



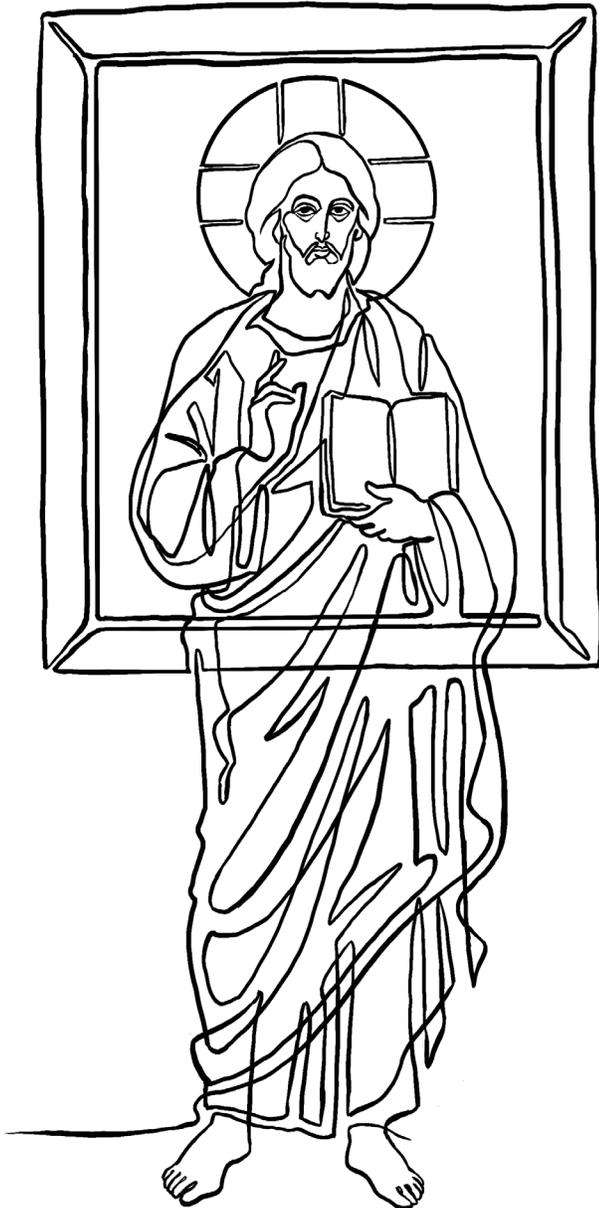
DIAKONIA

A National Ministry of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America

REFLECTIONS FROM TODAY'S READING - *John 1:43-51*

“Come and See!”

Fr. George Parsenios



Today's Gospel reading focuses our attention on the sense of sight. Words related to “seeing” occur seven times in this brief passage, in keeping with how the Gospel of John more generally emphasizes the five senses. It is in the Gospel of John that the sheep *hear* the voice of their Good Shepherd (John 10:3). People marvel at the *taste* of the water that Jesus turned to wine (John 2:9). Thomas “the Doubter” is told to *touch* the wounds of Jesus (20:25). And when Jesus is anointed, the *smell* of scented oil fills the house (12:3). Seeing. Hearing. Taste. Touch. Smell. The paradox of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is that the invisible, immaterial God has become visible, material flesh, and John refers so often to the five senses in order to stress that Jesus has made God accessible to human senses. Today's Gospel reading is perfectly chosen for the Sunday of Orthodoxy, the day we proclaim and defend the importance of icons for the Orthodox faith. When the validity of icons was challenged in the 8th and 9th centuries, the defenders of icons argued that removing the material image of Christ in icons was equivalent to denying the material appearance of Christ in the flesh. Christ is accessible to our senses in icons to underscore and defend our belief that he became accessible to the senses when he dwelt on earth with the apostles. As we celebrate this great mystery on the Sunday of Orthodoxy, therefore, the words of today's Gospel are addressed to each of us individually: “Come and see!”

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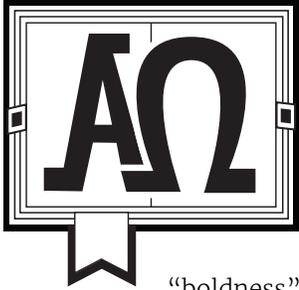
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FROM THE ORIGINAL GREEK: *Parresia* (Παρρησία) What is “Boldness?”

