

Fr Lawrence continued

One can treat the Fathers like this too. In this non-historical reading of the Fathers, one seeks and finds total unanimity among the Fathers in everything because, it is asserted, the Fathers were completely inspired by God. Here the Fathers are almost superhuman Spirit-bearers, and their authority resides in their individual sanctity. It is thought inconceivable that one could dwell so close to God and yet make theological mistakes. So, since all the Fathers walked with God in this way, the teaching of each Father must be completely correct in all details and must therefore agree with all the other Fathers in all details.

This approach to the Fathers is disturbed when discovering that the Fathers had weaknesses as well as virtues. I remember, for example, one such hagiographical approach to the famous conflict between Saint John Chrysostom and Saint Epiphanius, who clearly had little time for each other. One story, anecdotal but accurately expressing the mutual rancor, reported that when Epiphanius left Constantinople for his native Cyprus, he sent John a message saying, “I hope you will no longer be a bishop when you die,” to which John responded, “And I hope you will not set foot in your city again.” Ouch! How could two holy bishops and Spirit-bearing saints become so exasperated that they traded such barbs? Therefore one hagiographical account presents them not as trading barbs but prophecies: “Chrysostom wrote Epiphanius a letter: ‘My brother Epiphanius, I hear that you have advised the Emperor that I should be banished. Know that you will never again see your episcopal throne.’ To this Epiphanius wrote in return, ‘John, my suffering brother, withstand insults, but know that you will not reach the place to which you are exiled.’ And these two prophecies of the two saints soon came about.” Such holiness! Such untroubled harmony! Here history with all its gray shading, complexity, and variety gives way to fundamentalist ideology. A better approach would be to recognize that both saints had their gifts which enriched the Church, as well as their weaknesses, and that they were canonized because of the gifts. Finding a consensus among the Fathers does not involve sandpapering away all their differences.

So then what does it involve? In a word, the recognition that the Fathers share a tremendous amount of doctrine and practice, and this was the result of them having received it from the apostles before them. The amount of agreement shared, though general, is wide, and the diversity of patristic temperament and geography makes this large area of agreement all the more impressive.

We see this same reference to the Fathers as authoritative in some of the decrees of the Ecumenical Councils.

Thus the Second Council of Constantinople in 553 acknowledged, “We further declare that we hold fast to the decrees of the four Councils, and in every way follow the holy Fathers, Athanasius, Hilary, Basil, Gregory the Theologian, Gregory of Nyssa, Ambrose, Theophilus, John [Chrysostom] of Constantinople, Cyril, Augustine, Proclus, Leo...” Thus too the Second Council of Nicea in 787 regarding the use of icons proclaimed, “Thus the teaching of our holy Fathers, that is the tradition of the Catholic Church, which is from one end of the earth to the other... Thus we follow Paul who spoke in Christ, and the whole divine apostolic company, and the holy Fathers, holding fast the traditions which we have received.” In these citations we also see that the Fathers were viewed in antiquity as an identifiable and authoritative source of orthodoxy, and that one could appeal to their teaching.

Moreover this consensus came to include new questions that arose as well—things such as the legitimacy of Christian involvement in the State and in military service, the divinity of Christ, and the legitimacy of icons. The Church believes that ultimately it is guided by the Holy Spirit so that when it reaches a settled consensus and the majority of its members eventually agree about a considered controversial opinion, this represents the guidance of God. One here stresses the word “eventually,” for it took time before a consensus finally emerged, and a majority of the faithful reached agreement. The process was all lengthier and messier than the Emperor usually wanted. But ultimately we believe that the Church as a whole was guided to the truth, as Christ promised in John 16:13. If this were not so, how then could one be sure that the Church was right about anything and that (for example) the Arians were not correct after all?

