholas Apostola**

