

## **HOMILY FOR THE SUNDAY OF ORTHODOXY 2015**

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Glory Be To Jesus Christ! Glory Be Forever!

Today is a wonderful, glorious day. It is special because looking out in to the congregation I actually see people sitting there after three Sundays of story winter weather kept most of you away. It is good to be here with all of you in this beautiful little Church, our home away from home, our little slice of paradise, Heaven on Earth.

Today is also special, as it is the day each year, the first Sunday of Great Lent, when we celebrate the fact that God has given us the great blessing to be Orthodox Christians.

Today is known in the Church as the Sunday of Orthodoxy. Specifically we recall on this day that a raging heresy or false teaching was set aside at the Seventh Ecumenical Council held in the year 787 in the city of Nicea. The false teaching, known as Iconoclasm, taught that it was wrong to pray before and reverence icons, because to do so, they believed was to worship painted images, that were seen as akin to idols. This council guided by the Holy spirit, denounced the Worship of Icons, but upheld the veneration, stating that when we reverence an icon, we are merely showing reverence toward our Lord or the saint depicted on it. After this council, a great celebration took place and the icons that the faithful hid in their homes were brought back into the Church, to beautify them and help the faithful to have a vision of paradise, to see beauty and truth, and to sense the nearness of God. Look around this Church, brothers and sisters and imagine how impoverished we would be, if there were no icons, how cold

and lifeless this Church would feel. Let us then give thanks to God, that the Orthodoxy of Icons triumphed in the Church at this Council.

IT is so fitting that the Church chose the first Sunday of great Lent for the celebration of the Triumph of Orthodoxy as it comes after a most beautiful week of living, in a most intense manner, the Orthodox Christian Way of life. Hasn't this week been wonderful. By fasting and praying more, and attending the incredibly beautiful Divine Services of the first week of Lent, we have truly appreciated what a precious Jewel the Orthodox Christian Way of life is.

We are so blessed to be Orthodox Christians. We have an ancient faith that is rooted in tradition, that has an unbroken connection to the Early Church, and the teachings of the Apostles. So when we come and experience Orthodoxy in this Church, we have a deep sense of being connected to something with deep roots, to being a part of a large family, the communion of Saints who have been victorious in their battle against Satan. And on the same time, this ancient faith, feels brand new and fresh, and alive, unlike that of a museum that focuses on the past. Don't you feel it when you walk into the doors of this little Church, the peace, the joy, the love of Christ? Isn't there something for every sense? What we experience and know as Orthodox Christians is hard to express in words, but looking into your eyes, you that faithful attend Church week in and week and and especially those of you who eagerly take part in the fasting and prayer life of Great, Lent, I know you get it. We are blessed. Make no mistake, being Orthodox isn't

always easy, for when we put on Christ, and grow in likeness to him, so too do our struggles increase. The Glory of Orthodoxy is found in Martyrdom, that is in the selfless acts of kindness to others, of crucifying our own wills of dying to our selves and living and serving others. There is suffering in Orthodoxy, but there is also, most importantly Grace, and Truth, and Love and Peace and Joy.

Today, the Church in drawing our attention to the Holy Icons, is calling you and I to be living Icons of Orthodoxy, that our life may bear witness to the Truth and Beauty of Orthodoxy, by our humility, our kindness, our Love, our fearlessness in proclaiming the Truth and fighting against evil.

Today I challenge you and I to go out and be like Philip in this morning's gospel reading and find the Nathaniel's out there that are looking for something to anchor them in life, and show them where they can find Christ – in the Orthodox Church. The true Glory of the Orthodox Faith is in its richness and its ability to transform and lift up and beautify the souls of those who seek it out and live it. May we be ever grateful for the treasure we have in being a part of the Orthodox Faith and may we do all we can to build it up, defend it and share it with the world and live it, each and every day of our lives.

Christ is in our Midst! He is and ever Shall Be!