Good evening, welcome to week four of Orthodoxy 101. Let’s now begin with prayer, invoking 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 Holy Tradition as experienced in the Orthodox Church.

We defined tradition as meaning 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. I said that 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.

I spoke of Holy tradition being a treasure trove of the church, a fountain of blessings, if we remain true to it, if we live within the boundaries of the tradition of the Church. Far from restricting us, Holy Tradition being imbued with the Holy Spirit, gives us wings and sets us free, for it brings us into a living expression right now of all that has taken place in the past, that which is now and that which is yet to come. By voluntarily grafting ourselves to the Tree of Life, the church, we become open to the promptings of the Holy Spirit which makes all things new.

Wow, I’d better stop, I am starting to get carried away, I know, I just can’t help it sometimes, Orthodoxy is so rich and filled with so many wonderful nooks and crannies to explore.

This being said, I would like to speak this evening in more depth about an important aspect of Holy Tradition, Doctrine and Dogmas of the Orthodox Faith, that is the main teachings or truths about the Orthodox Christian Faith that have
been revealed to the Church by the Holy Spirit, through Holy Scripture and the gatherings of the Church in Council.

Our Metropolitan Gregory urges us, his priests, to clearly explain in sermons and religious education classes the essential doctrines and dogmas of the Church. This is because we live in difficult times and need to be able to clearly explain and defend our faith, given the rise in cults, anti-Christian movements, and increased persecutions of the Church. His Eminence also keeps us updated on the plight of our Patriarchate in Constantinople or Istanbul Turkey, where Christianity is in the minority, and the intolerance of the non-Christian Governments towards the Church. Our Patriarch has repeatedly requested the permission from the Government to re-open the Patriarchal theological Seminary on the island of Halki to properly train priests and educators to serve the Holy Church and perpetuate the Orthodox Faith. We are blessed to have religious freedom in our country, and we should exercise it never forgetting that many of our forefathers in the faith gave their lives to defend the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and to preach the truth. With this in mind, let us begin. Today, we will touch on the following Dogmas and teachings:

1. The Holy Trinity
2. Christology or the Doctrines regarding Jesus Christ,
3. Mariology or the teachings regarding the Blessed Virgin Mary,

4. Ecclesiology or teachings regarding the nature of the Church

The best way for us to cover these topics in a summary fashion, given the time constraints we have would be to study the Creed, the Symbol of Faith that we as Orthodox Christians pray at every Liturgy and which is as a part of our daily prayer rule. Much of the material I am presenting tonight has been taken and adapted from the Book “These Truths We Hold” Which is available from St. Tikhon’s Monastery Bookstore.

The Creed was composed, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, by the Fathers of the First and Second Ecumenical Councils held in the year 325 in the City of Nicea and in 381 in Constantinople at a time when various false teachings were being spread throughout the Church which attempted to overthrow the true faith in the Trinity. For this reason the formal name of the Creed is the Nicean/Constantinopolitan Creed.

The main reason for the convening of the First Ecumenical Council was the appearance and growing strength of the false teaching of the Alexandrian priest, Arius. Arius taught that the Son of God was created - that His existence had a beginning.
The Second Ecumenical Council condemned the false teaching of those who were known as the Pneumatomachi or Adversaries of the Spirit. These heretics or false teachers said that the Holy Spirit was merely a servant and fulfiller of God's wishes and was really only an angel. They did not recognize him as a Person of the Holy Trinity.

At these councils, the Church defended the traditional dogmas of the Church by creating what we call the Creed, the symbol of faith. The word Creed comes from the Latin word, Credo which literally means, I believe. The Creed remains to this day a guide to Truth for all Orthodox Christians in their spiritual life. It is interesting to note that even when we pray it together in Church, we say the words, I believe, instead of we believe, because we are reminded that our faith is deeply personal, and each and everyone of us needs to be personally committed to the faith. Originally, it was written in the first person plural “we” as being an expression of the beliefs of the entire church but the Church, inspired by the Holy Spirit, recognizing the necessity that each person personally accept the beliefs of the Church made the subtle change in its use in her prayer life to I. It is interesting to note only the creed and the prayer before receiving Holy Communion are prayed in the first person. The rest as being part of the corporate body of Christ. The only other occasion where the hymns of the Church are written in the
first person is in the penitential hymns of Lent and in many of the Psalms, where we recognize our personal responsibility and need for repentance.

