

7 Μαρτίου 2017

## 40 Day Challenge: Week 2 (Metropolitan of Toronto Sotirios)

[Ξένες γλώσσες](#) / [In English](#)

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The response to our 40 Day Challenge has been excellent ... and encouraging. We are heartened that this initiative has been received so well — Glory be to God!

Last week, the focus was on Fasting and Almsgiving. For Week 2 of our Challenge, we are drawing the attention of the faithful to the Church and Icons.



Today, the First Sunday of Lent, all Orthodox Christians — from Canada to Korea, Belgium to Burundi — commemorated the Triumph of our Holy Faith.

This is the faith of the Apostles. This is the faith of the Fathers. This is the faith of the Orthodox. This is the faith on which the world is established (Synodikon of the Seventh Ecumenical Council).

As we celebrate the Sunday of Orthodoxy and the restoration of the Holy Icons as decreed by the Fathers of the Seventh Ecumenical Council (787), how can we apply

— and how can we relate — to the courageous struggles of these forebearers of Orthodoxy?

In other words, what is the Challenge?

First, it is to remain within the Church. As St. Cyprian of Carthage writes, “A person cannot have God as his Father if he does not have the Church as his Mother.” The Church is the Kingdom of Heaven realized on earth. The Church is the source of the restoration and fulfillment of creation in Christ; it is here to bring the whole world back to God. The Church is where the faithful receive God’s grace through the sacraments. St. Ignatius the God-bearer, writing to the Ephesians, says: “Unless a man be within the sanctuary he lacks the bread of God.”

Second, to have Holy Icons, which are an indispensable part of Orthodoxy, be our guide, like an immovable lighthouse in stormy waters, leading us to Jesus Christ. The challenge is to imitate the lives of the holy men and women depicted in icons who gained eternal life by radiating love and following the commandments of God.

Thus, as we continue our ascetical struggle to purify ourselves by deadening the passions, let us venerate the Holy Icons and remain within the Church. This includes praying and supporting the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, which is the Mother Church of Christ, as well as His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew.