

**SUNDAY, JUNE 13, 2021**

**7th Sunday of Pascha**

**Holy Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council, Afterfeast of the Ascension**

On the seventh Sunday of Pascha, we commemorate the holy God-bearing Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council.

The Commemoration of the First Ecumenical Council has been celebrated by the Church of Christ from ancient times. The Lord Jesus Christ left the Church a great promise, "I will build My Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Mt. 16:18). Although the Church of Christ on earth will pass through difficult struggles with the Enemy of salvation, it will emerge victorious. The holy martyrs bore witness to the truth of the Savior's words, enduring suffering and death for confessing Christ, but the persecutor's sword is shattered by the Cross of Christ.

Persecution of Christians ceased during the fourth century, but heresies arose within the Church itself. One of the most pernicious of these heresies was Arianism. Arius, a priest of Alexandria, was a man of immense pride and ambition. In denying the divine nature of Jesus Christ and His equality with God the Father, Arius falsely taught that the Savior is not consubstantial with the Father, but is only a created being.

A local Council, convened with Patriarch Alexander of Alexandria presiding, condemned the false teachings of Arius. However, Arius would not submit to the authority of the Church. He wrote to many bishops, denouncing the decrees of the local Council. He spread his false teaching throughout the East, receiving support from certain Eastern bishops.

Investigating these dissensions, the holy emperor Constantine (May 21) consulted Bishop Hosius of Cordova (Aug. 27), who assured him that the heresy of Arius was directed against the most fundamental dogma of Christ's Church, and so he decided to convene an Ecumenical Council. In the year 325, 318 bishops representing Christian Churches from various lands gathered together at Nicea.

Among the assembled bishops were many confessors who had suffered during the persecutions, and who bore the marks of torture upon their bodies. Also participating in the Council were several great luminaries of the Church: Saint Nicholas, Archbishop of Myra in Lycia (December 6 and May 9), Saint Spyridon, Bishop of Tremithos (December 12), and others venerated by the Church as holy Fathers.

With Patriarch Alexander of Alexandria came his deacon, Athanasius [who later became Patriarch of Alexandria (May 2 and January 18)]. He is called "the Great," for he was a zealous champion for the purity of Orthodoxy. In the Sixth Ode of the Canon for today's Feast, he is referred to as "the thirteenth Apostle."

The emperor Constantine presided over the sessions of the Council. In his speech, responding to the welcome by Bishop Eusebius of Caesarea, he said, "God has helped me cast down the impious might of the persecutors, but more distressful for me than any blood spilled in battle is for a soldier, is the internal strife in the Church of God, for it is more ruinous."

Arius, with seventeen bishops among his supporters, remained arrogant, but his teaching was repudiated and he was excommunicated from the Church. In his speech, the holy

deacon Athanasius conclusively refuted the blasphemous opinions of Arius. The heresiarch Arius is depicted in iconography sitting on Satan's knees, or in the mouth of the Beast of the Deep (Rev. 13).

The Fathers of the Council declined to accept a Symbol of Faith (Creed) proposed by the Arians. Instead, they affirmed the Orthodox Symbol of Faith. Saint Constantine asked the Council to insert into the text of the Symbol of Faith the word "consubstantial," which he had heard in the speeches of the bishops. The Fathers of the Council unanimously accepted this suggestion.

In the Nicene Creed, the holy Fathers set forth and confirmed the Apostolic teachings about Christ's divine nature. The heresy of Arius was exposed and repudiated as an error of haughty reason. After resolving this chief dogmatic question, the Council also issued Twelve Canons on questions of churchly administration and discipline. Also decided was the date for the celebration of Holy Pascha. By decision of the Council, Holy Pascha should not be celebrated by Christians on the same day with the Jewish Passover, but on the first Sunday after the first full moon of the vernal equinox (which occurred on March 22 in 325).

The First Ecumenical Council is also commemorated on May 29.

## GREAT VESPERS

***LORD I CALL: Three stikhera for the Resurrection in tone 6, then three for the Ascension, then four for the Fathers***

### ***Resurrection, tone 6:***

Possessing victory over hell, O Christ,  
since You are free among the dead,  
You ascended the Cross  
raising with Yourself those who sat in the shades of death.//  
Drawing life from Your light, O almighty Savior, have mercy on us!

Today Christ tramples on death,  
for He is risen as He said!  
Let us all sing this song,  
for He has granted joy to the world:  
O Light unapproachable, O Fountain of life!//  
O Savior almighty, have mercy on us!

Where shall we sinners flee from You, Who are in all creation?  
In heaven You dwell!  
In hell You trampled on death!  
In the depths of the sea?  
Even there is Your hand, O Master!  
To You we flee, and falling before You, we pray://

O You Who rose from the dead, have mercy on us!

***Ascension, tone 6:***

The Lord has ascended into heaven  
that He might send the Comforter into the world.  
The heavens prepared His throne, and the clouds His mount.  
Angels marvel to see a Man high above them.  
The Father receives Him Whom He holds, co-eternal, in His bosom.  
The Holy Spirit commands all His Angels:  
“Lift up your gates, you princes!  
All you nations, clap your hands://  
for Christ has gone up to where He was before!”