The Creed itself is divided into twelve parts, seven of which were formulated at the First Ecumenical Council, the other five at the Second Ecumenical Council. The Fathers of the following Ecumenical Councils forbade any alterations in the Creed through addition or deduction of any new words. (the only exception was as I said changing the we Believe to I believe)

Before we begin, let us review the words of the creed:

(1) I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

(2) And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only-begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages. Light of Light; True God of True God; begotten, not made; consubstantial (of one essence) with the Father, by Whom all things were made;

(3) Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and became man.

(4) And He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered, and was buried.

(5) And the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures;
(6) And ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of the Father;

(7) And He shall come again with glory to judge the living and the dead; Whose Kingdom shall have no end.

(8) And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life, Who proceeds from the Father; Who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; Who spoke by the prophets.

(9) In one Holy, Catholic (Universal), and Apostolic Church.

(10) I acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins.

(11) I look for the resurrection of the dead;

(12) And the life of the world to come. Amen.

Now let us look at each of these twelve sections individually and in doing so we will learn more about the basic teachings of the Christian faith.

The creed begins with us affirming our faith, our belief. It is a powerful statement and when we read it, or rather, pray it we unequivocally, without reservation, without shame, and without qualification proclaim that we are believers. I believe, I have Faith, this means something to me, it is my life, it is what makes me who I am. Faith is as St. Paul writes
“... the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”
(Hebrews 11:1)

We live in times where it is hard for us and many other peoples to believe. If we can’t see it, today’s secular humanistic world tells us it is not real, it does not exist. However, those who have spiritual eyes to see and ears to hear know that this is not true, they know by experience that the spiritual realm does exist.

In teaching young people over the years, especially teenagers, I have made this point clear that just because you cannot physically see something, does not necessarily mean it does not exist, by doing a simple scientific experiment.

I have brought a microscope to class and a jar of pond water. Making sure there were no visible bugs, pieces of flora, or weeds, I ask the students if they see anything in the water, and they admit that it looks like clear water. Then, I put some pond water on a slide and look at it under the microscope and low and behold there are a ton of microscopic critters swimming in the water. The students then came to the conclusion that regardless of whether they could see them or not with their naked eye, these tiny creatures indeed do exist and live in the water. Using this example, we then discussed how the spiritual realm, the angels, saints, and our Lord Jesus Christ, certainly can exist, even though we can’t see them with our physical eyes.

But to believe requires a leap of faith, but one that is grounded in experience. It is the purpose of the Church and her spiritual life to nurture the faith of the Body of Christ, the members of the Church. The church is an incubator of faith, it helps the embryonic faith that is implanted within our souls by God, to grow into maturity.

But once again I digress....
So going back to the Creed, let us discuss the first section.

(1) I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

This section deals with the Essence or Nature of God and the Creation of the World.

Through Divine Revelation, for example Holy Scripture and the oral tradition which has been passed down to us, the Church teaches us to believe in the One God (Deut. 6:4; 1 Tim. 1:17) in Three Persons, Who in the Holy Scriptures are called God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19). God the Father was not created and always existed and did not proceed or come forth from another Person. God the Son before all time came forth from or was born from God the Father. God the Holy Spirit we are told before all time, proceeded or came forth from the Father. The Church teaches that none the less all Three Persons of the Holy Trinity are equal to one another, and are each fully God. A major problem with non-Christian religions is that they do not believe in the Holy Trinity.

We believe that God as Trinity created the World, both that which we see and that which we do not see, the physical and spiritual worlds. He created the invisible
world, and in particular the angels At first all the angels were holy. Some of them, firmly established in holiness, love and striving after goodness, glorify God continuously. Each Christian believer is given a Guardian Angel at Baptism. Other angels, who did not stand firm in goodness, sinned before God (Jude 1:6) and, remaining in evil, labor to enslave mankind to sin. The leader of the fallen angels is called the Devil or Satan (The Adversary; John 8:44).

