In the Name of the Father and of the Son and Of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

O Heavenly King the Comforter, the Spirit of Truth, who are in all places and fill all things, treasurer of blessings and giver of life. Come and dwell within us and cleanse us from every blemish and save our souls, O Blessed One.

For the next hour, I will speak on Tonight’s topic, Church History. In the coming weeks, as is indicated on the course syllabus that gave out last week, we will also cover following aspects of the faith: Church History, Holy Tradition, Doctrine and Dogma, Prayer, Ethics and Morality and Living the Faith – the Christian Vocation. Each week we will begin with a brief summary of what was covered in the previous weeks lesson and then go on to the scheduled topic.

If you recall, last week I began with a brief overview of the Orthodox Faith, explaining the origin of the word. Orthodox. The word Orthodox literally means right teaching or right worship and is derived from two greek words orthos (right or correct) doxa (teaching or worship) As I said last week, Orthodox Christianity
is not best described as a religion, but rather as a “way of life” which moves on the pathway of prayer. Everything we “do” for a lack of a better word in Orthodoxy is rooted in prayer and worship. We do not merely talk about theology, we pray it and live it. The Orthodox faith is useless, that’s right it is useless unless it is lived, Orthodoxy without ortho-praxis is sterile and barren and can bear no fruit. So approaching a study of Orthodoxy in a merely academic manner does not fit, it does not work. This is not to say that we can’t or should not learn about it, learn about its history, practices and traditions, for indeed God gives us a mind and intelligence for a reason. However, in the words of the fathers of the Church, our mind must descend into our heart. This means our intellect must be illumined by our hearts. Reason and experience compliment one another, provided both are illuminated by the Holy Spirit. It is for this reason that we began our session this evening in prayer, invoking the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

It is with this understanding in mind, that I feel emboldened to speak to you this evening about the History of the Church, praying that through our presentation you will gain a greater appreciation of how the Holy Spirit has protected and guided the Church throughout the centuries, through the stormy seas of life, and the wiles of the Evil One, so that it could pass down to you and I, the unaltered teachings of Christ and the apostolic faith.
Last week I shared with you the big picture, that is the History of Salvation, from Creation, and the Fall of Mankind, to the time of preparation for the coming of the Messiah, Christ, the age of the Prophets, the incarnation or taking on of Flesh of Christ, His birth, teaching ministry and redemptive death, the founding of the Church, the age of the Church which you and I are now a part of, and the age of the Kingdom to Come at the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. I encouraged you to commit this sketch to memory as it will serve as a foundation or filing system into which you can organize the vast amount of knowledge you will attain or may already have about the Orthodox Faith.

Last week we covered in a very limited manner Holy Scripture, the Old and New testament, by speaking about the History of Salvation. One thing I must say in closing on this topic, that we need to remember that the Bible is a book of the Church, it is a verbal icon of the life and teachings of Christ and the Early Church. Nothing we do or teach in the Church stands in opposition to Sacred Scripture, but as The Apostle John ends his Gospel, “there are also many thing which Jesus did; were everyone of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. “ (John 21:25) The Canon of Sacred Scripture was approved by the Church, that is the Church decided which books were to be placed in the bible. The Canon of Scripture was mostly decided by the 6th century, however the definitive canon of scripture was not officially
proclaimed until the sixth ecumenical council in Constantinople in the year 681. Scripture was first orally preserved, then written. We do not interpret scripture by our own personal understandings, but seek to read it in the mind of the Church and we have many commentaries that are written by the Saints that explain the meaning of Scripture, and in the case of the New Testament, The Orthodox Study Bible has many explanatory footnotes quoting from the Saints and theologians. You can purchase it on-line at our diocesan online store orthodoxgoods.com

I ask you this evening to fasten your seatbelts, because we are about to cover 21 centuries of Church history in less than an hour. I will probably speak fast because there is a lot to cover and I am not ashamed to say I am truly excited about this information and that I have the opportunity to speak to so many of you.

Please keep in mind that what I will be presenting to you this evening is obviously a vast oversimplification of a very complex topic. It is intended to serve merely as an overview, to give you a sense of the origins and development of the Church. In particular I will discuss the following eras:

1. The Age of the Apostles

2. The Age of Persecution
3. The Age of the Ecumenical Councils

4. The time of the Great Schism

5. The Age of the New Persecution

6. The 20th-21st Centuries

As we study tonight Church History, please keep in mind that our purpose is to gain a better understanding of the origins and development of the Church over the centuries. Most importantly, we study it to gain an appreciation for the ways God has and continues to reveal Himself to us in our daily lives, as we journey towards the Kingdom of Heaven. It goes without saying that not everything that has occurred in history has been in accordance with God’s will, however, it is certainly true that throughout all of history, we can unequivocally proclaim as did the prophet Isaiah, God is with us. By studying and becoming aware of the errors and failings of men we can learn from it and hopefully avoid making similar mistakes ourselves.

