

First Sunday of Great Lent – Sunday of Orthodoxy

On the first Sunday of Great Lent the church commemorates the **Restoration of the Holy Icons** and the triumph of the Orthodox Faith against the heresies.

The Iconoclastic Heresy was begun by the Byzantine Emperor Leo III the Isaurian (717-741) and continued by his son, Constantine V Copronymus (741-775), and by his grandson, Leo IV the Khazar (775-780). In 787, the 7th Ecumenical Council was convoked, during the reign of the Emperor Constantine VI (780-797) and his mother Irene (797-802), under the presidency of **St. Tarasius Patriarch of Constantinople**. With this council, the church closed the theme of the veneration, or not, of the Holy Icons, accepting that we venerate the person depicted in the Icon and not the actual material of the icon.

After a short period of peace – during the reign of the Orthodox Emperors Nicephorus (802-811), Stauracius (811), and Michael I Rangabe (811-813), – the heretic Emperor Leo V the Armenian (813-820) restored the Iconoclastic heresy. The same policy was followed by the next Emperors, Michael II (820-829) and Theophilus (829-842).

In 842, Theophilus died and his wife, the **Holy Empress Theodora**, restored the Orthodox Faith in the Holy Icons and **St. Methodius** was elected as Patriarch of Constantinople. The Restoration of the Holy Icons took place in the Byzantine Capital on the First Sunday of Great Lent in the year 842, in the presence of many Confessors of Orthodoxy, such as Sts. Joannicius the Great, Arsacius and **Naucratius, Theophanes and Theodore the Branded**, and others.

About the spiritual meaning of the first week of the Great Lent, St. John of Kronstadt writes: *“I congratulate myself and many of you, on the ineffable mercy of God, on the spiritual renewal received through the struggle of preparation, prayer, fasting and repentance, especially through partaking of the most pure and life-creating Mysteries of the Body and Blood of the Lord. In this short time we were able to ascertain in ourselves the benefit of fasting and prayer, not to mention the benefit of preparation, confession and communion – it goes without saying, we sincerely used this time for our salvation and sincerely fulfilled the conditions of fasting and preparation for communion; if we refrained from excess of food and drink, sincerely prayed, humbled ourselves before God and our neighbors, if we were merciful, if we recognized the multitude of our iniquities and transgressions and deeply regretted them, having a firm intention not to repeat them, and finally, sincerely acknowledged them and received absolution and remission of them, and were vouchsafed to taste the lift-creating Food.*

But have we all received actual benefit from the past week? Have our hearts become closer to God, to the most pure Mother of Life, to the Church, to our Holy Guardian Angel and to the Saints of God?”

**Through the prayers of Thy Holy Confessors,
O Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on us!
Amen.**