

Homily by His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew (Bartholomew, Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople)

[Ξένες γλώσσες / In English](#)



HOMILY
BY HIS ALL-HOLINESS
ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH BARTHOLOMEW
CHAIRMAN OF THE HOLY AND GREAT COUNCIL OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH
AT THE CONCELEBRATION OF THE DIVINE LITURGY
IN THE METROPOLITAN CHURCH
OF ST. MINAS IN HERAKLION, CRETE
WITH THEIR BEATITUDES
THE PRIMATES OF THE HOLY ORTHODOX CHURCHES



(Pentecost, June 19, 2016)

Your Beatitudes, Holy Brother Primates of the

local Orthodox Churches, Theodoros of Alexandria, John of Antioch, Theophilos of Jerusalem, Kirill of Moscow, Irinej of Belgrade, Daniel of Bucharest, Neophyte of Bulgaria, Ilia of Georgia, Chrysostomos of Cyprus, Ieronymos of Athens, Sawa of Warsaw, Anastasios of Tirana, and Rastislav of Prešov, together with Your honorable delegations,

Your Excellency Mr. President of the Hellenic Republic,

Your Eminence Archbishop Irenaios of Crete, together with the Most Reverend and beloved brothers who, together with you, comprise the Holy Eparchial Synod of the

Church of Crete,

Most Reverend and Right Reverend holy brothers,

Blessed Orthodox Clergy and Laity from all across the world,

A joyful day has now dawned, in which we celebrate the historic manifestation of the institution of the Church, which is constituted by the Holy Spirit, and we Orthodox brothers, who represent all the local Orthodox Autocephalous Churches, have gathered together in a liturgical assembly, so that we may carry out the **duty** and **responsibility** of the one Orthodox Church to the people and to the world today, by convening our Holy and Great Council.

Today is a day of **unity**, as we are all united in the faith and the sacraments through our liturgical gathering in one place and have come together “in the breaking of the Bread.” The Holy Eucharist truly reaffirms the **unity** and **catholicity** of our Orthodox Church.

The event of Pentecost, which took place in Jerusalem, marked the Church’s starting point in its historical journey and laid the foundations for the sanctification of human history in its entirety. The Apostles and the three thousands Christians who were baptized by them at that time comprised the first Church, which is a theanthropic reality of Christ, present in all of its members. Today, we, too, are filled with the same inspiration from the tongues of fire – from the Holy Spirit – and we are one Church, one body, even though we come from different ethnic, linguistic, and cultural traditions. Christ the God-man, the “firstborn among many brethren” (cf. Rom. 8:29), is present in each of our members.

Today, the fulfillment of the purpose of Divine Economy in its totality is taking place. Because, at Pentecost and after Pentecost, “God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 5:5). There is one Christ and we are all His joints and members: “All these are inspired by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills” (1 Cor. 12:11).

Through our distinctness, each Orthodox Church, as well as every faithful Orthodox Christian, are joined to one body, each with his own gifts, over which we should not look to others with suspicion or anger, but rejoice as if they were our own: “The treasure that my brother acquires ... I possess also,” proclaims Macarius of Egypt (*Spiritual Homilies* 3, 2, ΒΕΠΕΣ [Library of Greek Fathers and Ecclesiastical Authors], 41, p. 156).



Every local Orthodox Church has its own treasure and offers it to Christ. The eye cannot say to the hand “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet. Within the Church, there is no individual local Church that does not hold significance in its own right, so as to enable the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church not to be in need of each and every one of its members, nor can one member exist independently and absolutely sovereign, as is being attempted by those outside of the Church; especially during these last days. The Orthodox Church Militant, most honorable brothers, which is present on earth, perpetually continues the “upper room” of Pentecost, our local Churches, which are represented by all of us here today. We represent the mystical body of Christ, which extends unto the ages and delivers the human race from manifold suffering and impasses, and we are united with the Church Triumphant, fulfilling **God’s dispensation** and unifying the earthly with the heavenly (see the Kontakion of the feast of the Ascension). **This is precisely the mission of our Orthodox Church.**

At the same time, today is a **day of crying out** to the gracious Paraclete to come and abide in us and keep us in Its Truth and Its sanctification, as stated by our Lord during his agonizing prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. This entreaty of our

Lord, which is fulfilled here on this great day of Pentecost, is and remains the primary request of all humanity in a divided world that is full of strife, and which thirsts for unity, on behalf of which the Son of God gave up Himself so that all of us may have life, and that we may have it more abundantly.

Our Orthodox Church has the supreme gift and blessing of possessing the **treasure of truth** and preserving intact the **gift** of the All-Holy Spirit, which “has filled the whole world” (Wis. 1:7), and it is obliged to give the contemporary world **a testimony of love** and **unity**, and to reveal the **hidden hope that lies within it**. Of course, we do not boast over the truth of our Church. We sense its singular splendor, but also our own personal weakness and unworthiness. However, this is not enough when it remains on a theoretical level. It behooves a response on the practical level, where, unfortunately, we are greatly lacking.