1. The Age of the Apostles.
At the time of the Death and Resurrection of our Lord in 33 AD and specifically on the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came down upon the Disciples and Apostles, in the upper room in Jerusalem the New Testament Church was born. Filled with the Holy Spirit the Apostles fearlessly preached the gospel to the ends of the earth. On the day of Pentecost, the Apostle Peter gave such an inspired Sermon that 3000 people asked to be baptized. This first community of Christians, headed by St. James, the Brother of the Lord and the first Bishop of the city was later scattered by the persecutions which followed the stoning of the first martyr of the Christian Church, St. Stephen: And on that day a great persecution arose against the church in Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the region of Judea and Samaria, except the Apostles (Acts 8:1).

The Apostle Peter traveled to Antioch and Rome, the Apostle Andrew to Constantinople, Europe and the Slavic Lands (Our Patriarch Bartholomew is the 270th Successor to The Apostle Andrew) James to Jerusalem and Thomas to India amongst the others. St. Paul the former persecutor of Christians did much to spread Christianity beyond the Jewish people to the gentiles. The works and exploits of the Apostles are contained in the Book of The Acts of The Apostle which is contained in the New Testament. I encourage you to read the book of Acts it is specifically prescribed to be read from the Feast of Pascha (Easter) through Pentecost.
2. The Age of Persecution

The first three centuries of the Church were characterized by sporadic, but bloody, persecutions. Church tradition is full of the lives of these early martyrs for the faith, and one cannot but admire the courage and perseverance of these heroes who willingly gave up their lives rather than denounce Christ. Among these were Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, burned at the stake when over eighty years old, Justin the Martyr, and Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage, as well as many other men and women martyrs, who are commemorated in the Church Calendar. They are heroes that you and I need to emulate. It is a shame that we find it hard today to sacrifice our own personal time, to build up and serve the church, and to serve our Lord. These persecutions, while often short lived, kept the Christians on guard as they knew at any time the threat of persecution was always there. The calling of Martyrdom, the giving of ones life for the Church and Christ was very real to them and a part of their spirituality as they worshiped in secret, often underground in the catacombs or the tombs.

In the year 312, the a great event took place in the life of Emperor of Byzantium, Constantine the Great, where he was saved from certain death after placing the image of the Cross on armament. He did this after seeing a vision in the sign of the Cross and surrounding it these, words, by this sign you shall conquer. This led in
313, to the issuing of the Edict of Milan, which proclaimed the official toleration of the Christian faith. Fifty years later, the Emperor Theodosius carried this policy even further when he established that Christianity was the only accepted religion of the Empire, and outlawed paganism.

In 324, Constantine moved his imperial capital from Rome to Byzantium, on the shores of the Bosporus, where he built a new capital, Constantinople (dedicated in 330). From here, in 325, he called in the City of Nicea what was to be the first of the Seven Ecumenical Councils.

3. Age of The Seven Ecumenical Councils

The Orthodox Church has always upheld that the deciding of matters of church teachings, and disciplinary importance must be done in council with all of the Bishops and Hierarchs of the Church, who represented the faithful under their flocks. This is based on what I mentioned last week – the council of Jerusalem, where the apostles met to decide on how to receive gentiles into the Christian Faith. After prayer and deliberation, they were moved to say that the decision was “good to us and to the Holy Spirit.” This vision of conciliarity, where the Bishop of Jerusalem, the eldest brother, presided over the council but did not dictate its decision, is basis for decision making in the Church.
From the fourth to the eighth centuries, seven councils were called by the Byzantine Emperor to decide matters of importance in the Church, as there were divisions within the Church due to false teachings that were being introduced. These councils performed two basic tasks: 1) They formulated the visible, ecclesiastical organization of the Church, setting the ranking of the Five Patriarchates or centers of Christianity; and 2) they defined, once and for all, the teachings of the Church on faith, formulating the basic dogmas concerning the Trinity and the Incarnation or taking on of Flesh by Christ.

