

THE SUNDAY OF ORTHODOXY

*“This is the Apostolic faith, this is the Orthodox faith, this is the faith of the Fathers,
this is the faith that is the foundation of the world.”*

Sunday of Orthodoxy

Each of the Sundays of Great Lent has its own special theme. In the course of Church history, almost each Lenten Sunday has obtained a second theme, a historical theme. Originally the Lenten fast was the time for catechumens to prepare for baptism and entry into the Church. The Sunday spiritual themes were part of the early Christian catechesis.

The Sunday of the Triumph of Orthodoxy is celebrated on the first Sunday of Great Lent. It is the celebration of the victory of the “Iconodules” (Icon Defenders) over the “Iconoclasts” (Icon Opposers) by the decision of the Seventh Ecumenical Council. The service commemorates the restoration of icons for use in services and private devotional life of Christians.

Services often include the clergy or the faithful triumphantly processing around the church, holding icons of their patron or parish saints. For more than one hundred years the Church of Christ was troubled by the persecution of the Iconoclasts, beginning in the reign of Leo the Isaurian (717-741) and ending in the reign of Theophilus (829-842). After Theophilus's death, his widow the Empress Theodora (celebrated Feb. 11), together with the Patriarch Methodius (June 14), established Orthodoxy anew.

Queen Theodora venerated the icon of the Mother of God in the presence of the Patriarch Methodius and the other confessors and righteous men, and openly cried out these holy words: “If anyone does not offer relative worship to the holy icons, not adoring them as though they were gods, but venerating them out of love as images of the archetype, let him be anathema.” Then with common prayer and fasting during the whole first week of the Forty-day Fast, she asked God's forgiveness for her husband.

After this, on the first Sunday of the Fast, she and her son, Michael the Emperor, made a procession with all the clergy and people and restored the holy icons, and again adorned the Church of Christ with them. This is the holy deed that Orthodox commemorate, that is, the triumph of true doctrine over heresy.

Despite the teaching about icons defined at the Seventh Ecumenical Council in 787, the iconoclasts began to trouble the Church again. After the death of the last iconoclast emperor, Theophilus, his young son Michael III, with his mother the regent Theodora, and Patriarch Methodios, summoned the Synod of Constantinople in 843 to bring peace to the Church. At the end of the first session, all made a triumphal procession from the Church of Blachernae to Hagia Sophia, restoring the icons to the church. This occurred on 11 March, 843 (which that year was the first Sunday of Lent).

The name “Orthodoxy” gradually affected the character of the feast. Originally commemorating the defeat of iconoclasm, the Sunday of Orthodoxy gradually was understood in a more general sense as opposition to all heterodoxy. In this way, though its first occasion is not forgotten, the feast has become one in honor of the true Faith in general.