SEVENTH SUNDAY OF PASCHA
Sunday of the Holy Fathers of the 1st Ecumenical Council
27 May / 9 June 2024

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit! Amen!
Во имя Отца и Сына и Святого Духа! Аминь!
Христос воскресе! - Воистину воскресе!
Khristós anésti! – Alethós anésti!
Christ is risen! – He is risen indeed!

The 1st Ecumenical Council: Today is the Sunday of the Holy Fathers of the 1st Ecumenical Council which took place at Nicaea in the Roman province of Bithynia in Asia Minor in 325 A.D. The council, probably attended by more than 1800 church officials, was convened by the Emperor Constantine to deal with the heresy of Arianism. Arius, a priest in the Egyptian city of Alexandria had declared – to quote Fr Timothy Ware (*The Orthodox Church,* 3rd ed. p. 23) - that Jesus, the Son of God" "…was inferior to (God) the Father". The council, however, concluded - as Timothy Ware writes – that "Only if Christ is truly God…can He unite us to God…" and that Christ "…" is one in essence with the Father", adding that Christ "…is no demigod or superior creature, but God in the same sense that the Father is God, "true God from true God." The council rejected the teaching of Arius, concluding, as stated in the Nicene Creed, that Christ was "begotten not made, one in essence with the Father." A second council at Nicaea in 381 A.D. broadened the original content of the Creed.

Epistle: Acts 20:16-18, 28-36 This morning's reading from the Acts of the Apostles seems like a prophecy of things to come in the history of the Church (and the world). Heading by ship to Jerusalem for the Day of Pentecost, Paul decides to bypass Ephesus. He disembarks at Miletus and sends a message to the elders of the church in Ephesus to meet him there. He urges caution and discernment for them. "You know", Paul says, "from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived among you. Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He (meaning Christ) purchased with His own blood." Why does Paul say this? He explains: "For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves". What Paul says is almost a premonition of discord within the Church – discord which which would erupt in numerous heresies, including the heresy of Arius which led to the 1st Ecumenical Council and indeed to others! Paul has a warning both for the people of his own time and for ours as well! "Therefore", he says, "watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears". His message, however, goes beyond a warning! It expands gloriously, radiantly, exultantly in a proclamation of hope and joy! "So now, brethren", he says, "I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified". As an aside, he adds "I have coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me". What is his message? It is the same message that is proclaimed throughout the whole history of the Church! It is a message of love, of forgiveness, of compassion, of patience, and indeed of exultation! It is a proclamation also of the words of the 2nd Great Commandment that we love one another as God has loved us! Paul's words echo down through the centuries to the present day! "I have shown you in every way", he says, "laboring like this, that you must support the weak".Paul continues, "And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" These words invite us to look beyond ourselves and to consider the lives of others, whoever and wherever they may be! It

is a message for all of us! And we read that after Paul had spoken so eloquently to those around him, "…he knelt down and prayed with them all." Glory to God!

Gospel: John 17:1-13 This morning's reading from St John's Gospel connects directly with the Seventh Sunday of Pascha, the Sunday dedicated to the memory of the Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council. How and why is this? The answer is that in the thirteen verses of this morning's Gospel our Lord Jesus Christ Himself answers the basic questions which arose at the First Ecumenical Council. Who is this "Jesus"? We read that "Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: 'Father, the hour has come'". He knows that it is the Cross that awaits Him and he says, "Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You", and He continues with these words of hope for the whole world which will be seen through the glorious victory of the Cross realized in the Resurrection! Jesus says that God has "…given Him authority over all flesh that He should give eternal life to as many…" as God has given Him, His Son. He continues, saying "And this is eternal life, that they (meaning us) may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent." Jesus continues His prayer to God the Father with these words: "I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do. And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was." Of these words alone, *The Orthodox Study Bible* comments that "this testimony is sufficient to dismiss Arianism! There is more to follow, however as Jesus offers a prayer for the apostles. To God the Father, Jesus says "I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world." Here, again referring to the apostles, He says to God the Father that "They were Yours, You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word. Now they have known that all things which You have given Me are from You." With reference to the apostles, *The Orthodox Study Bible* reminds us that "They are the ones through whom God's word comes to us". Jesus speaks further of the importance of the apostles, saying of them to God the Father "For I have given to them the words which You have given Me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came forth from You; and they have believed that You sent Me". In His prayer to God the Father, Jesus says that in addition to praying for the apostles, He prays also for those whom God has given to Him, for those who come to believe in Him and saying of them that they belong both to God and to Him: "And all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine, and I am glorified in them." The abiding theme through this entire prayer of Jesus is the theme of love! In this prayer there is however a sense of foreboding! Soon Jesus will be betrayed by Judas Iscariot, arrested and condemned to death. Jesus in His prayer, knowing what He must endure, offers not words of fear or words of anger but words of hope for the world – of hope for us! "Now I am no longer in the world", He says, "but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are". Here the words "that they may be one as We are", directly contradict the heresy of Arianism and are in perfect harmony with the conclusion of the First Ecumenical Council as expressed in the Nicene Creed that Jesus Christ was "begotten, not made" and that He was and is "one in essence with the Father." The last words of this morning's reading from the Gospel According to St John remind us that at the heart and centre of our faith is its proclamation of love – not love for a few, but the love of God, the Love of Christ, the love of Christ, the love of the Holy Spirit. We read as follows these words: "While I was with them in the world (Here Jesus speaks of and for us) "I kept them in Your name. Those whom You gave Me I have kept; and none of them is lost except the son of perdition (A reference to Judas Iscariot), that the Scripture might be fulfilled. But now I come to You, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves." Glory to God!

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Христос воскресе! - Воистину воскресе!

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Epistle: Acts 20:16-18, 28-36

16 For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus, so that he would not have to spend time in Asia; for
he was hurrying to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the Day of Pentecost. 17 From Miletus he sent
to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church. 18 And when they had come to him, he said to
them: "You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived among
you, 28 Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has
made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. 29
For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the
flock. 30 Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away
the disciples after themselves. 31 Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not
cease to warn everyone night and day with tears. 32 So now, brethren, I commend you to God and
to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those
who are sanctified. 33 I have coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. 34 Yes, you yourselves
know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me. 35 I
have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember
the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" 36 And
when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all.