A belief in the reliability of the Church’s received doctrine as the pillar and bulwark of the truth (1 Timothy 3:15) is the foundation for a belief in the consensus of the Fathers, for we access the former through the latter. God may indeed guide all the Christians so that it is the *consensus fidelium* that really counts. But most of the faithful live and die without leaving written records; their consensus therefore lives in the consensus of those who *did* leave written records—namely the Fathers. Through the broad agreement which the Fathers share we can discern the faith of the Church. To do otherwise is to cast any ultimate certainty to the wind. In the absence of a patristic lens for reading the Scripture we Orthodox are left at the mercy of the loudest voices—either the voice of the latest popular author writing the latest best-seller, or perhaps the voice of the scholar whose theories happen to be currently ascendant in the academic world. But all such popularity fades, as best-sellers are relegated to the dusty shelves of second-hand bookshops, and as one academic theory succeeds another. Contemporary popularity is thus a very poor lens through which to read the Scriptures. So, if we Orthodox reject the consensus of the Fathers, when someone asks us the question, “How can you be sure what the Bible teaches?” we are reduced to answering, “Actually, when it comes right down to it, we haven’t a clue.”

Third Anniversary of Metropolitan Tikhon's Enthronement

Exactly three years ago today—January 27, 2013—His Beatitude, Metropolitan Tikhon was [enthroned at Saint Nicholas Cathedral](#) in Washington, DC as Archbishop of Washington, Metropolitan of All America and Canada.

On behalf of the Holy Synod of Bishops, the clergy, monastics and faithful of the Orthodox Church in America we pray that our Lord will grant him peace, safety, honor, health and length of days “rightly dividing” the word of God’s truth. Axios! Eis polla eti despota! God grant you many years!

Among the greetings received by Metropolitan Tikhon was the following.

GREETINGS OF HIS HOLINESS, PATRIARCH KIRILL OF MOSCOW AND ALL RUSSIA

His Beatitude Tikhon
Archbishop of Washington
Metropolitan of All America and Canada

Your Beatitude, Beloved in the Lord Brother and Con-celebrant,

Please accept my heartfelt greetings with the anniversary of your enthronement.

In your lofty ministry of Primate of the Orthodox Church in America, you strive to be for your flock an example of a worthy servant in the vineyard of Christ, “a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15).

May the All-Bountiful Lord keep you in good health and grant you His abundant help in your Primateal ministry for the benefit of the Mother Church.

With brotherly love in Christ,
+ Kirill
Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia



*Southern NJ Barrier Islands
Wildwood, Ocean City, Stone Harbor
Flooding & Beach erosion post 01/23/16
snowstorm*



St. Panteliemon Orthodox Church

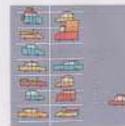
Due to renovations at St. Panteliemon, the meal will be held in the Hall at
St Blasé Catholic Church, 75th Avenue & 61st Place, Summit



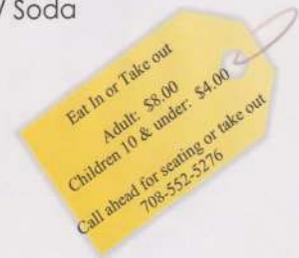
*Wednesday
February 10, 2016*

*11:00 am to 2:00 pm
&
4:00 pm to 8:00 pm*

Fish Fry, Coleslaw, Fries
Coffee / Soda



Parking available in the rear of the church.
Street parking also available.



Thank you St Blasé Catholic Church for allowing us to use your Hall!

GREAT ATTENDANCE AT OUR STUDY GROUPS

Bible Study Group
(1st & 3rd Tuesdays)
All are welcomed!

Proto Deacon Bob
Mat Susan
Marcia & John G
Mark & Helen H
Nick C
Steve N
Duke & Carol J

Orthodoxy 101 Group
(Last Tuesday of month)
ALL ARE WELCOME!

Proto deacon Bob
Nick C
Steve N
Duke & Carol J
Mark & Helen H
Lynn L
Liz W
Joey & Pavlinka
Sam (Village Trustee)