The Lord began His preaching to the world by calling on the people to repent. The work of a Christian throughout the duration of his life is repentance. We, the leaders of the Church, especially, are obliged to provide a good example and embrace the entirety of the truth which we have received; because our opponent tries to scatter misguided ideas in our hearts which negate the truth of our faith. Those fellow men and women of ours who are misled about the truth spread these misguided ideas, which appear novel and worthy of attention, and often manage to lure away a good amount of faithful through the repeated skillful presentation of these ideas. For this reason, we Bishops ought to gather together to discuss the matters that are confronting the Orthodox Church at different times and throughout the world, so as to adopt the appropriate measures to protect the faithful from the prevailing errors. Especially in our time, there is a very large number of errors that are circulating, and the arguments used by the deceivers are particularly sophisticated, which means that a coordinated effort on the part of the shepherds of the Orthodox Church is required in order to inform the faithful. The number of religious factions that are attempting to lead the Orthodox faithful astray are in the hundreds. The discussions and exchange of related experiences on the manner in which to counter the methods of the aforementioned organizations during the Council will have much to offer to the Orthodox Church.

The Lord of the Orthodox Church, Who is “the same yesterday, today and forever,” worked with us so that we could reach today’s historic moment of the Holy and Great Council, this liturgical Gathering, and communion from one Common Cup. Regardless of our different opinions, we Orthodox Christians ought to point out that the only **road** on our course in this world is **unity**. Of course, this road demands a living sacrifice, much work, and is achieved after great struggle. It is certain that

this Council of ours will contribute towards this direction by creating a climate of mutual trust and understanding through our meeting in the Holy Spirit and through an edifying and sincere dialogue.

The **unity** of the Orthodox Church and its faithful represents our **mission**. It is followed by the **testimony** of our Church, so that the world may see “its good works” – **our good works** – shining brightly, be refreshed, and glorify “our Father who is in heaven.” Our ecclesial unity does not take on the form of a federation, nor does it stem from the congregating around some mortal figure. It proceeds from and is made complete by our common faith, which is synonymous with salvation, with eternal life. “And this is eternal life,” to know the Father and Him whom He sent, Jesus Christ, the King of kings and Lord of lords, as he is depicted in our Orthodox Iconography as well.

Your Beatitudes, Holy brethren,

Your Excellency Mr. President of the Hellenic Republic,

Blessed Orthodox Christians, clergy, monastics, and people everywhere under the heavens,

We are convinced – and we proclaim at this historic moment from the altar of the Metropolitan Cathedral of the Island of Crete, which is an extension of the one belonging to the Holy and Great Church of Christ, the church of the Hagia Sophia (Holy Wisdom), Hagia Irene (Holy Peace), and Hagia Dynamis (Holy Might); that is, the Holy Synthrono of John Chrysostom, Gregory the Theologian, and Photios the Great – that only **in unity** and by living out our Orthodoxy as an **experience of faith and life** is it possible to navigate through the modern world’s dramatic history and give a testimony of salvation to those both near and far.

Setting aside the problems that arise from our different ethnic backgrounds, we beseech the descent of the Paraclete upon all of us as well, so that illuminated by Him – by the “Light and Life, and living fountain of reason; by the Spirit of wisdom, the Spirit of understanding ... the Spirit of sovereignty and the Spirit that expiates sins; the God Who deifies” (cf. sticheron for the vespers of Pentecost) – we may issue a **message of truth, genuineness, and hope** all across today’s world, which thirsts, and our Churches as an **institution** and we as **persons** may reaffirm that we are **precious vessels**.

The Holy Spirit unites us in the Church through the “**bond of perfection**” and **love**, and is expressed and borne witness to by the persons of the Holy Trinity, which is of one nature, but reveals itself in three persons. Similarly, the Orthodox Church is

One, but reveals itself in the world through its individual local vines, which are unbreakably and indivisibly attached to one – to one Church, to one body.

Brothers, fathers and children, today the totality of our Holy Orthodox Church is represented here in Crete: “we have seen the true light; we have received the heavenly Spirit; we have found the true faith, worshipping the undivided Trinity, for the Trinity has saved us.” Therefore, we bless the Lord of Mercy and Compassions, and every supplication with one voice and one heart, for He is “the source of our existence, our breath, our understanding, our knowledge of God, the Holy Spirit and the Father Who is without beginning, and His only begotten Son ... the One Who gave us to comprehend the beauty of heaven, the sun in its course, the orb of the moon, the order of the stars and the harmony and different movements that prevail among them ... the turning hours, the changing seasons, the flowing air, the cycle of years ... our hope of gaining the heavenly kingdom, equality of honor with the angels, the contemplation of glory.”

To this All-Holy Spirit, which brings to perfection all good things, and today’s concelebration, and the testimony of our Orthodox Church to the entire world in and through this Holy and Great Council of ours, to It, together with the Father and the Son, do we dutifully offer praise, now and forever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.