

Homily on Luke 8:5-15 and 2 Corinthians 6:16-7:1

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

The Bible warns us not to follow the ways of the world, its false ideas and practices. And since people want to go to Heaven, they protect themselves by abstaining from various earthly things. The Amish are famous for avoiding TV's, radios, cars, the mind behind technology. But others interpret it differently, so they only avoid the pop-culture. And there are other ways to do this. One way comes from a fear of possibly worshipping idols, so some Christians will not allow icons and candles and rituals in churches, not even liturgies, altars, incense. They fear that such things will cause people to worship man-made idols as false gods, not worshipping God alone.

Today we celebrate the 7th Ecumenical Council in 787, which revealed what the difference is between an idol and an icon, between worshipping gods in images and honoring saints in images. This dispute came from a new movement with Muslim influence, where people wondered if praying with icons was worshipping the actual images of Christ and saints. Then some emperors banned icons in all churches, which many people refused to obey, causing a persecution for 2-3 generations.

The Bible tells us two things. Moses was told by God not to use idols, but then God told Moses to use icons for prayer at the holy of holies, the ark of the covenant, as well as writing Scriptures, whose book, pages and letter-symbols are images of the Holy Spirit. So the Bible seems to give 2 conflicting messages or does it seem like a contradiction because of our confusion? The fathers of the 7th Ecumenical Council studied how to answer this question, finally declaring that icons are not idols and that there is a difference between honoring images and worshipping images.

It is also a matter of perspective. The Resurrection of Christ did not end the need for icons; it enhanced the need for icons. Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man, so that Heaven and earth are unified in the risen Body of Christ. The power of death no longer prevails; the darkness is passing away, St. John says in Scripture. All things of the Church are unified by Christ's divinity energizing His humanity and energizing the new creation, with Himself as the New Adam. Our baptized flesh is now trustworthy because God became man, destroying death by His Death, so that all are alive to God. Now, the rituals of Liturgy, Eucharist, icons, candles, incense, water, sacraments and all blessed objects help us to participate in the future Kingdom of God right now. This is why St. Paul in today's epistle made the comparison of Christians as the temple of God and unbelievers as idols. This follows Moses, who speaks of Adam and Eve as walking icons, being in the image and likeness of God, just as he speaks of Jesus Christ as the walking icon-image of God the Father.

In this perspective, we do not need fewer icons to save us from the false ways of the world; we need more icons to save us from bad earthly influences. So while people worry about icons, words or religious materiality, the 7th Ecumenical Council heard the Holy Spirit say that icons are not idols and false worship. God made all things good and the risen Jesus is still in the Church, so physical things are not always suspicious. God has come down to us, not for more barriers, but to bring Heaven closer. So we have 2 perspectives on images: the barrier or unity. The 7th Ecumenical Council taught that icons are unifying, not a strict wall of separation. So we can pray with icons, not because they can be gods, but because Christ is lifting us to His heavenly ways with the angels and saints; and that is how Christ will return.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Christ is among us!