



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 even martyred for their faith.

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. The second and final one lasted almost thirty years in the 800s. We celebrate the end of this second and final Iconoclastic Persecution, as you know, every year on the Sunday of Orthodoxy.

This means that the many of the 350 Holy Fathers for whom we shall pray this Sunday were martyred for their belief in the power of icons, even after the authority of this Seventh Ecumenical Council.

What can we learn from this troubling period in Church history? Quite simply we can take strength and comfort in the fact that, contrary to the ways of the world, God and Orthodoxy will always triumph in the end. In spite of the spirit of disunity and anguish that pervaded the Church during both of these periods of Iconoclasm, those who clung to their faith in the icons as valuable tools were eventually proven correct.

We can also take courage in the example of these brave souls, who withstood the political pressures and tortures, never once abandoning the faith of the Holy Fathers. Regardless of whether we shall ever face such a public test of our faith, we have the example of the defenders of icons. These Sunday, as we pray and commemorate their historic commitment, may we strive to be inspired and follow their example, now and for all time.

+ALEXIOS
Metropolitan of Atlanta