



My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

While Thursday's celebration of the Lord's Ascension appears to be the end of the story that began with His Nativity & Ministry, and continued with His Passion & His Resurrection, it is not, because the Church will never end. Instead, after Christ ascends to sit at the right hand of the Father, we commemorate a new chapter for us on Earth, and a question: how will we carry on Christ's Gospel?

Before we can celebrate the coming of Holy Spirit at Pentecost, this Sunday, we honor those Fathers who defended Christ as the Second Person of the Holy Trinity. Arius was a Bishop who preached that Christ was not the Son & pre-existing Logos, but an ordinary man "adopted" by God. It is no accident that this week's readings speak to the need to defend the truth. Paul tells the Ephesians: *"Keep watch over yourselves and over all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers... I know that after I have gone, savage wolves will come in among you,*

not sparing the flock. Some even from your own group will come distorting the truth in order to entice the disciples to follow them. Therefore be alert..." (Acts 20:28-31) And it is in this spirit of alertness that St. Constantine called the first Ecumenical Council, in Nicaea, in the year 325.

The Fathers of the 1st Council were so filled with zeal, that in anathemizing Arius, they created a statement of belief in *"...one Lord Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, begotten of the Father Light of Light, true God of true God, begotten, not created, of one essence with the Father through whom all things were made..."* This Nicene Creed is familiar to all, but what is less known is how the Creed of 325 ended: *"But those who say: 'There was a time when he was not;' and 'He was not before he was made;' and 'He was made out of nothing,' or 'He is of another substance' or 'essence,' or 'The Son of God is created,' or 'changeable,' or 'alterable' — they are condemned by the holy catholic and apostolic Church."* These are strong words to imagine reciting every Sunday, but I mention them so that we never forget how the Holy Fathers of the 1st Council stood firm in what they had received (without change) from the Apostles.

My beloved, this Sunday, may we offer our heartfelt prayers to these Holy Fathers, because they remained with the Truth, and in proclaiming Truth, they have taught us to remain strong in our beliefs. Only by imitating their strength and courage, will we be able to carry out these words of prayer, offered by the Lord for all His Disciples: *"And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one" (John 17:11).*

**+SEVASTIANOS
Metropolitan of Atlanta**