



My Beloved Ones,

This Sunday the Orthodox Church is blessed to commemorate the 350 Holy Fathers of the Seventh Ecumenical Council, held in Nicaea in the year 787. The purpose of this council was to refute the Iconoclastic Persecution issued by an edict issued in 726. For nearly 60 years, beginning under the command of Emperor Leo the Isaurian, icons were banned from churches, and those who advocated the Orthodox position were persecuted, and martyred.

What is noteworthy about this particular Sunday is that, in spite of the support of the Patriarch and the Emperor, this period renewing the Church's belief in icons did not last. The first Iconoclastic Persecution lasted 59 years, while the second and final one in the 800s, lasted almost thirty years. We celebrate the end of this second and final

Iconoclastic Persecution, as you know, every year on the Sunday of Orthodoxy. This means that many of the 350 Holy Fathers of the Seventh Ecumenical Council, for whom we shall pray this Sunday, were martyred.

What can we learn from this troubling period in Church history? Let us also reflect on this Sunday's Gospel reading, the Parable of the Sower and the Seed: *"A sower went out to sow his seed; and as he sowed, some fell on the path and was trampled on, and the birds of the air ate it up. Some fell on the rock; and as it grew up, it withered for lack of moisture. Some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew with it and choked it. Some fell into good soil, and when it grew, it produced a hundredfold... The ones on the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts... The ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word...have no root... and in a time of testing fall away... among the thorns, these are the ones who hear; but as they go on their way, they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature. But as for that in the good soil, these are the ones who, when they hear the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patient endurance."* (Luke 8:5-8; 12-15)

This Sunday, we take strength and comfort in the fact that unlike those seeds which fall on rocks and into thorns, God and Orthodoxy will always triumph thanks to the testimony of these Holy Fathers. Despite the spirit of disunity and anguish that pervaded the Church during Iconoclasm, those who clung to their faith and Holy Tradition, were—like those seeds in good, true soil—witnesses who refreshed the tree which is forever sustained by the blood of martyrs.

+ALEXIOS
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