

19th Sunday After Pentecost

Memory of the Holy Fathers of the Seventh Ecumenical Council

Dear brothers and sisters!

Memorable events are always marked in our calendars in a different color or font. For us, it is a sign to pay attention and remember what it commemorates. And today the Church commemorates the Holy Fathers of the Seventh Ecumenical Council, because they confirmed the veracity of the veneration of icons.

The Holy Fathers, whose memory we celebrate, condemned the heresy of iconoclasm, the destruction of icons. This heresy dates back to the beginning of the 8th century, when the Byzantine Emperor Leo issued a decree requiring the removal of holy icons from churches and houses and ordering them to be burnt in the city squares. The decree was motivated by the accusation that the worship of icons was idolatry. Only during the reign of the pious Empress Irina, was the veneration of icons restored.

Through the works of this Empress, and with the support of the Patriarch of Constantinople Tarasius, the Seventh Ecumenical Council was convened in 787. More than three hundred bishops were in attendance. This council affirmed that iconography is a special form of revelation of the Divine reality.

The history of the Council shows that the Holy Fathers believed that the sole Head of the Church is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. There were at the time of the Council many saints and teachers, martyrs and confessors who had been persecuted by the iconoclasts and bore on their bodies the wounds of their suffering for the faith. As did many ascetics and miracle

workers. But none of them had sought supremacy, all kept themselves in humility and obedience.

St. Andrew of Crete said: “Many holy fathers faithfully adhered to the Holy Scriptures and Tradition. They fought valiantly against the iconoclasts, for which reason they were tortured in various ways. Everywhere there were dungeons, shackles, and deep ditches filled not with robbers, not thieves, but with bishops, priests, monks and other pious people.”

St. John of Damascus, who lived during the early decades of the iconoclast movement, wrote many works that raised the ire of the iconoclasts. It is even said that in retribution, his right hand was cut off! But the Lord did not abandon his beloved: St. John, praying before an icon of the Blessed Virgin, was healed.

Defending icons, St. John of Damascus wrote: “The devil is jealous that we might see the image of our Lord and through Him be sanctified. The devil will envy that we see His salvific sufferings, and he will envy the honor of the saints, which they have bestowed on God. He does not want us to become zealous for courage and their faith.”

Holy icons have a special effect on a person. They sanctify our minds. In the heart they enkindle love for God and for the saints, and they strengthen the will of people to do good.

Dear believers, let us try to be grateful to God for His great Divine love. After all, it was this love that gave us everything we have now—the Church of God with its sacraments and saints, who were able to live with God in such a way that the light of Divine love sanctified them and which they radiate to us. We pray that we, following their example, may constantly glorify our heavenly Father, who is in us, and that we may be in Him.