



My Beloved Ones,

I greet you with love and joy, praying that God will bless you and your families always, bestowing upon you good health, wisdom, peace and abundant joy, as we approach the end of the first week of Great Lent!

This first Sunday of Great Lent observes the Sunday of Orthodoxy, when the veneration of icons was restored to the Church in the year 483, after the many years of iconoclastic persecutions.

When we discuss iconoclasm, we often discuss what icons are not, in order to defend the Orthodox position of veneration to the non-Orthodox. However, this sets aside what icons mean for us.

From the beginning of creation itself we hear God say, *“Let us make man in our image, after our likeness”* (Genesis 1:26). For a creation that is so tied into the image of its Creator, it is understandable that Man would hunger for ways to reflect that divinity, and the holiness of His saints.

The negative side of this impulse, of course gave rise to the Israelites worshipping the Golden Calf during their wanderings in the desert. A consequence of this paganism gave rise to the Second Commandment *“Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image”* The nature of this Commandment is that which gave, and still gives many Christians, the mistaken belief that icons constitute a violation of God’s Law.

However, even the simplified analogy of veneration to honoring those we love through things such as photographs, fails to capture the profoundness of this human impulse to see the divine.

Only the holiest among us will be blessed to witness our Lord in this life. And surely no person will ever be able to understand God within the confines of the human mind. In short, our lifelong goal of Theosis recognizes that man has a hungering to know God in the limited ways that are comprehensible to us.

God Himself recognizes this; for if He did not, His Son would not have taken on our flesh. Christ came to earth in the form of a human being, who is himself an icon of the living God. God walked, talked, lived and breathed among His people. Our Apostolic Church has its roots firmly established in those Apostles who had living encounters with the Second Person of the Holy Trinity.

Therefore, we celebrate the restoration of the icons this Sunday, and honor those who fought and died for their restoration. I pray that each of you shall join in this Sunday’s commemoration by following the examples of your clergy and young people. Bring an icon of your patron saint, and proclaim that which we witness to the entire world: that icons are tools to teach the Faith, objects to venerate our patron saints and feast days, and, perhaps, most of all, a means to witness our Lord and Savior in this earthly life, before we stand at His Throne.

+ALEXIOS
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