



www.fortsmithorthodox.org

July 16, 2017

7500 Mahogany Drive, Fort Smith, AR 72917

**Sixth Sunday After Pentecost
Fathers of the First Six Ecumenical Councils**

"... from this day, from this hour, from this minute let us strive to love God above all else and to fulfill His holy will"

...St. Herman of Alaska

From Ancient Faith Podcasts –Musings From the High Desert Podcast – Fr.. Gabriel Rochelle

This is the weekend when we commemorate the Fathers of the first six Ecumenical Councils. As you know, we have a special day on which we commemorate the Fathers of the Seventh Ecumenical Council, which is the one which has to do with the restoration of the icons in the Church. But on this day we commemorate the first six Councils because they all deal basically with the same issue.

Many years ago, there was a meeting, an ecumenical meeting of ministers and that sort of thing, and the person who was in charge of the meeting for the day wanted to talk about things like giving your life to Jesus and all that sort of stuff, but he got up and he said, "Can you imagine back then, in the third or the fourth century—I don't remember which—the Church actually argued over *one letter!*" And there were all these titters of laughter and guffaws that went up in the room at that particular point.

Okay, so, in the interest of honest confession, I did not leap up at that time with flames coming out of my mouth and my ears to say, "What kind of an idiot are you, to believe that that was inconsequential in the fourth century!?" The difference was between whether or not Jesus Christ *was* of the essence of God or was some other kind of a creation. And if you buy that second half, then you can go to the Jehovah's Witness convention which is happening as we speak, at New Mexico State University."

These things *matter*, friends, and that's why we commemorate them. The key issue here in all of these Councils, in all of these Ecumenical Councils... the key issue is: how can we save the Gospel in order to save the people—that's the key issue. The results of these Councils are held universally by many churches: Roman Catholics, Orthodox, Anglicans, Episcopalians, Lutherans, Presbyterians, some others I guess as well—but these are of the very essence of what the faith is all about: the decisions of these Councils. They're not stupid little things, arguments over one letter, "hee hee hee." They have to do with your soul and with mine.

So what was the argument all about at that particular time? The argument was always about the Incarnation. It was about: was Jesus of Nazareth truly God and human at the same time, or was he not? And there were all kinds of conflicting opinions at that particular point. Some said, "Nah, he was a creature that's sort of somewhere halfway between God and humanity." That was Arius. There were others who said, "Well, he was human, but what happened was that he really didn't have a human spirit. He had God's spirit put within him." And that was [Apollinaris]. Others said, "Well, this Holy Trinity thing, it's sort of like God puts masks in front of his face, so now like one minute he'll be God the Father and the next minute he'll be God the Son and the third minute he'll be God the Holy Spirit." And the Church deliberated all of these views over the course of

these centuries, not because they're inconsequential or stupid or on an intellectual level only. It's because they affect our faith. And if they didn't, they would have never argued over these things.

So the question is really: how did they affect our faith? Since the beginning of Christianity, since the very beginning of Christianity, the issue has been: did God really enter into the human mainstream in order that humans might once again return to God? Athanasius expressed it in a simple formula: God became man in order that man might become god. It was a really simple, straightforward formula. It needs a bit of nuancing these days, perhaps, because it's not meant that you become God in the sense of some particular churches, but it's meant that you once again reenter into the divine realm with Christ because Christ became everything you are in order that he might return you to God.

That's what's missing in the heresies. What's missing in the heresies is the completeness of the faith, and that's why people like Basil of Caesarea, Cyril of Alexandria, St. Athanasius, St. Gregory—why these people rose up at that particular time in history to defend the faith. It wasn't for the sake of intellect; it was for the sake of salvation. It wasn't for the sake of looking good; it was for the sake of you—that you and I might find the true pathway to God through Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Why these things went on so long is because of a secondary issue, which is intellectual pride. These guys were not about to give up the viewpoints that they had invented. Arius was stuck in the mud. He was not ready to give up his position. He said, "No, no. I'm right, and the rest of the whole Church is wrong." And that's why councils were called, and the Holy Spirit was invoked upon those councils, in order that they might find what the truthfulness in the situation was. So they were led forward by that Spirit, and we have continued to pray through the centuries that we would be held up and upheld by that same Spirit as well.