These councils were not unilaterally proclaimed ecumenical or universal until after their decision stood the test of time, and were ratified at future councils.

The following are the dates and places of the Councils.


Of course time will not permit me to go into great detail regarding what took place at each of them, however, I will give you a brief synopsis of each which I have adapted from a wonderful resource that gives a nice overview of the Orthodoxy Faith, entitled *These Truths We Hold, compiled by a monk of St. Tikhon’s Monastery*. You can order a copy from St. Tikhon’s Monastery Bookstore.
1. Nicea I (325).

This Council condemned the heresy of Arianism, which had contended that the Son was inferior to the Father and was, in fact, created. The Fathers here declared that the Son is one in essence (homoousios) with the Father, and formulated the first part of what eventually became the Creed the Symbol of Faith. In addition, three great Sees were singled out Rome, Alexandria and Antioch (Canon 6), and the See of Jerusalem, although still subject to the Metropolitan of Caesarea, was given the next place in honor after Antioch (Canon 7).

2. Constantinople I (381).

This Council expanded the Nicene Creed, developing the teachings concerning the Holy Spirit, who proceeds from the Father; Who, with the Father and Son, is worshipped and glorified..., against the heresy of the Pneumatomachi (Spiritsmashers) and the Macedonians (followers of Macedonius), who could not accept the Third Person of the Trinity as equal to the other Two. It was in this period that we see the activities of the great Cappadocian Fathers, St. Gregory Nazianzus (the Theologian), St. Basil the Great and St. Gregory of Nyssa, as well as the great Alexandrian Father, St. Athanasius the Great. The First Council of Constantinople also decreed that Constantinople, the new capital, should hold the next place of honor after Rome, since it was now the New Rome (Canon 111).
3. Ephesus (431).

This Council met to discuss the heresy of the Nestorians, who could not accept that God and Man had been united in one Person, Christ, refusing to call the Virgin Mary, Theotokos (or Birthgiver of God). Supported primarily by St. Cyril of Alexandria, this Council affirmed that Mary was truly Theotokos, since, as the Evangelist had proclaimed, the Word was made flesh (John 1:14), and the Virgin had borne a single and undivided Person Who is, at the same time, God and Man.


This Council met to discuss the heresy of the Monophysites who held that in Christ the human nature had been merged into the divine, so that there was, after the divine union, only one nature. The Bishops of this Council accepted the so-called Tome of Pope St. Leo the Great of Rome, which affirmed the belief that the one and the same son, perfect in Godhead and perfect in manhood, [is] truly God and truly man...acknowledged in two natures unconfused, unchanged, undivided and inseparable. In addition, the place of Constantinople after that of Rome was confirmed, as was that of Jerusalem in the fifth place of honor.

A tragic result of this Council (and that of Ephesus prior) was the splitting apart from the main body of a large group of Christians adhering to either the Nestorian
or Monophysite view. The Nestorians were found basically in Persia and Mesopotamia, and were especially decimated by the Islamic and Turkish onslaughts, whereas the Monophysites were strong in Africa (Egypt and Ethiopia the present Coptic Church), Armenia, and India (the Jacobite Church).

So you don’t think these decisions are man-made and without the guidance of the Holy Spirit, I would like to share with you a true story, a miracle that occurred at this ecumenical council that confirmed the Truth proclaimed by this Ecumenical Council
In the year 451 in the city of Chalcedon, in the very church where the glorified relics of the holy Great Martyr Euphemia rested, the sessions of the Fourth Ecumenical Council (July 16) took place. The Council was convened for determining the precise dogmatic formulae of the Orthodox Church concerning the nature of the God-Man Jesus Christ.

This was necessary as I said before because of the widespread heresy of the Monophysites ["mono-physis" meaning "one nature"], who opposed the Orthodox teaching of the two natures in Jesus Christ, the Divine and the Human natures (in one Divine Person

After prolonged discussions the two sides could not come to a decisive agreement.

The holy Patriarch Anatolius of Constantinople proposed that the Council submit the decision of the Church dispute to the Holy Spirit, through His undoubted bearer St Euphemia the All-Praised, whose wonderworking relics had been discovered during the Council's discussions. The Orthodox hierarchs and their opponents wrote down their confessions of faith on separate scrolls and sealed them with their seals. They opened the tomb of the holy Great Martyr Euphemia and placed both scrolls upon her bosom. Then, in the presence of the emperor Marcian (450-457), the participants of the Council sealed the tomb, putting on it the imperial seal and setting a guard to watch over it for three days. During these days both sides
imposed upon themselves a strict fast and made intense prayer. After three days the patriarch and the emperor in the presence of the Council opened the tomb with its relics: the scroll with the Orthodox confession was held by St Euphemia in her right hand, and the scroll of the heretics lay at her feet. St Euphemia, as though alive, raised her hand and gave the scroll to the patriarch. After this miracle many of the hesitant accepted the Orthodox confession, while those remaining obstinate in the heresy were consigned to the Council's condemnation and excommunication.

