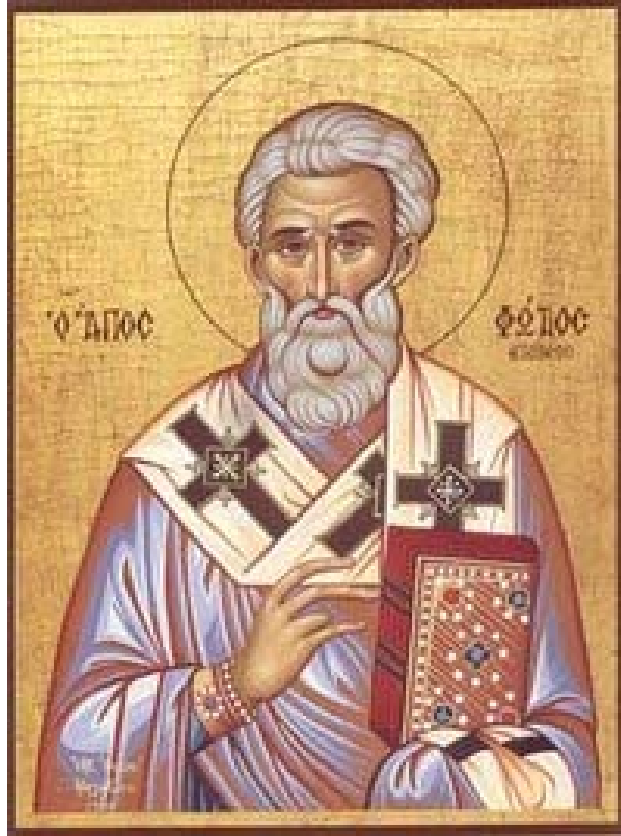


Our Father among the Saints Photius the Great, First in Rank among Patriarchs, and Equal to the Apostles.



**SAINT PHOTIUS THE GREAT  
FIRST IN RANK AMONG PATRIARCHS  
AND EQUAL TO THE APOSTLES.**

**Our Father Among the Saints Photius the Great,  
Patriarch of Constantinople  
Whom the Holy Church Celebrates on February 6.**

820 – 891 A.D.

“Our God-bearing Fathers, who governed all things in the Church of God in a proper and God-pleasing manner, have left to us as a sacred heritage the God-given teaching, just as they themselves had received from the Holy Apostles, that the confession and defense of the True Orthodox Faith is the greatest of virtues. No other virtue, they tell us, is so great before God and so profitable for the Church. For Truth is God, and love and confession of God’s Truth—that is to say, the True Faith of the Church—frees, enlightens and saves us men. This holy teaching is proclaimed especially by those holy Fathers who spent their entire lives struggling to preserve Christ’s true and saving Faith, by which alone men are saved and enter eternal life. This holy tradition of the

Fathers, confirmed, as it is, and testified to by their entire lives, offers the greatest lesson for our own generation, a generation which, lacking zeal 'for the love of the Truth' (II Thess. 2:10), has grown cold and hardened in its indifference toward the correct Faith.

"Among the ancient and great Fathers of the Church, perhaps the greatest zealots for the correct faith and the Truth of God were SS. Athanasios the Great and Basil the Great. Yet our holy and God-bearing Father Photius, the Confessor and Defender of the Orthodox Faith of Christ, is in no way inferior to them. Like them, he labored in all the virtues that please God and bring deification. But above all he strove for Divine Truth, the true dogma of the Orthodox Faith bequeathed to the Church as a holy inheritance by the God-inspired Apostles and Fathers. So it is that the holy Photius wrote in his famous letter to Nicholas, the Pope of Rome: 'Nothing is dearer than the Truth.' And in the same letter, he noted: 'It is truly necessary that we observe all things, but above all, that which pertains to matters of the Faith in which but a small deviation represents a deadly sin.'

"Invoking the help of our holy Father Photius, we shall describe his holy life and apostolic labors in defense of the Orthodox Faith, for the instruction and spiritual profit of our generation waxed cold toward the Truth. We know that St. Photius was 'a sign which spoken against' (Lk. 2:34) both during his life and afterward, for many enemies spoke and wrote against his holy person. Impartial historical truth, however, will best show the spiritual greatness of our holy Father and his exceptional importance for the Orthodox Faith and Church."

Our God-bearing Father Photius was born in Constantinople around the year 820 to prominent, wealthy, and pious parents. He drank until the end the cup of Confessor for Christ and in exile gave up his blessed soul in peace into the hands of the Lord on February 6, 891. The *Synodicon of Orthodoxy*, read each year on the Sunday of Orthodoxy, enjoins all to praise him:

To Ignatius and Photios, most holy and Orthodox Patriarchs:  
ETERNAL MEMORY!

