Good Evening  Let’s now begin with prayer, evoking the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

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.

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

Glory Be to Jesus Christ! Glory Forever!

Last week we discussed Church History. A rather large topic for a relatively short timespan. As I said last week, I apologize for doing a very complex, involved and important topic such as Church History an injustice by breezing through centuries of triumphs and falls in a matter of minutes. However, I did forewarn you that my intent was to only to give you an overview and hit the high points of the major eras of Church History. I spoke at length about the age of the
Ecumenical Councils and attempted to point out some of the major doctrinal challenges that the Church was facing. In doing so, I believe I may have caused confusion regarding some of the heresies or false teachings that led to divisions in the early church, that formed what some may refer to today as the Oriental or Non-Chalcedonian Churches. So before I begin today’s topic, Holy Tradition, I would like to take a few minutes to further explain this.

As I said last week the Fourth Ecumenical Council was called to solve the problem of the doctrine of Christ. This Council was called to clarify the relationship between the humanity and divinity of Christ. This council affirmed that Jesus Christ was indeed both God and Man that He is one person in two natures, human and divine. “He is fully human. He is fully divine. He is perfect God and perfect man. As God, He is "of one essence" (homoousios) with God the Father and the Holy Spirit. As man, He is "of one essence" (homoousios) with all human beings. The union of divinity and humanity in Christ is called the hypostatic union. This expression means that in the one, unique person of Christ, divinity and humanity are united in such a way that they are neither mixed together and confused, nor separated and divided. Christ is one person Who is both human and divine. The Son of God and the Son of Mary is one and the same person.” (The Orthodox Faith— by Protopresbyter Thomas Hopko Volume 3 Bible and Church History)
At that council there were those who were referred to as monophysites who did not agree with the decision of the council because it spoke of the two natures of Christ, which was not included in an earlier christological formula by St. Cyril of Alexandria which stated that Christ has but one nature in the incarnation. The supporters of the Chalcedon decision countered that though their words differed from that of St. Cyril, their doctrine is exactly the same but expressed in a more precise manner. This disagreement still exists to this day and has not been resolved.

The term Oriental or Non Chalcedonian is used to describe those Christians who do not accept the Council of Chalcedon whom the early church described as monophysites. Today these churches include the Coptic Church of Egypt, the Ethiopian Church, the Syrian Jacobite Church, the Syrian Church of India, and the Armenian Church.

The Oriental Orthodox Church, however, does not consider itself to be monophysite. It teaches that that Jesus has one nature but in his one nature is His full humanity and full divinity which aren't co-mingled or mixed together.
Over the past twenty years the Orthodox Church has engaged in serious dialogue with the Non-Chalcedonians. There appears to be a consensus that the non-chalcedonian’s Christological beliefs are the same as that of the Orthodox Church, but merely expressed differently. However, the stumbling block to a full reunion appears to be the unwillingness of the Oriental Orthodox Church to recognize the 4th - 7th Councils of the Church as Ecumenical. In the fullness of time, we pray that this division will be healed.

Now moving along, I will speak for the next hour on Tonight’s topic, Holy Tradition.

Tonight, I promise you our discussion will cover less ground. We will be talking about Holy Tradition. Specifically we will be discussing seven aspects of Holy Tradition:

1. What is Holy Tradition
2. Sacred Scripture
3. Decisions of the Ecumenical Councils and the Canons
4. Writings and Witness of the Saints
5. Church Architecture/Iconography

6. Liturgical Life/ The Church Calendar / The Church Year -

7. Fasting, Almsgiving & Ascetical Labors

We will begin by explaining what we mean by Holy Tradition. I invite you to purchase a copy of an excellent book, *These Truths We Hold*, which was compiled by a monk of St. Tikhon’s Monastery, from which much of tonight’s lecture is based. You can purchase this on-line from St. Tikhon’s Seminary Bookstore.

1. What is Holy Tradition?

One of the characteristics that is noteworthy of the Orthodox Church is its changelessness. On the lighter side, it reminds me of a joke I once heard which goes like this “How many Orthodox does it take to change a light bulb? And the answer is “Change?” This joke points out something important about the Faith. In Orthodoxy we have a loyalty to the past, and we see ourselves today as being in living continuity with the early Church – we are not a new Church, we are the same church, the original church, the church established by Christ and set in place
by the Apostles. This idea of living continuity may be summed up in one word: Tradition. As St. John of Damascus says, *We do not change the everlasting boundaries which our fathers have set, but we keep the Tradition, just as we received it* [On the Holy Icons, II, 12].