The Cherubim were amazed at Your Ascension, O Lord,  
beholding You, the God Who sits enthroned upon them,  
ascending upon the clouds;  
and we glorify You, for Your mercy is good.//  
Glory to You!

Beholding Your Ascension on the holy mountain,  
O Christ, the brightness of the Father’s glory,  
we hymn the radiant appearance of Your countenance;  
we worship Your sufferings,  
we honor Your Resurrection,  
as we glorify Your glorious Ascension.//  
Have mercy on us!

***Fathers, tone 6:***

You were begotten from the Father before the Morning Star,  
but Arius taught wrongfully that You were created:  
in his ignorance he designated You as a creature,  
yet the Fathers of the Council proclaimed You as Son of God,//  
co-enthroned with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

O Savior, who has torn Your garment?  
Who has challenged the unity of the triune Godhead?  
It is Arius, for he denied that You are equal to the Father.  
Those who follow him do not believe that God took flesh for our sake,  
but the Fathers of the Council proclaimed You as Son of God,//  
co-enthroned with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

Arius fell into the abyss of sin,  
pretending blindness that he might not see the Light.  
By his purpose he became the image of Judas.  
But the Council at Nicea proclaimed You as Son of God, //  
co-enthroned with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

The foolish Arius blasphemed the All-holy Trinity,  
dividing the Persons into three different unequal substances,  
but the God-bearing Fathers denounced his confusion:  
they assembled with the zeal of Elijah,  
destroying error with the sword of the Spirit, //  
as they were directed by the inspiration of God.

***Glory ... Fathers, tone 6:***

Today let us praise the mystical trumpets of the Spirit,  
the God-bearing Fathers,  
who stand in the midst of the Church, singing true theology,  
praising the changeless Trinity!  
They laid low the errors of Arius  
and upheld the Orthodox Faith. //  
They always entreat the Lord to have mercy on our souls.

***now and ever ... Theotokion-dogmatikon in tone 4:***

Who will not bless you, O most holy Virgin?  
Who will not sing of your most pure childbearing?  
The only-begotten Son shone timelessly from the Father,  
but from you He was ineffably incarnate.  
God by nature, yet Man for our sake,  
not two persons, but one known in two natures.  
Entreat Him, O pure and all-blessed Lady, //  
to have mercy on our souls!

**APOSTICHA:**

***Resurrection, tone 6:***

Your Resurrection, O Christ our Savior,  
the Angels in heaven sing!  
Enable us on earth //  
to glorify You in purity of heart!

Destroying the gates of hell,

breaking the chains of death,  
You resurrected the fallen human race as almighty God!//  
O Lord, Who rose from the dead, glory to You!

Desiring to return us to Paradise,  
Christ was nailed to the Cross and placed in a tomb.  
The Myrrhbearing Women sought Him with tears, crying,  
“Woe to us, O Savior!  
How do You deign to descend to death?  
What place can hold Your life bearing body?  
Come to us as You promised!  
Take away our wailing and tears!”  
Then the Angel appeared to them:  
“Stop your lamentations!  
Go, proclaim to the Apostles:  
‘The Lord is risen,//  
granting us purification and great mercy!’”

Having been crucified as You willed,  
by Your burial You captured death, O Christ,  
rising on the third day as God in glory,//  
granting the world unending life and great mercy!

***Glory ... Fathers in tone 4:***

Today we, the Orthodox, celebrate the annual memory  
of the God-bearing Fathers who assembled in Nicea.  
They laid low the godless doctrines of Arius,  
driving him from the unity of the Catholic Church,  
and teaching us how to confess the consubstantial and co-eternal Son of God.  
They expressed this clearly in the Symbol of Faith,  
and we follow their divine doctrines,  
believing in and serving the Son with the Father and the all-Holy Spirit,//  
the consubstantial Trinity and one Divinity.

***now & ever... Ascensions in tone 4:***

Fulfilling, O Lord, in Your goodness,  
the mystery hidden from ages and generations,  
You came with Your Disciples to the Mount of Olives,  
together with the Mother who bore You, the Maker and Creator of all;  
for it was fitting that she who as a mother had been grieved beyond all at Your Passion,  
should also be filled with exceeding joy at the glory of Your flesh.  
In this joy we also partake

at Your ascent into heaven, O Master,//  
and we glorify Your great mercy that has come upon us.

**TROPARIA:**

***Resurrection, tone 6:***

The Angelic Powers were at Thy tomb;  
the guards became as dead men.  
Mary stood by Thy grave,  
seeking Thy most pure body.  
Thou didst capture hell not being tempted by it.  
Thou didst come to the Virgin, granting life.  
O Lord, Who didst rise from the dead,//  
glory to Thee.

***Fathers, tone 8:***

You are most glorious, O Christ our God!  
You have established the Holy Fathers as lights on the earth.  
Through them You have guided us to the true Faith.//  
O greatly compassionate One, glory to You!

***Ascension, tone 4:***

You ascended in glory, O Christ our God,  
granting joy to Your Disciples by the promise of the Holy Spirit.  
Through the blessing, they were assured  
that You are the Son of God,//  
the Redeemer of the world!

***Magnification***

We magnify, we magnify You,  
O Christ the giver of life,  
and we honor Your divine Ascension into heaven  
with Your Most Pure body.