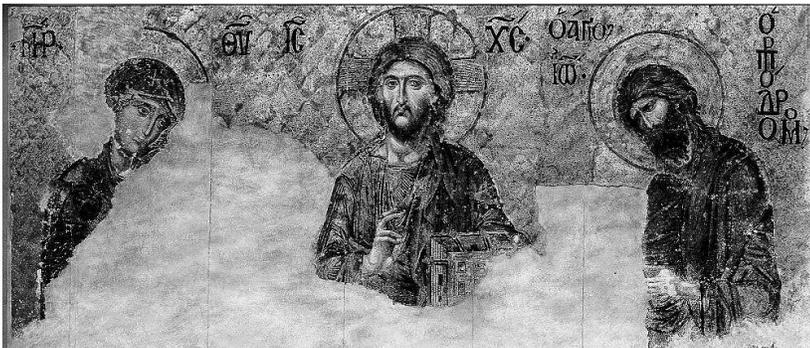
Fr. George Parsenios



In every Divine Liturgy, prior to reciting the Lord’s Prayer, the priest asks that the congregation be granted to speak this prayer “with boldness and without fear of condemnation.” What is “boldness,” and why does it matter? The term “boldness” translates the Greek word *παρρησία/parresia*, which is a compound noun consisting of *pas* “all, every” and *resis* “statement, utterance.” To possess *parresia* is to “say everything,” which was a political virtue in the ancient cities,

especially Athens. Athenian citizens were asked to speak freely in their public assemblies and on juries without restraint and with no fear of punishment or reprisal. Philosophers also relied on *parresia* to admonish their disciples without holding back difficult truths. In this spirit, 1 John urges Christians to live in virtue and truth, in order to have precisely this same boldness before the Father and not shrink from God’s presence (2:28). Our faith should make us humble, but our humility should not be timid. We must be bold and unashamed in our Christian faith. A life of faithful, disciplined devotion will banish all timidity from our hearts so that we can pray the Lord’s Prayer with boldness and without fear of condemnation.

THIS WEEK’S LOOK AT CHURCH HISTORY Restoration of Holy Icons



The Sunday of Orthodoxy, observed on the first Sunday of Great Lent, commemorates the restoration of holy icons on March 11, 843. This ended more than a century of controversy, and firmly re established the place of icons in Orthodox worship.

The groundwork for this victory was laid by the Seventh Ecumenical Council, convened in Nicaea in 787 by Empress Irene at the request of Patriarch Tarasios of

Constantinople. The Council, attended by 367 bishops, addressed the misuse of icons by those who treated them with near idolatrous reverence, and the reaction that sought to remove them entirely from the Church. Those who defended the icons saw them as expressions of divine truth, bearers of beauty, and essential witnesses to Orthodox doctrine.

The Council affirmed that icons are to be venerated—not worshipped. Veneration directed toward an icon passes to the one depicted, while worship belongs to God alone. In 843, a synod in Constantinople under Empress Theodora formally restored icons at the great church of Agia Sophia, an event now celebrated each year on the Sunday of Orthodoxy.

PHOTO: Painted copy of Deesis Mosaic in Agia Sophia. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

SUNDAY OF ORTHODOXY

Faith That Stands Firm

Eva Konstantakos



The first Sunday of Great Lent celebrates the triumph of truth—the restoration of holy icons and the affirmation that Christ truly became human for our salvation. Icons are not mere art; they proclaim the reality of God’s presence among us. As St. John of Damascus wrote, *“I do not worship matter, but I worship the Creator of matter who became matter for my sake.”*

This day reminds us that faith is not abstract; it is lived and expressed in real life. Icons teach us that God entered history, took on flesh, and dwells among His people. In a world that often questions or dismisses faith, this Sunday calls us to stand firm—not by arguing, but by living authentically. As Scripture says, *“Be watchful, stand firm in your faith, be courageous, be strong”* (1 Corinthians 16:13, RSV).

Lent is a time to rediscover what we believe and why it matters. Faith is shown in choices, relationships, and the way we treat others.



Personal Challenge:

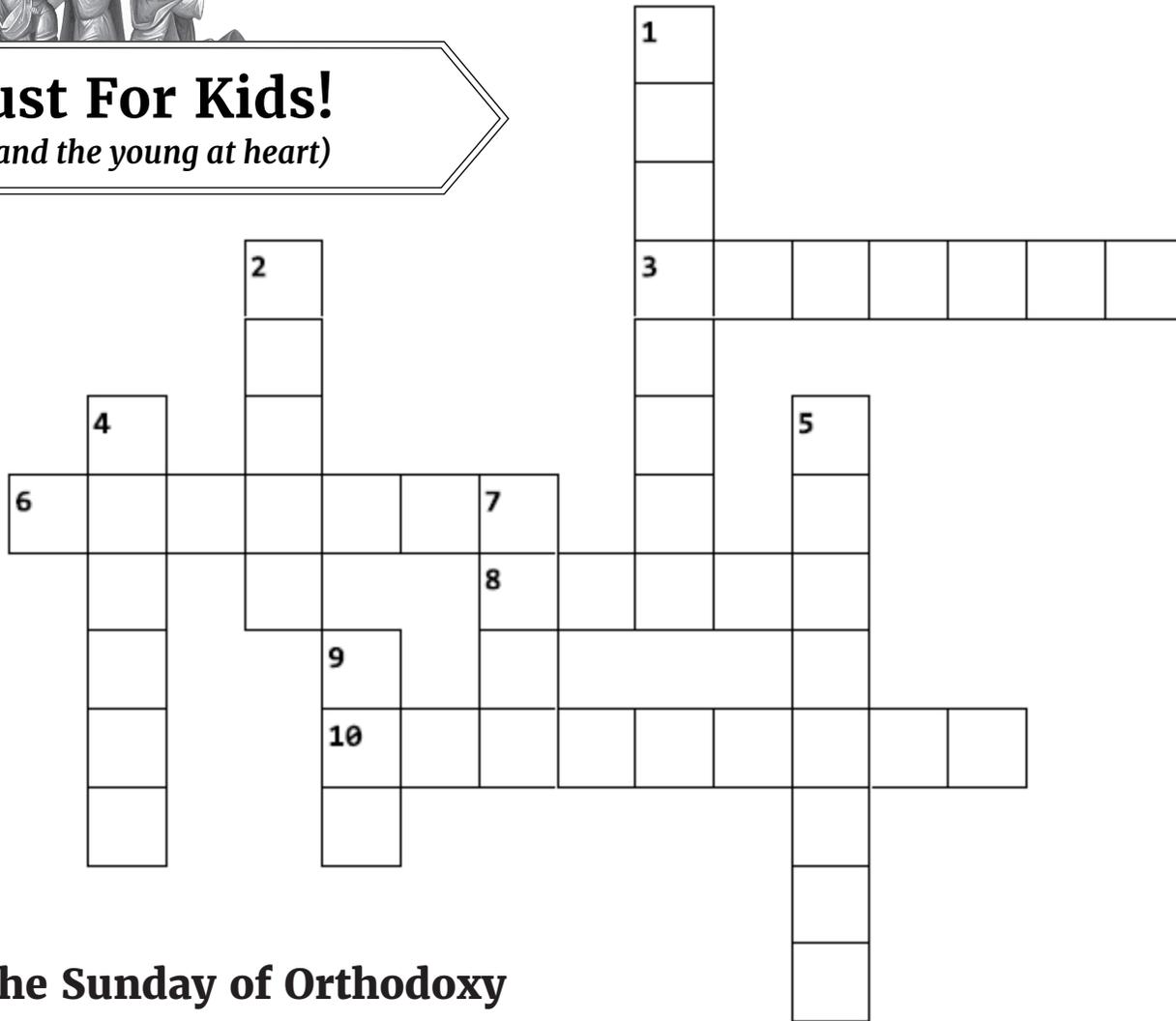
Place an icon in a visible spot – in your room, on your desk, in your locker, in your car, or even as the background on your phone/tablet. Let it remind you daily to pray—even briefly—and to live with integrity, reflecting Christ in all you do.

Father Thomas FitzGerald on *The Icons*

The icon is not simply decorative, inspirational, or educational. Most importantly, it signifies the presence of the person depicted. The icon is like a window linking heaven and earth. When we worship, we do so as part of the Church which includes the living and the departed. We never lose contact with those who are with the Lord in glory. This belief is expressed every time one venerates an icon or places a candle before it. Orthodox churches have icons not only on the iconostasis but also on the walls, ceilings, and in arches. Above the sanctuary in the apse, there is very frequently a large icon of Mary, the Theotokos and the Christ Child. The Orthodox Church believes that Mary is the human person closest to God. This very prominent icon recalls her important role in the Incarnation of Jesus Christ.



Just For Kids!
 (...and the young at heart)



The Sunday of Orthodoxy

The Sunday of **Orthodoxy** is celebrated on the first Sunday of **Great Lent**, when we remember an important **event** that happened on March 11, 843. On that day, holy **icons** were brought back into the Church after many years of people arguing about whether they should be used. This day reminds us that icons have an important place in **Orthodox** worship. Earlier, in 787, a big meeting called the Seventh Ecumenical **Council** took place in Nicaea. **Empress Irene** and Patriarch Tarasios brought together 367 bishops to talk about icons. The Council explained that we **venerate** icons, which means we show respect to the person shown in the icon—not to the wood or paint. Only **God** is worshipped. Finally, in 843, Empress Theodora held another meeting in Constantinople and restored icons to the great church of Agia **Sophia**. We celebrate this every year on the Sunday of Orthodoxy.

ACROSS

- 3. Irene was an _____.
- 6. 367 Bishops met in an Ecumenical _____.
- 8. This is a very important _____.
- 10. This is the Sunday of _____.

DOWN

- 1. We don't worship icons. We _____ them.
- 2. We celebrate _____ in the church.
- 4. The great church in Constantinople (Istanbul) is the Church of Saint (Agia) _____.
- 5. Icons have an important place in _____ worship.
- 7. This is the first Sunday of Great _____.
- 9. Only _____ is worshipped.