The very word tradition means that which is "passed on" and "given over" from one to another. **Holy Tradition** is, therefore, that which is passed on and given over within the Church from the time of Christ's apostles right down to the present day.

To an Orthodox Christian, Tradition means the Holy Bible; it means the Creed; it means the decisions of the Seven Ecumenical Councils and the writings of the Fathers; it means the Canons, the Service Books, the Holy Icons, etc. Put another way, holy tradition encompasses doctrine, how the church is governed, worship and art and in short everything which Orthodoxy has lived her entire life. It is important that we understand that as Orthodox, we consider the Holy Bible to be a part of Holy Tradition, and not separate from it. This is what many Protestant denominations claim – this is why they will only accept what is found in the Bible to be true and therefore reject our traditions of worship, dogmas and other aspects of Holy Tradition. We understand the truth that the Holy Bible exists and found its formulation within the life of the Church.
As Orthodox, however, while giving it due respect, we realize that not everything received from the past is of equal value. The Holy Scriptures, the Creed and the dogmatic and doctrinal definitions of the Ecumenical Councils hold the first place in Holy Tradition and cannot be discarded or revised. The other parts of Holy Tradition are not placed on an equal level, nor do they possess the same authority as the above. The decrees of the Councils since the Seventh Ecumenical Council (787) obviously do not stand on the same level as the Nicene Creed, nor do the writings of, for example, of the Byzantine era theologians of the Church, hold equal rank with St. John's Gospel.

Orthodox loyalty to Tradition [the things of the past] is not something mechanical or lifeless, however. Tradition is a personal encounter with Christ in the Holy Spirit, as Bishop Kallistos Ware a prominent Orthodox Theologian of the 20th century has written. *Tradition is not only kept by the Church it lives in the Church, it is the life of the Holy Spirit in the Church* [The Orthodox Church, p.206]. Thus Tradition must be seen and experienced from within. Tradition is a living experience of the Holy Spirit in the present. While inwardly unchanging (since God does not change), Tradition constantly takes on new forms, adding to the old forms, but not replacing it.
Our Lord tells us that when the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth (John 16:13) and this promise forms the basis of Orthodox respect for Holy Tradition. I would like to now quote Fr. George Florovsky, who wrote very beautifully and clearly about this point. Fr. George writes “Tradition is the witness of the Holy Spirit; the Spirit's unceasing revelation and preaching of good things.... To accept and understand Tradition we must live within the Church, we must be conscious of the grace-giving presence of the Lord in it; we must feel the breath of the Holy [Spirit] in it.... Tradition is not only a protective, conservative principle; it is, primarily, the principle of growth and regeneration.... Tradition is the constant abiding of the Spirit and not only the memory of words.”

2. Sacred Scripture – I will not go into any detail on this topic since we spoke about it the last few weeks. Suffice it to say, Holy Scripture was first orally preserved by the Old Testament prophets, and people of Israel and the Holy Apostles and Evangelists. Later they were written down and the Church in council decided which writings were to be included in the Holy Bible – we believe they were guided by the Holy Spirit. This is why the Gnostic gospels and other writings that are getting a lot of press today were not put into the Bible, because they do not reflect the Truth of Christ and do not express the mind of the Church.

Last week we discussed as part of Church History the Seven Ecumenical or General Councils of the Church which were called by the Byzantine Emperors to deal with heresies or false teachings and matters of church discipline. Again it is not possible to go over the decisions of each council given our time constraints - they are contained in my notes from last week which are posted on our parish website. Suffice it to say, these decision shaped our present dogmatic teachings and formed the basis of what is known as Canon Law in the Church. The word canon is from the greek word *kanon* which means rule. They are rules or guidelines for the church to follow. Contained within Canon law are the qualifications for Bishops and Priests, how to discipline the same if they fall away from the Church, as well as pastoral matters such as marriage and divorce, how to apply penance in the Church when someone has committed a serious sin and the list goes on. These rules are applied with pastoral prudence not to punish, but to heal and maintain discipline and order in the Church.