After He had created the bodiless powers, the Triune God with His Words Let there be... created the whole visible world out of nothing in six days that is, all the host of heaven, the earth on which we live and all that surrounds the earth and finished His work of creation by creating man (Gen. 1:3-28), from whom came forth the whole human race (Acts 17:26). The first man, Adam, was created sinless by God's grace (Eccles. 7:29), and he was made in the Image and Likeness of God until he misused his free will, his heart burned with pure love for the One God, while his conscience was untroubled and at peace. When our first parents were like this, all the creatures which surrounded them were submissive and served them (Gen. 1:26), and the very place of their habitation was called Paradise (Gen. 2:8).

Let us now move on to Sections 2 -7 which deal with the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, Jesus Christ.
(2) And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only-begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages. Light of Light; True God of True God; begotten, not made; consubstantial (of one essence) with the Father, by Whom all things were made;

(3) Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and became man.

(4) And He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered, and was buried.

(5) And the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures;

(6) And ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of the Father;

(7) And He shall come again with glory to judge the living and the dead;

Whose Kingdom shall have no end.

Concerning our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ, we are taught by the Church, that he was both perfect God and Man having in the fullness of time, come into the world and took on human flesh, to save mankind after the fall of Adam and Eve. We believe that The Virgin Mary gave birth to Jesus, and that she became with child not by a man in the usual manner, but by the Holy Spirit. It is very
important that we understand that Mary the Mother of God, or Theotokos in Greek, was a virgin before, during and after giving birth. She is called the ever Virgin Mary. It is important that you know this because, many Protestant Christian Churches, teach that Mary had other children by St. Joseph after giving birth to Christ. They use as proof texts the references in Scripture, to Christ’s Mother and brothers. The Church teaches that Joseph was a widower and had children by his first wife and these are the ones who are referred to as Jesus’ brothers.

The Church teaches and we believe that Christ preached and taught the Gospel, healed the sick, resurrected the dead and performed many miracles during his three year public ministry from 30-33 AD. After having completed His work, endured mocking, abuse, the Passion of the Cross and death under Pontius Pilate (Matt. 26:47-75; 27:1-66). While His Body was in the Tomb, Christ descended into Hell, where He freed the souls of the righteous who had awaited His coming (1 Pet. 3:18-19; Eph. 4:8-9), and on the third day after His death and burial, he rose from the dead. During the forty days after His Resurrection, the Savior appeared many times to His disciples and continued to instruct them in the mysteries of His divine Kingdom (Acts 1:3).

Having accomplished our Redemption, the Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of His disciples, ascended into Heaven (Acts 1:9) and sits at the right hand of God the
Father (Mark 16:19) with honor and glory in the same Body in which He had been resurrected from the dead. The Lord ascended into Heaven as the God-Man, for as God He was always in Heaven and in every place of God's dominion (Ps. 103:22). After His Ascension the Savior was given all power in Heaven and on earth (Matt. 28:18), and through His Divine Providence He preserves His Church, in which He is present Today through Grace (Matt. 28:20), instructing and giving wisdom to her bishops and priests, through the Holy Spirit (John 16:13), to administer rightly the word of Truth. The Church will continue until the time of the second coming, when we believe that the Lord, Jesus Christ will come in His glory with His angels (Matt. 25:31) to judge the living and the dead (John 5:29), after which the Kingdom of Glory and Blessedness shall come, and of His kingdom there shall be no end (Luke 1:33).

Moving back to the Creed, let us now move onto article #8 which speaks of the Holy Spirit,

(8) And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life, Who proceeds from the Father; Who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; Who spoke by the prophets.

The Orthodox Church believes the Holy Spirit to be True God, the Third Person of the Holy Trinity. Holy Scripture testifies to the Holy Spirit while speaking of the
very beginning of Creation: The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters (Gen. 1:2)

The distinctive property of the Third Person of the Trinity the Holy Spirit is that He proceeds from God the Father before all time.