So there's a big "so what?" in this, you know. I prepared a little paper that I'll give out tomorrow after the Divine Liturgy, but I wanted to approach it sort of personally tonight, to say that this is of the *guts* of the faith. I mean, if you give this stuff up, you have given up what Christianity is all about. That's what's so important about it. God is love, and we receive God as love, but there has to be a way for God to get to us, because we cannot rise to God on our own. We are broken people. We live under the sign of sin, even if that's a difficult word in these days. So we need that which Christ brought among us.

Over the course of the centuries it was argued about in so many different ways: what does it really mean that God became human? And those who held onto the faith delivered it to us in order that we might keep it whole and intact for another generation. Yeah, there was that subsidiary issue of intellectual pride on the part of those who refused to see the truthfulness of their opponents, and those who did not and walked away and gathered other people with them then became schismatics and invented other alternative churches to what we know today and call Orthodoxy.

That's the story for this particular weekend. Perhaps, as over the course of the next week you think about this story and think about the four major problems in the early Church of figuring out how Christ was related to God and related to humanity at the same time, you can give thanks to those Fathers of those six Ecumenical Councils, because they did deliver "the faith once delivered to the saints," as it says in Scripture.

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Christ is in our midst!

Epistles:

Romans 12:6-14 Brethren: Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; * if service, in our serving; he who teaches, in his teaching; * he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who contributes, in liberality; he who gives aid, with zeal; he who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness. * Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; * love one another with brotherly affection; outdo one another in showing honor. * Never flag in zeal, be aglow with the Spirit, serve the Lord. * Rejoice in your hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. * Contribute to the needs of the saints, practice hospitality. * Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. **Hebrews 13:7-16** Brethren: Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the Word of God; consider the outcome of their life, and imitate their faith. * Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. * Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings; for it is well that the heart be strengthened by grace, not by foods, which have not benefited their adherents. * We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat. * For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp. * So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people

through His own Blood. * Therefore let us go forth to Him outside the camp and bear the abuse He endured. * For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city which is to come. * Through Him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge His name. * Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God

Gospels:

Matthew 9:1-8 At that time, Jesus got into a boat, and crossed over and came to His own city. * And behold, they brought to Him a paralytic, lying on his bed; and when Jesus saw their faith He said to the paralytic, "Take heart, My son; your sins are forgiven." * And behold, some of the scribes said to themselves, "This man is blaspheming." * But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, "Why do you think evil in your hearts? * For which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise and walk'? * But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" -- He then said to the paralytic -- "Rise, take up your bed and go home." * And he rose and went home. * When the crowds saw it, they were afraid, and they glorified God, who had given such authority to men. **John 17:1-13** At that time, Jesus lifted up His eyes to heaven and said: Father, the hour has come; glorify Thy Son that the Son may glorify Thee, * since Thou hast given Him power over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom Thou hast given Him. * And this is eternal life, that they know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ Whom Thou hast sent. * I glorified Thee on earth, having accomplished the work which Thou gavest Me to do; * and now, Father, glorify Thou Me in Thine own presence with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was made. * I have manifested Thy name to the men whom Thou gavest Me out of the world; Thine they were, and Thou gavest them to Me, and they have kept Thy Word. * Now they know that everything that Thou hast given Me is from Thee; * for I have given them the words which Thou gavest Me, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from Thee; and they have believed that Thou didst send Me. * I am praying for them; I am not praying for the world but for those whom Thou hast given Me, for they are Thine; * all Mine are Thine, and Thine are Mine, and I am glorified in them. * And now I am no more in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to Thee. Holy Father, keep them in Thy name, which Thou hast given Me, that they may be one, even as We are one. *While I was with them, I kept them in Thy name, which Thou hast given Me; I have guarded them, and none of them is lost but the son of perdition, that the scripture might be fulfilled. * But now I am coming to Thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves.

Birthdays/Anniversaries

(B & N) Asher (Elijah) Reherman 7/20

(B) Dimitri Reherman 7/20

The Sanctuary candle for July 16th is given by Reader Daniel for Anna

If you would like to sponsor a Sanctuary Candle there is a sign-up sheet in the Narthex, suggested donation is \$20. The candle is lit on Saturday before Vespers and special prayers are said, it burns over the Altar for one week.

Fr. Nicholas will have a class on Vespers following Liturgy

This Sunday – mainly for the choir but all are welcome to attend.

Wednesday Vespers 6 p.m.

Saturday Vespers 6 p.m.

Sunday Hours 9:05 a.m.

Sunday Divine Liturgy 9:30 a.m.

Followed by Church School & Coffee Hour

Fr. Nicholas Roth: 479-755-3534

frnicholasroth@gmail.com