

**SUNDAY, JULY 18, 2021**  
**COMMEMORATION OF THE HOLY FATHERS**  
**OF THE FIRST SIX ECUMENICAL COUNCILS**

The Commemoration of the Holy Fathers of the First Six Ecumenical Councils.

In the Ninth Article of the Nicea-Constantinople Symbol of Faith proclaimed by the holy Fathers of the First and Second Ecumenical Councils, we confess our faith in “One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church.” By virtue of the catholic nature of the Church, an Ecumenical Council is the Church’s supreme authority, and possesses the competence to resolve major questions of church life. An Ecumenical Council is comprised of archpastors and pastors of the Church, and representatives of all the local Churches, from every land of the “oikumene” (i.e. from all the whole inhabited world).

The Orthodox Church acknowledges Seven Holy Ecumenical Councils:

The First Ecumenical Council (Nicea I) (May 29, and also on seventh Sunday after Pascha) was convened in the year 325 against the heresy of Arius, in the city of Nicea in Bithynia under Saint Constantine the Great, Equal of the Apostles.

The Second Ecumenical Council (Constantinople I) (May 22) was convened in the year 381 against the heresy of Macedonias, by the emperor Theodosius the Great.

The Third Ecumenical Council (Ephesus) (September 9) was convened in the year 431 against the heresy of Nestorius, in the city of Ephesus by the emperor Theodosius the Younger.

The Fourth Ecumenical Council (Chalcedon) (July 16) was convened in the year 451, against the Monophysite heresy, in the city of Chalcedon under the emperor Marcian.

The Fifth Ecumenical Council (Constantinople II) (July 25) “Concerning the Three Chapters,” was convened in the year 553, under the emperor Justinian the Great.

The Sixth Ecumenical Council (Constantinople III) (January 23) met during the years 680-681, to fight the Monothelite heresy, under the emperor Constantine Pogonatos.

The fact that the Seventh Ecumenical Council (Nicea II) is not commemorated today testifies to the antiquity of today’s celebration. The Seventh Council, commemorated on the Sunday nearest to October 11, was convened at Nicea in the year 787 against the Iconoclast heresy, under the emperor Constantine and his mother Irene.

The Church venerates the Holy Fathers of the Ecumenical Councils because Christ has established them as “lights upon the earth,” guiding us to the true Faith. “Adorned with the robe of truth,” the doctrine of the Fathers, based upon the preaching of the Apostles, has established one faith for the Church. The Ecumenical Councils, are the highest authority in the Church. Such Councils, guided by the grace of the Holy Spirit, and accepted by the Church, are infallible.

The Orthodox Church's conciliar definitions of dogma have the highest authority, and such definitions always begin with the Apostolic formula: "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us..." (Acts 15: 28).

The Ecumenical Councils were always convened for a specific reason: to combat false opinions and heresies, and to clarify the Orthodox Church's teaching. But the Holy Spirit has thus seen fit, that the dogmas, the truths of faith, immutable in their content and scope, constantly and consequently are revealed by the conciliar mind of the Church, and are given precision by the holy Fathers within theological concepts and terms in exactly such measure as is needed by the Church itself for its economy of salvation. The Church, in expounding its dogmas, is dealing with the concerns of a given historical moment, "not revealing everything in haste and thoughtlessly, nor indeed, ultimately hiding something" (Saint Gregory the Theologian).

## GREAT VESPERS

***LORD I CALL*** (Four stikhera of the Resurrection in tone 3, followed by three stikhera of the Fathers)

***Resurrection, tone 3:***

By Your Cross, O Christ our Savior,  
death's dominion has been shattered;  
the devil's delusion destroyed.  
The human race, being saved by faith,//  
always offers You a song.

All has been enlightened by Your Resurrection, O Lord.  
Paradise has been opened again.  
All creation, praising You,//  
always offers You a song.

I glorify the power of the Father and the Son.  
I praise the authority of the Holy Spirit:  
the undivided, uncreated Godhead,//  
the consubstantial Trinity which reigns forever.

We bow down in worship before Your precious Cross, O Christ,  
and we glorify and praise Your Resurrection,//  
for by Your wounds we have all been healed.

***Holy Fathers, tone 6:***

You were begotten from the Father before the Morning Star,  
but Arius taught wrongly that You were created.  
In his ignorance he designated You as a creature,

yet the Fathers of the Council in Nicea, O Lord,  
proclaimed that You are the Son of God, //  
co-enthroned with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

O honored Fathers,  
you skillfully stitched together the garment of Christ,  
which had been divided and torn apart by barking dogs.  
You found it unbearable to see His nakedness,  
as, of old, Shem and Japheth could not bear to see the nakedness of their father.  
You put to shame the wretchedness of Arius and those who agreed with him, //  
and who professed the madness that bears his name.

The Macedónians and Nestórians, the Eutýchians and Dióscorenes,  
the Appolinárians, Sabéllians, and Séverans,  
who were revealed as oppressive wolves in sheep's skins,  
you, as true shepherds, drove far away from the Savior's flock,  
having stripped the thrice-wretched ones of their sheep's skins. //  
Therefore, we call you blessed, O holy Fathers.