The Holy Spirit participated with the Father and the Son in the creation of the world, for by the word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth (Ps. 33:6), and of man (Gen. 1:26-27). The Holy Spirit bore witness of Himself through the Prophets and the chosen men of God, proclaimed the Lord's Truth and Will to God's people, and told of the coming of the Messiah through the prophets.

The action of the Holy Spirit never ceased in the world, but it was only with the coming of Christ the Savior into the world that the fullness of God's saving grace was made accessible to men. The Holy Spirit was revealed to the world in a special way on the day of the founding of Christ's Church, Pentecost when He descended upon the Holy Apostles in the form of tongues of fire (Acts 2). From that charismatic moment to the present the Holy Spirit abides in the Church as Christ Himself bears witness: And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Comforter, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of Truth (John 14:16).
Everything in the Church is filled with the Holy Spirit. The action of His grace lives in every sacrament of the Church and extends to all forms of divine service. In the Holy Eucharist, the holiest moments in the Church's daily liturgical service, the prayers and rites are linked, above all, with the calling down of the Holy Spirit. The Church prays that through Holy Communion we may commune with the Holy Spirit; and that having partaken of the Holy Gifts, we bear the living Christ in our hearts and become temples of the Holy Spirit.

9) In one Holy, Catholic (Universal) , and Apostolic Church.

This article of the Creed speaks about the nature and purpose of the Church. The Holy Church was founded by our Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 20:28). The purpose of Christ's Church is the salvation of man. It is only in the Church that full union of man and God takes place, and this union is how salvation ultimately occurs. By His suffering on the Cross Christ paid the ransom for the sins of humanity. By His Holy Blood He founded the Church (Acts 20:28), so that in her we might live by Him and for Him (2 Cor. 5:14-15). Therefore there is no guarantee of salvation outside of the Church.

The Church is **One** as the Lord Who founded her is One (John 10:18). The Church is **Holy**, for she lives, acts, and thinks by the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5; 8:15; 9:17). The Church is Catholic, for her flock has one heart and one soul (Acts 4:32) and
her catholicity is dominant. (catholic means universal or literally of the whole) By the use of the word Catholic, we do not mean Roman Catholic. The Church is Apostolic, for she keeps Apostolic Succession through ordination by the laying-on of hands upon the hierarchs (Acts 6:6; 14:23; 20:28), and preserves the teachings of the Apostles.

St. Paul calls the Church the mystical Body of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23), and this expression really describes the inner life of the Church which is the union of God and man. The Church is a community of people united by their Orthodox faith, its doctrine, the hierarchy, and the Sacraments. The human side is changeable and imperfect, but the Church is Holy and Divine.

The purpose of the Church is to reveal the Kingdom of God on earth, for she was established by Christ to be a means of transfiguring the world in the Light of the Gospel Truth. The Apostles, like Christ Himself, teach only one Church; they teach the unity of all in God: There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all (Eph. 4:4-6).

The unity of the Church is founded on the mutual love of all the members of the Church: If we love one another, God lives in us and His love is perfected in us (1 John 4:12). For it is precisely in that we share the bonds of love that we constitute
the Church, the true Body of Christ, and for this reason the Lord commands us to love one another (John 15:17). It is by prayer offered in unity of spirit that the unity of the Church is achieved. The church then is neither a dictatorship nor a democracy, but a unity of all believers. The unity of the Church exists by the power of the Divine Grace in the Holy Spirit. The unity of all the members of the Church with Christ and between one another exists in its highest form in the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist in partaking of the Body and Blood of Christ:

The unity of the Church is protected by the Canons of the Ecumenical Councils, the rules of the Holy Fathers of the Church, and Holy Tradition. The One Head of the Church is Christ

The Lord inspires man with faith in the Church through His grace by drawing him into the life of the Church. The Christian feels the power of Divine Grace acting upon him through the Holy Sacraments, the rites and the whole order of Orthodox Church life; and as he lives this life man attains an unshakeable conviction of the truth of his faith in the one Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.

