

Today is the Sunday on which we celebrate the victory of Orthodoxy. The immediate reason for this lies in a distant past, the 9th century, when the worship of icons was finally allowed. With the death of the emperor Theophilus, his wife was able to allow the veneration of icons, and this happened with a great feast and procession of icons on the first Sunday of Great Lent. A special detail about this event is that the emperor was not aware that his wife secretly worshiped icons against his will and also secretly raised their children, 5 girls and 1 boy, in the Orthodox Faith. On Mount Athos is still her icon of the Mother God. This is an icon on one side, a mirror on the other side. When her husband was in the room there was a mirror, when he was gone there was an icon and she could say her prayers before that icon. That is an important detail for us, because this day may be called "The Triumph of Orthodoxy", which will always exist, but it is a spiritual triumph and it is very possible that at some point we will have to pretend again. Because it clashes with the values of the godless society.

Back to the Feast. Icon worship is so important because it brings us back to something very essential; the fact that Christ is fully God and fully man, that God, the invisible, unknowable, unattainable God, has taken on a body, has been given a face in Jesus Christ and we can make an image of that face. In Christ we see God. The disciples asked Jesus; Show us the Father! And Christ answered; "How long have I been with You and You ask me; "Show us the Father?" The Old Testament talks about a prohibition to make pictures and that was because God had not yet appeared on earth but now He has and we make pictures of Him. That was pretty much the reasoning of the 7th Ecumenical Council, convened by Empress Theodora. It was not only about the icon worship but also about the worship of the Holy Relics because with His descent from heaven to earth His Grace is also on earth, in the earthly, in the material, like the relics, but also in the Holy Oil, and the bread and wine which becomes the holy Body and Blood of Christ. This day is the basis of sacraments, the mysteries, in which something material, bread, wine, oil, becomes something sacred.

Christ-God has assumed a physical body and through this we also get to know God in the physical. We get to know the physical through our senses. And in Orthodoxy we use all our senses to approach God; through everything we see, hear, smell, feel, taste in church, we can experience Christ.

On this day it is also confirmed that we worship God with our bodies. We kiss the icons, we make prostrations, we sing and we speak the Scriptures; all that is physical and the Christian way of approaching God.

The triumph of Orthodoxy further takes place within ourselves. We have fasted, we have been hungry, perhaps very slightly, we have not given in to the urge to fulfill our passions, and every moment when that happens, is a victory of orthodoxy, of true Christian faith. Because every moment we say no and suffer that little bit, because of Christ, we are reminded again of God and why we are doing this and that is a triumph, a victory. Not a victory over anyone else but the victory over ourselves, over our impulses, over our passions.

In today's Gospel reading we see Nathanael who, when Philip says that he has found the Messiah, answers: See first, then believe. And then when he sees and hears Christ, he knows it; this is God in the Flesh, the Savior he so longed for and he follows Him. That is why this gospel reading fits so well with the Triumph of Orthodoxy. We celebrate that God is with us as a human being , that He knows what human existence entails and that by following Him, we ourselves can be one with Him.