

THE ORTHODOX WEEKLY BULETIN VESTAL, CLIFFWOOD, NEW JERSEY

SUNDAY OF ORTHODOXY

“WE VENERATE YOUR MOST-PURE IMAGE, O GOD ONE”

Can you image walking into an Orthodox Church and NOT seeing any icons adorning the edifice? Can you visualize being told that icons could NOT be displayed in your own home? Indeed, there was a period in Church History when these preporsterous suppositions were realities!

During the reign of Emperor Leo III (717 A.D. – 741 A.D.), the veneration of icons was deemed to be IDOLATRY. All such sacred images were ordered to be destroyed, and their defenders cast into prison. A bloody struggle broke out over this edict, and for over a century, the dispute raged, with both factions gaining control at various times. Finally, the iconoclasts were decisively defeated in 842 A.D. Through the efforts of the Empress Theodora and Patriarch Methodius I, the use and veneration of icons was restored. The day this blessed victory took place was the first Sunday of Lent, providing the basis for our annual liturgical celebration and procession with holy icons. We refer to this day as the SUNDAY OF ORTHODOXY, reminding us that the focal point of our celebration is the triumph of a TRUTH and DOGMA of the undivided Church.

One of the hymns form Matins on the first Sunday of Great Lent beautifully captures the spirit of the church’s position on holy icons: “Preserving the ancestral laws of the church, we depict images of Christ, His blessed mother and the saints. As we venerate them with our lips, we cry out from the depths of our hearts: Bless, O Lord, all the works of Your hands.”