(10) I acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins.

This section of the creed speaks to us of the importance of the Holy Mystery of Baptism. Baptism, as seen through the eyes of the Church is the way in which a
person becomes a member of the Church. In the waters of baptism, we are born again, we die to our old selves and rise up with Christ in Glory. We are only allowed to be baptized once during our lives – in the early Church there were some who wished to be re-baptized when they fell away from the Church. At the second ecumenical council, it was proclaimed that we may only be baptized once. However, it is understood in the theology of the Church, that the Holy Mystery of confession is like a second baptism, for by participating in it we renew our baptismal vows and our sins are forgiven.

(11) I look for the resurrection of the dead; (12) And the life of the world to come. Amen.

At this point, I would like to make a brief comment about the Orthodox Church’s teaching in regard to the afterlife. We understand that now, when one dies, his or her soul is released from the body and begins its ascent to heaven, for a first judgment. We believe that the soul remains on the earth for 3 days, visiting the places and people it was closest to. On the fortieth day, we believe that the soul stands before the Lord in Judgment. From that time of the first or particular judgment until the second coming, depending on the outcome, the soul will pre-experience either the joys of heaven or the sorrows of hell. At the time of the second coming, those who are still alive will be lifted up body and soul to heaven,
and those who have died, their bodies will be raised up from the graves and reformed and will be united once again with their souls. At this time, it will be determined for all eternity who will be in heaven and who will be in hell.

With this understanding in mind, we understand that the Orthodox Church's prayers for the dead are based on faith in universal resurrection and on the unity of the Churches Militant (those who are still living) and Triumphant (the righteous who have departed this life). By His Resurrection, our Lord Jesus Christ showed that death is not annihilation and non-existence, but the gate to life and immortality. The Christian looks on death as the transition to an eternal life.

**Concerning the Life of the World to Come.**

The Creed ends with this confident hope on the part of the Christian: I look for...the life of the world to come. By the life of the world to come the Holy Church means the life that shall be after the resurrection of the dead and Christ's last judgment.

A man is responsible to God for the life that he has been given. It is here on earth that, of his own free will, a man lays the beginning of that life which shall begin when his body dies. His fate after death depends on how he has lived his life on earth. If he has always been with Christ, joined closely to Him through the Holy
Sacraments of the Church, then after his death he shall also be with God, ceaselessly experiencing the blessed and eternal joy of living communion with God which we who live on earth call in the words of Holy Scripture Paradise (Luke 23:43), the Kingdom of Heaven or the Kingdom of God (Matt. 5:3-10,8,11; Luke 13:28-29; 1 Cor. 15:50), the house or the mansions of our Heavenly Father (John 14:2).

This unspeakable joy of life in Paradise cannot be expressed in human language (2 Cor. 12:2,4); it comes from the fullness of knowing God and from the nearness of God. That is why Christ our Savior says: And this is eternal life, that they know You the only true God, and Jesus Christ Whom You havet sent (John 17,:3).

This joy can not be extinguished, but it affects the human soul in different ways. What this joy will be like and how intense it will be differs from person to person. Only those who consciously and stubbornly resist Christ’s call to repentance, the call to a life worthy of repentance, shall remain outside communion with God at death, deprived of Light and Grace (Luke 16:23; Matt. 5:22,29; 8:12; 22:13; Phil. 2:10).

In conclusion, it is important that we remember that the Church has some important teachings which are not optional equipment, but form the very essence of the Faith. They are important matters. The understanding that God is a Trinity of
persons is essential, and any religion or sect that does not believe in the Trinity, are not worshipping the one True God. They may be nice people or not, it does not matter. By bearing the name Orthodox, we have a responsibility to know and believe the Truth, which has been preserved in the Church throughout the centuries, safeguarded by the witness and blood of the Holy Martyrs. Let us seek to strengthen our knowledge in these important teachings, and not only know them but live them.

May God Bless you for your attentiveness and desire to understand more deeply our precious Orthodox Faith

Questions anyone?