4. Writings and Witness of the Fathers and Saints of the Church.

An important component of Holy Tradition is the writings and witness of the Saints. Understanding as I said before, that Holy Tradition is a personal encounter
with Christ in the Holy Spirit, it is natural that we turn to those in the Church who have been glorified as saints, as those who acquired as much as humanly possible the mind of Christ. By studying their lives, we can learn much about how to live as faithful Orthodox Christians, and be victorious over sin and achieve eternal salvation. The saints of the Church, while of one mind, never-the-less, had different life experiences and different personal gifts. With the number and variety of the saints, there is one or many that share our own personal strengths and weaknesses that we can learn from and seek their spiritual guidance and intercession. There are different types of saints; martyrs, who gave their life in defense of the faith; wonderworkers such as St. Nicholas who performed great miracles; ascetic saints – monks and nuns who acquired salvation through strict fasting and prayer, Confessors of the Faith who fearlessly preached the gospel in hostile times, Prophets who spoke in the name of Christ, Apostles who labored to establish and build up the church, and the list goes one. One is not made a saint in the Orthodox church, rather the Church recognizes and proclaims one to be a saint in light of their life accomplishments and miracles which have come about through their intercession. This is the process of canonization – it follows a local veneration or awareness of a person’s holiness.

5. Church Architecture/Iconography
Everything we do in the Church has a reason – and the reason is usually to reveal a truth about Christ and/or the nature of the Church and the Kingdom of Heaven. So it goes almost without saying that the architecture of the Church reveals to us the glory of the Church of Christ and the Kingdom of Heaven. In terms of the architecture of the Church, an Orthodox church may be in any of four forms, The form of a cross, a circle, a rectangle and an octagon. The symbolism of the cross is obvious as it expresses the nature of the Christian life, the circle represents eternity – and the truth that the Church will continue for eternity, the rectangle reminds us that the Church is an ark of salvation, that keeps of safe in the stormy seas of life, and the octagon, signifies a star, for the Church, like a star, guides a man through the darkness of sin which encompasses him. Orthodox Churches are supposed to face the east, as this is where the sun rises, we face the light, and we know from Scripture, at the Second coming Christ will come from the east. At one’s baptism we turn to the west and renounce Satan, and turn to the east and confess our faith in Christ.

**Interior of an Orthodox Church**

The interior of an Orthodox church is divided into several parts. One enters the church through the Porch where, in ancient times, the Weepers (Penitents forbidden to enter the church proper) stood. From the Porch one entered the
Vestibule (Narthex) in ancient times this was a large place, where the Catechumens received instruction while preparing for Baptism, and also where those who were unable to partake of Holy Communion because of canonical impediments stood. Today the beginning of the Baptismal service takes place here as does in some traditions, the betrothal or engagement portion of the wedding ceremony. The narthex symbolizes the world.

The main body of the church is the Nave, separated from the Sanctuary (Altar) by an Icon screen with doors, called the Iconostasis (Icon stand). The walls of the Nave are usually decorated with Icons and frescoes or paintings, before many of which are hanging lit lamps (lampadas). On each side, near the front, are usually found portable Icons called Banners which are fastened to staffs. These are carried in processions on special holy days in like manner to the ancient military banners of victory, which they imitate. The Nave of the Church represents the church militant, the church on earth.

At the extreme Eastern end of the church is found the Altar (or Sanctuary), with two small rooms the Sacristy and the Vestry at either side, separated from the Nave by the Iconostasis. The Iconostasis is placed near the edge of the platform upon which stands the Altar and the part of the platform which projects out into the Nave is called the Soleas (an elevated place) where the Communicants come to
receive Holy Communion and where the Celebrants come out for public prayers, sermons, etc. The Sanctuary represents the holy of holies, and is the image of paradise, the kingdom of heaven and the Church Triumphant. We know from the Book of Revelation that in the Kingdom of heaven there will be a golden altar with 7 lamps burning on it.

I encourage you if you are interested to check out our on-line interactive tour of an Orthodox Church which is found on our diocesan website, www.acrod.org – just look for the graphic link on the home page.

5. Iconography

One of the first things that strikes a visitor to an Orthodox church is the prominent place assigned to the Holy Icons. An icon is a pictorial replication and a spiritual representation of a saint, biblical scene or historical religious event. The word is derived from the Greek “eikon,” which means to resemble. The icon seeks to reveal the divine through visible and familiar content. In this sense, the icon has been called “a meeting between heaven and earth”. For through them we receive a vision of the spiritual world. The stylized character of the icon shows man and nature restored to their original beauty as reflections of the celestial glory. Icons have played a role in Christianity since the days of the Apostles. St. Luke has traditionally been known as the first iconographer. An art form that has resisted
change, modern icons have evolved very little. Today they still bear a strong resemblance to icons of the Byzantine period.

