

Sunday of Orthodoxy

Synaxarion of the Feast

The Sunday of Orthodoxy is the first Sunday of Great Lent. The dominant theme of this Sunday since 843 has been that of the victory of the icons. In that year the iconoclastic controversy, which had raged on and off since 726, was finally laid to rest, and icons and their veneration were restored on the first Sunday in Lent. Ever since, this Sunday has been commemorated as the "Triumph of Orthodoxy."

The name of this Sunday reflects the great significance which icons possess for the Orthodox Church. They are not optional devotional extras, but an integral part of Orthodox faith and devotion. They are held to be a necessary consequence of Christian faith in the incarnation of the Word of God, the Second Person of the Trinity, in Jesus Christ. They have a sacramental character, making present to the believer the person or event depicted on them. So the interior of Orthodox churches is often covered with icons painted on walls and domed roofs, and there is always an icon screen, or iconostasis, separating the sanctuary from the nave, often with several rows of icons. No Orthodox home is complete without an icon corner (iconostasion), where the family prays.

Icons are venerated by burning lamps and candles in front of them, by the use of incense and by kissing. But there is a clear doctrinal distinction between the veneration paid to icons and the worship due to God. The former is not only relative, it is in fact paid to the person represented by the icon. This distinction safeguards the veneration of icons from any charge of idolatry.

The theme of the victory of the icons, by its emphasis on the incarnation, points us to the basic Christian truth that the one whose death and resurrection we celebrate at Easter was none other than the Word of God who became human in Jesus Christ.

~ Source: Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, http://lent.goarch.org/sunday_of_orthodoxy/learn

Thoughts on the Feast

Be it on the internet or in front of us, "a picture is worth a thousand words", giving us insight into a greater story.

Today, Orthodox Christians celebrate the First Sunday of Great Lent, also known as **the Sunday of Orthodoxy**. On this Sunday, we celebrate the victory of icons – God's big "photo album" for the universe to see His righteous ones. In icons, we see the majesty of the life of Christ, the Theotokos and all the Saints of the Church: a little about who they are, how they died, how Christ is the Leader and all the saints are dedicated soldiers of the 'heavenly army'. Every icon is a testament to Christ who, although Uncontainable and Immeasurable, is depicted in our iconography.

As Orthodox Christians, we kiss icons, we prostrate before them, we honour (or *venerate*) them. Worship is reserved for God alone, as He is the only one who is Holy by nature. Yet, veneration is due to icons – not to the wood and paint that is used to create it, but to the prototype that is depicted in it. If, for example, a person sees an icon of St. John the Baptist, we show respect to the Saint and how he sacrificed his life for Christ, being "the greatest of

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the prophets". We kiss the icon to show that devotion to the Saint, and not merely to "honour" the iconography, who made a "nice-looking painting".

We honour the icons that are around us: at Church, in our homes, in our places of work. Yet, we tend to forget the other "icons" that are around us – the living icons who are *all of us!* When we see our family, friends, acquaintances, enemies – even the person we don't know – we should remember that it is as if we are seeing an icon of Christ. We are all in the image of God. When we sin, we become a "murky and soiled icon", one that is stained because we choose to fall away from the will of God. Even with this, it still remains an icon. Would we take an icon that is dirty and throw it out? Never! So, we should never give up on our brother and sister in Christ who has fallen away.

As we continue in our Lenten journey, we should try to forgive, to love, to be as the Prototype of all icons, Jesus Christ. All the saints have Him as the Centre of their lives; we, who are the living icons of Christ, should as well. Holiness is the aim, not just "being a good person". Let us not just "talk the talk" but "walk the walk" to the Kingdom.

God bless!

Discussion Questions

For Children

1. Take an icon from Church or from your home.
 - a. Find out about the Saint's life. What is the most interesting fact that you learned from them?
 - b. Use paint/pencil crayons/etc. and try to make the icon again on paper. Bring it with you to Sunday School class!
2. How do icons help you in your prayer life?

For Youth and Young Adults

1. Both the 7th Ecumenical Council and the Regional Synod of 843 dealt with the question of iconography. What arguments for iconography did they have?
2. Look up the lives of St. John of Damascus and St. Theodore the Studite, two defenders of icons. What is interesting from their lives and how did they defend iconography?
3. People that are suffering are icons of Christ. List two to three ways you can help them during this Great Lent.