5. Constantinople II (553).

This Council met to further reinterpret the decrees of Chalcedon, seeking to explain how the two natures of Christ unite to form a single person. It affirmed that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is one of the Holy Trinity, one and the same divine Person (hypostasis), Who has united personally (hypostatically) in Himself the two natures of God and Man, without fusing them together and without allowing their separation. Certain teachings of Origen, including his teaching concerning the pre-existence of the soul, among other things, were also expressly condemned.


This Council met to condemn the Monothelite heresy which held that in the union of the two natures in Christ, the human will was merged into the divine as one will,
since the two natures were united into one person. The Council, however, held that if Christ has two natures, he also has two wills human and divine.

7. Nicea II (787).

This Council met to affirm the belief of the Orthodox that veneration of the Holy Icons was proper and necessary for a correct understanding of the Incarnation of Christ, against those who held that Icon-veneration was idolatry and that all Icons should be destroyed (Iconoclasts). This Seventh Council was also the last of the Ecumenical Councils accepted as such by the Orthodox Church, although the possibility does exist that, in principle, more could be convened. The Iconoclast controversy did not end until after another rising of the heretics beginning in 815, which was finally suppressed by the Empress Theodora in 843. This final victory of the Holy Icons in 843 is known as the Triumph of Orthodoxy, and is commemorated on the First Sunday of Great Lent. Thus, with the resolution of the Iconoclast controversy, the Age of the Seven Councils came to an end.

Another major historical event that took place in this period was the rise and rapid spread of Islam, the most striking characteristic of which was the speed of its expansion. And today is no exception especially in the west. Within fifteen years after the death of Mohammed in 632, his followers had captured Syria, Palestine and Egypt, and in fifty years, they were already at the gates of Constantinople.
Within 100 years, they had swept across North Africa and through Spain. The Byzantine Empire lost the Patriarchates of Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem, and until the actual fall of Constantinople in 1453, the Empire was never free from attack. During the early part of the 9th Century, we see the evangelization of the Slavic Peoples by Sts Cyril and Methodios and the Conversion of Prince Vladimir of Kievan Rus.

**4. The Great Schism** - marked one of the most tragic events in the history of Christianity, when the formal split between the Patriarchates of the East – Constantinople, Alexandria, Jerusalem and Antioch, and the Patriarchate of the West – Rome occurred in the year 1054 In this year the Churches of the East and West mutually excommunicated each other. Officially proclaimed at Constantinople in that year by the Papal Legate, Cardinal Humbert, it was, in a sense, the culmination of a process that had been taking place for several centuries, ultimately centering on two major controversies: Papal authority and the Filioque. Orthodox see the Pope as being the first among equals, not as the final authority in the Church on Doctrine and Dogma. The Filioque is the latin word for *and the Son* which was added to the Creed in the section which talks about the Holy Spirit Proceeding from the Father. There were several other issues, too numerous to speak about now and most notably, the differences in Eastern and Western approaches to theology. We know that later, the Roman Church in 1517 had a
further split – when the Protestant Confession was established with the nailing of the 95 theses on the Wittenburg Cathedral by Martin Luther. The schism of 1054, however, was not initially recognized by the entire Christian East and was never healed, even after several attempts were made to do so. Probably the deciding factor in the permanence of the Schism had been the capture and sack of Constantinople by the Latin Crusaders in 1204, which the Orthodox never forgot. However it is important to note that the late Pope John Paul II officially offered an apology for this terrible event in history to His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew a short time before his repose.