About the First Icon of The Christian Church – The Image of Our Lord Not Made by Hands.

*One of the earliest Icons witnessed to by Church Tradition, is the Icon of the Savior Not-Made-By-Hands. According to Tradition, during the time of the earthly ministry of the Savior, Abgar ruled in the Syrian city of Edessa. He was afflicted with leprosy over his whole body. At this time report of the great miracles performed by the Lord extended throughout Syria (Matt. 4:24) and as far as Arabia. Although not having seen the Lord, Abgar believed in Him as the Son of God and wrote a letter requesting Him to come and heal him. With this letter he sent to Palestine his court-painter Ananias, entrusting him to paint an image of the Divine Teacher.*

Ananias went to Jerusalem and saw the Lord surrounded by people. He was not able to go to Him because of the great throng of people listening to His preaching; so he stood on a huge rock and attempted to produce a painting of the image of the Lord Jesus Christ, unable, however, to succeed. The Savior Himself called him by name and gave Abgar a beautiful letter in which, 'having glorified the faith of the ruler, He promised to send His disciple in order to heal him from the leprosy and instruct him in salvation.

*After this, the Lord called for water and a towel. He wiped His face, rubbing with the towel, and on it was impressed His Divine Image. The towel and the letter the Savior sent with Ananias to Edessa. With thanksgiving Abgar received the sacred object and received healing, but a small portion, only a trace, remained of the terrible disease on his face until the arrival of the promised Disciple of the Lord.*

*The Apostle of the 70, Thaddeus, came to them and preached the Gospel, baptizing the believing Abgar and all living in Edessa. Having written on the Image Not-Made-By-Hands the words, Christ-God, everyone trusting in Thee will not be put to shame, Abgar adorned it and placed it in a niche over the city gates.*
For many years the inhabitants preserved a pious custom of venerating the Image Not-Made-By-Hands whenever passing through the gates. But a great-grandson of Abgar, ruling Edessa, fell into idolatry and resolved to take the Image away from the city walls. In a vision, the Lord ordered the Bishop of Edessa to conceal His Image. The Bishop, coming at night with his clergy, lit before the Image a lampada and then blocked up the niche with clay tablets and bricks.

Many years passed by and the inhabitants forgot about the Holy Object. But then, when in 545 the Persian King Chroses I besieged Edessa, the position of the city seemed hopeless. But the Most-Holy Sovereign Lady manifested Herself to Bishop Evlavios and commanded him to get from the enclosed niche the Image with which to save the city from the adversaries. Dismantling the niche, the Bishop found the Holy Image; before it burned the lampada and on the clay tablets, with which the niche had been enclosed, was a similar image. After preceding with the Cross and the Image Not-Made-By-Hands around the walls of the city, the Persian army miraculously departed.

In 630, Edessa was seized by the Arabs; but they did not impede veneration of the Image Not-Made-By-Hands, glory of which extended out into all the East. In 944 the Emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitus (912-59) requested that the Image be redeemed from the Emir the ruler of the city of Edessa and brought to the Capital of the Orthodox. With great honor the Image of the Savior Not-Made-By-Hands and the letter which He wrote to Abgar, were brought by the clergy to Constantinople. On Aug. 16 the Image of the Savior was placed in the Pharos Church of the Most-Holy Theotokos.

Concerning the subsequent fate of the Image Not-Made-By-Hands, there exists several traditions. According to one, it was carried away by Crusaders during the time of their dominion over Constantinople (1204-61), but the ship on which the Holy Objects had been taken, sank in the Sea of Marmora. According to another, the Image Not-Made-By-Hands was taken about 1362 to Genoa, where it was presented to and preserved in a monastery dedicated to the Apostle Bartholomew.

In the time of the iconoclastic heresy, the defenders of icon-veneration, shedding their blood for the Holy Icons, sang the Troparion to the Image Not-Made-By-Hands. The Image (the Holy Face) was put up as an emblem of the Russian armies, defending them from the enemy; and in the Russian Orthodox Church there is a pious custom that before entering a church, the faithful read together the prayers and the Troparion to the Image Not-Made-By-Hands. The Feast of this Icon is
celebrated on Aug. 16, during the Afterfeast period of the Feast of the Dormition, and is popularly called the Third Feast-of-the-Savior in August.

