



ASSEMBLY OF CANONICAL
ORTHODOX BISHOPS
OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Sunday of Orthodoxy 2025

Encyclical

Dearly beloved faithful in Christ,

Each year on the first Sunday of Great Lent, the Sunday of Orthodoxy, we lift our voices and our hearts in joyful remembrance of the restoration of the holy icons to their rightful place in the life of the Church. Today, we celebrate triumphally and with humility the resulting Unity of the Orthodox Church manifested through this decision of the 7th Ecumenical Council that met in Nicaea in 787, under the aegis of Byzantine Empress Irene and, subsequently, the definitive Restoration of Holy Icons in Constantinople on the First Sunday of Great and Holy Lent in 843, henceforth known as Orthodoxy Sunday, under the patronage of the Byzantine Regent, Saint Theodora, and, the Ecumenical Patriarch, Saint Methodios the Confessor. Now, here in the United States of America, the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops is tasked with preserving, manifesting, and promoting this same mystery of Unity exemplified and confessed with courage by the Saints so long ago. Thus, inspired by the same sense of joy, witness and responsibility “Assembly of Bishops Sunday” is now recognized throughout the country in conjunction with the Sunday of Orthodoxy.

In his first letter to the Corinthians, Saint Paul cries out across the ages with a message that still speaks to our hearts today: “I appeal to you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree and that there be no dissensions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment” (1 Corinthians 1:10). This powerful pericope crossed with the example of restoration celebrated on the Sunday of Orthodoxy inspires us to always rise above division and to stand together in the unshakable love of our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ. Indeed, the restoration of the holy icons is the restoration of unity through the victory of faith over fear, of salvation over condemnation, of a God incarnate over an unknown deity. Unity prevails when we all open up our hearts and minds in selfless love, transformed by grace in the mystery of Christ. Just as we venerate icons, we too become icons to one another, united in one body, that is the Church, just as the Saints of the 8th and 9th Centuries chose to stand firm, witnessing God’s glory. Thus, let us be challenged by Saint Paul’s words by being “united in the same mind and the same judgement.” Let us not harden our differences but rather embrace what unites us in Christ.

As we celebrate Assembly of Bishops Sunday – along with the Sunday of Orthodoxy – we encourage you all to learn about the Ministries of the Assembly as well as to support our sincere efforts for Orthodox Christian Unity through the steadfast and generous gifts of your time, talent, and treasure.

With Paternal love in Christ and prayers for a blessed Lenten journey, on the 9th of March, 2025.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "to His Beatitude Elpidophoros".

† ELPIDOPHOROS
Archbishop of America
Chair

and the members of the Executive Committee of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops
of the United States of America