5. The Age of the New Persecution

The rise of Islam in 632 saw a massive spread of this faith throughout the Middle East and in Asia Minor Turkey. The state of Kievan Rus fell in 1237 because of the invasion of the Mongols, who ruled until 1480. In 1453, a crucial event occurred in world Orthodoxy, with the Fall of Constantinople to the Turkish Sultan, Mohammed II. The Greek-speaking Churches fell under the heavy yoke of Islam for nearly 500 years. It wasn’t until the Balkan Revolutions of the 19th Century and World War I that this yolk was broken. Of course the Church of Constantinople where our Patriarch Bartholomew resides today is still suppressed - in fact they are not permitted to open a Seminary, nor are non Turkish Citizens
allowed to be Bishops and ultimately the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople. During that time, the defense of Orthodoxy and its perpetuation shifted north to the Slavic Lands where many of the founders of our parish here in Phoenixville and our American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese came from. During this difficult period of time, attempts were made to reunite the Church of the East and West to fight against the great persecutions. However, these attempts, most notably the Council of Florence, exacted too high a price for the Orthodox to pay, instead of being a reunion, based on truth, it would force the Orthodox to recognize the sovereignty of the Pope and compromise on other important theological issues. This time in history was very difficult for the ancestors of the founders of our diocese, who as Orthodox Christians in the year 1640 were forced to become united with the Church of Rome for largely political reasons. The Union of Uzhorod as it was called, guaranteed the rights of our ancestors to keep their religious customs, their liturgy, their right to chose their own priests and bishops, and to have married clergy, as long as they recognized the universal jurisdiction of the Pope. Rome had no intention, as history would bear out, of keeping their end of the agreement and the history of our people has been one of gradual removal of the customs and traditions we had at the time of the Union and their replacement with Latin customs, and the taking away of the right to have married clergy and to nominate candidates for the Episcopacy. For these reasons and especially the
removal of the right in this country for our clergy to marry, in 1937 our diocese was formed under the canonical protection of the Church of Constantinople which our ancestors were united at the time of the Union of Uzhorod.

6. 20th -21st Century Orthodoxy in America.

Orthodox Christianity first came to the United States in the 18th Century through the efforts of the Russian Fur Traders in Alaska. Eventually, Orthodoxy came to the lower 48 states in the San Francisco area near the Fort Ross, trading post. It is reported that prior to this, Greek Orthodox Settlers in New Orleans celebrated the first Orthodox Liturgy in the Nation. In these early years, the late 19th and Early 20th Centuries, the only Orthodox Hierarchy and Diocese was that of the Russian Orthodox Church. After World War I there was a great immigration of peoples from the Slavic Lands, and especially the Rusyn and Ukrainian Peoples. Also there was a great number of immigrants from Greece and the Middle East. At that time, wishing to maintain their own unique ethnic expression of Orthodox Christianity, they sent for their own Bishops and priests, and eventually established their own diocese based on their ethnic backgrounds, and that is why we have the Greek, Carpatho-Rusyn, Ukrainian, Albanian, Romanian, Bulgarian, Serbian, and Antiochian or Syrian Orthodox dioceses in America. Today there is some hope that when we are spiritually mature enough, there will be a natural process of uniting
into a single Orthodox Christian Church here in America. This is not something that will take place, any time soon, I am afraid, but the important part is that we all are in communion with one another, and although having a few cultural and liturgical differences, we are united by our common faith. In our local area, we work together through a clergy organization to provide Pan-orthodox programming, educational conferences, youth activities and joint worship during Great Lent.

We can see from this brief overview, that the Orthodox Church has a rich history, and has much to be grateful to our ancestors in the faith, the Holy Apostles and Fathers of the Church who gave their lives for the faith upholding what we know to be true in Orthodoxy.

Living in a day and age that is in many ways selfish and self-absorbed, it is important that we look to our ancestors in the faith for inspiration and encouragement in being good Christians. In Orthodoxy, we honor and venerate, but do NOT worship Saints, precisely because they have demonstrated through their holy life and great deeds the power of a living faith in Christ Jesus. They stand as a great inspiration to us as examples for us to emulate.

As Orthodox Christians I think that sometimes we take the rich history and the great sacrifices of our ancestors in the faith for granted. If the saints and fathers of
the church and our ancestors did not sacrifice and work hard in more difficult times than we are experiencing now, you and I would not be here today, there would be no Church for us to inherit. You and I are a part of the living History of the Church. A history that is still being written, a history that allows for everyone to be a part of. The doors of the Church and the arms of the faithful of the Orthodox Church are open to all who wish to join us in the Orthodox Way.

Knowing in all humility, the inadequacy of this evening’s presentation, I ask your forgiveness and pray that despite its limitations you received some spiritual profit and will consider studying this in more detail. At the end of this course, I will provide you with a reading list for future study and growth in your knowledge of the Orthodox Faith.

Now I will take your questions if there are any