**From These Truths We Hold**

The veneration of the icon should not be misinterpreted as being made to the physical picture itself. These gestures pass over from the icon to the person depicted, thus the honor which is given to the icon passes over to the “prototype”, the person himself. As we venerate the icons, we are reminded of the high spiritual values and virtues of the holy ones depicted, and are encouraged to pursue those same values and virtues ourselves. In Orthodox tradition, icons are not intended to be realistic paintings of people and events, but rather are symbolic interpretations of the great spiritual qualities of the saints - such as sacrifice, humility, devotion, faith and love. Every element and detail in the icon, from color choice to hand position to the placement and size of secondary figures, has symbolic meaning based upon the Scriptures, the writings of the Fathers, and other theological sources. Thus the Holy Icons are one more piece of that which the Church calls Holy Tradition. They are truly the Gospel message in line, form and color.

Holy Tradition witnesses that the Orthodox Church had a clear understanding of the importance of Icons right from the beginning. It is understood that we do not worship icons but rather venerate them, understanding that by kissing them or
showing reverence to them we are demonstrating our respect and devotion to the person or persons or holy day depicted.

6. Liturgical Life/ The Church Calendar / The Church Year -

The most visible and participatory aspect of Church tradition is her liturgical or public prayer life. I will not go into great detail on this today as I will be doing so in a future session. It is sufficient to say at this point, that as Orthodox we live by the Church calendar: there are daily, weekly, and yearly prayer or festal cycles based on the solar and lunar calendars. Inspired by the Holy Spirit the fathers of the early church developed our present form of worship from the worship of the Jewish temple and synagogue. The purpose of our worship is to transform us, to lead us to repentance and evoke from us a sense of awe at the things which are holy and bring us to an experience of the living God. Through our worship we transcend time and place and re-experience that which has already taken place in the church and foretaste that which is yet to come. Our worship is mystical, spiritual and other worldly – it is like none other found on this earth. On Pascha, when we are all here united in prayer, participating in the Holy Sacraments, the singing is beautiful, the spirit is joyful, we understand in part what heaven will be like in all of its fullness. We must remember always to give thanks to God for His
great gift of the Church and Her uplifting worship and to attend all divine services without fail if our health permits.

7. Fasting, Almsgiving & Ascetical Labors

Lastly, a very essential aspect of Holy Tradition is the understanding of struggle, sacrifice and spiritual labor. Being created in the image and likeness of God, our souls are imbued with a deep longing for prayer, and spiritual nourishment. However, living in the fallen world, we are tempted to satisfy this longing with material comforts, rest, recreation, enjoyment and luxurious dining. Not that these things are evil or sinful in and of themselves, but rather it is their misuse or overuse which causes a problem. Recognizing this, the Church encourages us to practice ascetism, that is spiritual labors, to restore balance - to bring us back to an awareness of the spiritual needs of our soul. As such, the church calls us to fast from meat and if possible dairy products, almost every Wednesday and Friday of the year and during four special seasons of the year: Advent – From November 15/28 through Dec 24/Jan 6, Great Lent – 7 weeks before Pascha or Easter. The Saints Peter and Paul Fast – following Pentecost and Ending on June 30/July 12th and the Dormition Fast from August 1/14-15/28. Interestingly, if you were to count up all of the fasting days, you would see that approximately one half of the 365 days of the year are fast days. So you see the guiding principle of balance at
work here. If we strictly followed the Church’s guidelines, we would have no problems with cholesterol and other health issues. If we followed the monastic regiment of praying with prostrations (like we do during Lent) we would not need aerobic workouts or the gym! Another grave spiritual difficulty we fight is selfishness or self centeredness. The church helps us to combat this by teaching us to do good works of charity for other people and to pray with zeal for others, even our enemies.

In conclusion then, today we talked about Holy Tradition as being the visible manifestation of the working of the Holy Spirit in our lives and the Church. Holy Tradition is a living tradition, that we are called to embrace and be a part of.

As I have said the past few weeks, It is somewhat artificial or forced to study or talk about the Orthodox Faith, and in particular the Tradition of the Church, that which has been passed down through the ages. It can only be fully apprehended by living it. Those who do not come from a traditional faith background, might be tempted to view Holy Tradition as a straight jacket, as something that restricts and limits our personal freedom. The reality is that by freely and willingly becoming a part of the Tradition of the Church, we are given wings, we are freed from the limitations of time and space. We become a part of something far greater than ourselves, and can experience, past, present and future as a single event. Firmly
anchored in the apostolic faith, and enlivened by the Holy Spirit, we ourselves can become witnesses to the Light of Christ, that illumens all, and experience the joys of paradise, now and in the age to come.

Thank you for your attention. Questions anyone?