

SERMON On the Holy Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council, June 9, 2019

In the Book of Acts today we hear Paul's admonishment to the bishops in Ephesus: "For I know that after my departure ravenous wolves will enter among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them" (Acts 20:29-30). When Christians are threatened with imprisonment, torture or death because of their faith in our Lord, the church cannot be harmed. In fact, the church is sanctified and strengthened by the spilled blood of the martyrs. However, there is a much more pernicious threat instigated by Satan and those whom he inspires to attack the church from within. These are the clergy and bishops who pervert the doctrines of the Church and introduce innovations and false doctrines to the faithful. Sometimes these false teachings or heresies are blatant and sometimes they are very subtle. Whether obvious or not, these heresies result in Christians becoming confused about the faith and believing and understanding our faith incorrectly and in a false way. This is a very serious matter and it is of this that Paul is speaking when he warns the Bishops of Ephesus to beware of false doctrines and to protect and guard the flock as good shepherds. In the Paterikon or lives of the holy monastic fathers, there is the story of one elder who was accused of being a sinner. "Yes, I am a sinner," replied the father. "Father, you are a fornicator," said his accuser. "Yes, I am a fornicator." "Father, you a liar." "Yes, I am a liar." meekly replied the Elder. "Father, you are a heretic," was the next accusation. "No, I am not a heretic!" vehemently declared the Elder. "Father, why did you meekly accept all the accusations of being a sinner, but when we accused you of being a heretic, you vehemently denied this accusation?" "Because," replied the holy Elder, "I can repent for my sins and be saved. But heresy separates me from God." This is why heresy is so dangerous and insidious. The Holy Fathers whom we celebrate today formulated the first version of the Creed at the first Ecumenical council in Nicea in 325. The final version of the Creed that we pray and recite today in our daily prayers and during every Divine Liturgy was finalized at the second Ecumenical Council held in Constantinople in 381. "This is the Faith of the Apostles, this is the Faith which has established the universe, this is the Orthodox Faith" we declare on the Sunday of Orthodoxy. Brothers and sisters, the Creed is the exposition of the Orthodox faith. Any deviation from the Creed, even one word, is a falsehood and a lie. Throughout the centuries there have been numerous heretics who have threatened the Church with destruction and caused much turmoil and harm to the faithful.. Among them are Arius, against whom the Holy Fathers we celebrate today convened in the city of Nicea. Other famous heretics against whom the Holy Fathers of the church struggled were Nestorius, Montanus, Paul of Samosata and Appolinaris of Laodicea. Other major heretics against whom the church struggled were the gnostics, the docetists, the monophysites, the modalist monarchianists and the monothelites. Today there is an assault on Orthodox Christianity being waged by such heretics as the Mormons and the Jehovah's Witnesses. They teach absurd and foolish doctrines based on the fantasies and lies of thieves and gold diggers such as Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, and Charles Taze Russell. Polite young men in clean white shirts with neckties and trimmed haircuts will approach you and declare that they are missionaries. They carry a black book which resembles a Bible but which is in reality a collection of perverted writings written by the founder of Mormonism, Joseph Smith, in the 1800's. They will use those writings which resemble science fiction and mix them with the Gospel that we follow in the Church. They are trained to deceive you and lure you into accepting baptism and chrismation from them. Instead of speaking rationally and logically they have lost the ability to think for themselves, and they will recite their lies like automatons, concentrating on how you *feel* and not on the foolishness of their faith. Brothers and sisters, you have already been baptized into the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our faith is clearly and succinctly delineated in the Creed. We confess one Lord, one Faith, and one Baptism. These missionaries are not interested in the Orthodox Faith. They believe that the Orthodox Church is a false church. Therefore, do not engage these wolves in sheep's clothing that the holy apostle Paul warns us about today. Politely decline to debate or engage in discussion with them. You will not convert

them, and they will only become more aggressive and relentless until you agree with them and accept their faith. They are not genuinely interested in anything you have to say except to get you to convert to their false religion. Walk away from them and beware, brothers and sisters, of anyone, no matter how they look, how they dress, and whatever they call themselves, if anyone would try to lure you to accept a faith other than Orthodox Christianity. By the grace, love and mercy of God you have already been baptized into Jesus Christ and are sanctified by His Holy Body and Precious Blood. Don't be naive and don't be fooled by wolves in sheep's clothing who would take all your blessings from God away from you and lead you instead into lies and perdition. May God protect and defend us all and keep us always within the saving ark of His Holy Church. Amen!