***GLORY... Holy 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... the Dogmatikon of the Resurrection in tone 3:***

How can we not wonder  
at your mystical childbearing, O exalted Mother?  
For without receiving the touch of man,  
you gave birth to a Son in the flesh, immaculate Virgin.  
The Son born of the Father before eternity  
was born of you at the fullness of time, O honored Lady.  
He underwent no mingling, no change, no division,  
but preserved the fullness of each nature.  
Entreat Him, O Lady and Virgin, and Mother,  
to save the souls of those who, in the Orthodox manner, confess you //  
*to be the Theotokos.*

**THREE OLD TESTAMENT READINGS**

***The reading from the book of Genesis.***

And Abram, having heard that Lot his nephew had been taken captive, numbered his own home-born servants three hundred and eighteen, and pursued after them to Dan. And he fell upon them at night, he and his servants who were with him, and he smote them and pursued them as far as Chobal, which is on the left of Damascus. And he recovered Lot his nephew, and all his possessions, and the women and the people. And the king of Sodom went out to meet him after he returned from the slaughter of Chodollogomor, and the kings with him, to the valley of Saby; this was the king's dale. And Melchisedek, king of Salem, brought forth bread and wine, and he was the priest of the Most High God. And he blessed Abram, and said: Blessed be Abram of the Most High God, Who made heaven and earth, and blessed be the Most High God, Who delivered your enemies into your power. **(14:14-20)**

***The reading from the Book of Deuteronomy.***

Thus said Moses to the sons of Israel: Behold, God has delivered the land before you; go in and inherit the land which I swore to your fathers Abraham and Issac and Jacob, to give it to them and to their seed after them. And I spoke to you at that time, saying: I shall not be able by myself to bear you. The Lord your God has multiplied you, and behold, you are today as the stars of heaven in multitude. The Lord God of your fathers add to you a thousandfold more than you are, and bless you as He has spoken to you. So I took of you wise and understanding and prudent men, and I set them to rule over you as rulers of thousands, and rulers of hundreds, and rulers of tens, and instructors for your judges. And I commanded your judges at that time, saying: Hear causes between your brethren, and judge justly between a man and his brother, and the stranger that is with him. You shall not have respect to persons in judgment, you shall judge small and great equally; you shall not shrink from before the person of a man, for the judgment is God's. **(1:8-11, 15-17)**

***The Reading from the Book of Deuteronomy.***

Thus said Moses to the sons of Israel: Behold, the heaven, and the Heaven of heaven, belong to the Lord your God, the earth and all things that are therein. Yet the Lord chose your fathers to love them, and above all nations, as at this day He chose you out of their seed after them. Therefore you shall circumcise the hardness of your heart, and you shall not harden your neck. For the Lord our God, He is God of gods, and Lord of lords, the great, and strong, and terrible God, Who does not respect persons, nor will He by any means accept a bribe; executing judgment for the stranger and orphan and widow, and He loves the stranger to give him food and raiment. You shall fear the Lord your God, and serve Him, and shall swear by His Name. He is your boast, and He is your God, Who has wrought for you these great and glorious things, which your eyes have seen. **(10:14-21)**

**APOSTIKHA: All stikhera of the Resurrection in tone 3:**

The sun was darkened by your Passion, O Christ,  
but all creation was enlightened by the light of Your Resurrection.//  
Accept our evening song, O Lover of mankind!

Your life-bearing Resurrection, O Lord,

enlightened the whole universe, recalling Your creation.  
Delivered from Adam's curse, we sing://  
“Almighty Lord, glory to You!”

You are the changeless God,  
Who, suffering in the flesh, were changed.  
Creation could not endure seeing You on the Cross.  
It was filled with fear while praising Your patience.  
By descending to hell and rising on the third day, //  
You have granted to the world life and great mercy.

You endured death, O Christ,  
to deliver the human race from death.  
You rose from the dead on the third day,  
raising with yourself those who knew You as God //  
and enlightening the world. Glory to You!

***GLORY... Holy Fathers, tone 4:***

Today we celebrate the annual memorial  
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 AND EVER... Resurrectional Theotokion in tone 4:***

Look on the entreaties of your servants, O blameless one!  
Stop all the terrible attacks against us,  
freeing us from every affliction,  
for we have only you as our sure and firm anchor!  
Lady, do not let us be put to shame,  
for we call on you for our intercession!  
Hasten to pray for those who call in faith:  
“Rejoice, Lady, Help of all://  
the Joy and Shelter and Salvation of our souls!”

***TROPARIA***

***Resurrection, tone 3***

Let the heavens rejoice!  
Let the earth be glad!

For the Lord has shown strength with His arm.  
He has trampled down death by death.  
He has become the first born of the dead.  
He has delivered us from the depths of hell,  
and has granted to the world//  
great mercy.

***Holy 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!

***Resurrectional Dismissal Theotokion, tone 8***

For our sake You were born of the Virgin  
and endured crucifixion, O Good One, destroying death by death.  
Revealing the Resurrection as God, do not despise the work of Your hand!  
Reveal Your love for man, O Merciful One, and accept the Theotokos praying for us,//  
and save the despairing people, O our Savior!