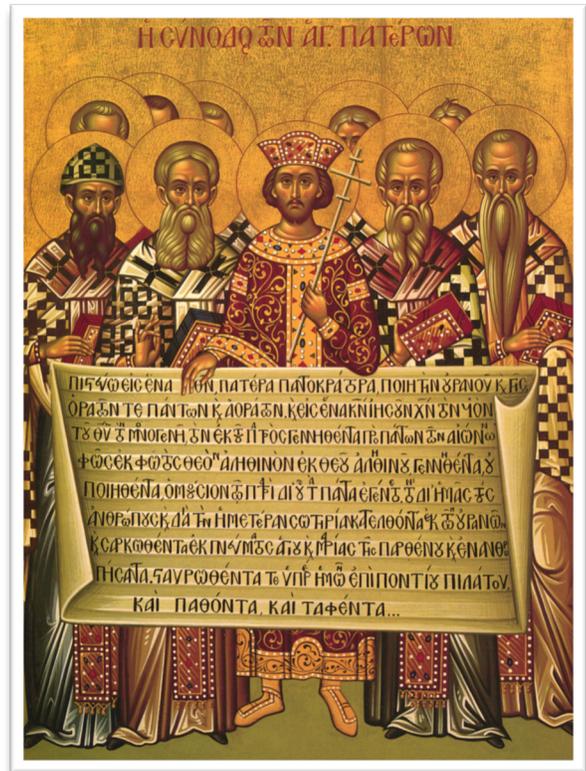


Family Gospel Lesson

John 17:1—13

Shortly after the Mystical Supper and prior to His betrayal and arrest, Jesus Christ offered this prayer to His Father in heaven. It is the first part of what is known as the Lord's high-priestly prayer. In this prayer we hear Jesus praying for Himself, for His disciples, and for the Church, as He prepares Himself for the final, grueling stages of His earthly ministry. As He prays to His Father He also reveals more fully His unique identity as the Son of the only true God and His role as the Savior of the world. As He prays for His Apostles, as they soon would be called by sharing His teachings with the world, He asks that they be kept united as one as He and His Father are forever united as One. Jesus foresees and foretells that there will be a struggle for them to stay united in faith and love as His Body in the world.

On this day, the Orthodox Church honors the Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council as a whole. This council, the first of seven that have been given the title “ecumenical,” was assembled by the emperor, St. Constantine the Great, in Nicea in 325 A.D. to preserve the unity of the Church. The 318 bishops (many of whom we now recognize as saints) gathered to defend what the Church, as a whole, believed about the person of Jesus Christ. Affirming the divinity of Christ, along with his humanity, they laid the foundation for the subsequent ecumenical councils.



For Consideration

- What happens in this Gospel lesson?
- Why does Jesus pray for Himself? Why does Jesus pray for his Apostles? How do we strengthen or weaken the unity of the Church?
- What does this Gospel passage mean for our lives?

TO DO TOGETHER

I Believe

The Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council formulated and ratified the first seven articles of the Nicene Creed. As we know, the Creed contains the essential beliefs we hold as Orthodox Christians. Gather as a family to recite the creed. If you have very young children, they can repeat after you line by line. Discuss each line as a family, reflecting on the meaning of each so that everyone has a better understanding when they pray.

Imitators of Christ

This Gospel reading vividly shows the importance of prayer. Jesus asks for His Father's sanctification for Himself and His disciples. Using a Bible concordance or www.biblegateway.com, find instances of Jesus Christ praying at various times. You will quickly learn that prayer was a critical part of Jesus' life and is necessary in our lives as Christians. Discuss how can we make it a critical part of ours.

Family Meeting

Just as the 318 bishops assembled for the benefit of the Church, why not gather as a family periodically to assess your spiritual health? Frequent and open communication makes for dynamic, vibrant Orthodox Christian families.

Closing Prayer

When a ray is projected from the sun, it is a portion of the whole sun; but the sun will be in the ray because it is part of the sun; the substance is not separated but extended. So from the Spirit comes spirit, and God from God, as light is kindled into light. This ray of God glided down into a virgin's womb and was fashioned as flesh, born of man mixed with God. The flesh was built up by the Spirit, was nourished, grew up, spoke, taught, worked, and was Christ.

—Tertullian

Final Thought

I praise the all-holy Council of the Holy Fathers as I cry out, "O Christ, I implore you, guard closely in me its all-holy revelation." Shining like lightning the god-bearing Fathers, having come together today, confessed you clearly, O Christ, as alike without beginning and consubstantial with the Father. Illustrious are the groomsmen of your bride the Church, O Master, who wisely laid down the definition of the faith and adorned her as with fair adornment of gold.

—From the matins of the Holy Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council



Center for Family Care of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America

79 Saint Basil Road, Garrison, NY 10524

845-424-8175 • familycare@goarch.org • www.family.goarch.org