To all that is written or spoken against the holy Patriarchs  
Tarasios, Nicephoros, Methodios, Ignatios, and Photios:  
ANATHEMA!

Saint Photius was the most erudite man of his day, a scholar among scholars. In order to resolve the conflicts arising from the long years of the iconoclastic heresy, he, while still a layman, and over his most strenuous refusal (even to the point of the shedding of tears), was elected Patriarch of

Constantinople in 858. During the course of his service as Patriarch he attained to unceasing prayer of the heart, i.e. the prayer, "Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on me".

St. Photius was principally opposed by the proud and ambitious Pope of Rome, Nicholas I. Two points lay behind Nicholas' opposition to St. Photius. First, St. Photius' refusal to permit Nicholas' addition of the term *filioque* (and the Son) to the Symbol of Faith, the Nicene Creed, and, secondly, the Saint's reproof, based on the holy canons, of Nicholas's desire to make himself as the Pope of Rome the ruler over the whole Church.

To deal with such departures from holy Tradition, St. Photius in 867 convened a Council in Constantinople.<sup>1</sup> The Eastern Patriarchates were invited to send their representatives. Around one thousand bishops, clerics, and monks attended this great and ecumenical council. In this holy Council held under the Emperor Michael both the *filioque* as well as the Papal pretensions to universal power were condemned.

The Council enacted two condemnations. First,  
"It condemned the heretical Latin teaching on the Holy Spirit (*filioque*) and solemnly condemned all earlier heresies. Pope Nicholas of Rome was condemned, defrocked, and anathematized as the leader of this heresy and the creator of discord in the Church. Also condemned was Nicholas' lust for power, his pride, and his desire to rule the entire Church of God and subject it to himself."

Further,

"By this Council, our holy Father Photius and the Fathers with him demonstrated that, without exception, all bishops of the Church, including the Bishop of Rome, are subject to the conciliar authority of the Church, especially when some new heretical teaching appears."

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<sup>1</sup> The first document used to support the papal claims was the *Donation of Constantine*:

*The Donation of Constantine* was used by the Papacy in the Middle Ages to support its claims for worldly power. This false document claims that the Emperor Constantine (307-377) gave Pope Sylvester I, whose representatives participated in the First Ecumenical Council at Nicea in 325, extraordinary powers heretofore unknown in the Christian world. In reality, this fabrication was composed in the chancellery of Pope Stephen (752), and together with the *Pseudo-Isidorian Decretals* served as the cornerstone of caesaropapism.

The *Pseudo-Isidorian Decretals* were composed sometime between 847 and 852, most likely in 850 before the election of Pope Nicholas I. They contain imagined letters of Clement I, Sylvester I, and others in which the supposed powers of the Roman bishops in the Church and over the entire world are codified. Although attributed to Isidore of Seville, they have been proven false and were crafted to fortify the papal pretensions of Nicholas I.

Upon these documents, now well known as forgeries, both to the Roman Catholic denomination and also to the rest of the world, rest the Papal claims to universal supremacy over the Church.

Later, after returning from his first exile, St. Photius again convened a Council in Constantinople in November, 877. Some four hundred bishops attended, including two from Rome where Pope John VIII (877-882) now ruled. Pope John did not confess the filioque heresy and allowed no change in the Creed. The Fathers of the Council of 877 decree:

“Were someone bold enough to compose an exposition of faith other than this sacred Symbol (the Nicene Creed Ed.), which from the beginning came to us from our blessed and holy Fathers, and then call it the Symbol of Faith—stealing the dignity of these God-inspired men and including in it their own private formularies—and try to foist it on believers or on those returning from heresy as if it were the common teaching, thereby audaciously distorting with either false words, additions, or subtractions the treasure of this sacred and honored Symbol: such a person we depose completely if he be a clergyman; and if he be a layman, we impose upon him an anathema, in accordance with the already prescribed condemnation of the holy Ecumenical Councils.”

Further,

“to prevent future, power-hungry Popes of Nicholas’ stripe from seeking authority over God’s Church, at St. Photios’ suggestion the Council enacted a canon according to which the Bishop of Rome could enjoy only those privileges which he canonically possessed up to that time, that is, the primacy of honor. By this rule the Council forbade Rome to presume to extend or amend her prerogatives in any way, either at the present time or in the future. For God’s Church differs from worldly government or authority; in Her the law and rule of the Gospel reign: “Whosoever will be great among you, let him be your servant. And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant” (Mt. 20:26-27; Mk. 10:43-44)”.

All the Bishops present at the Council of 877, including the two representatives sent by Pope John, affixed their signatures to the acts of this Council. So ended that holy and great Council called by St. Photius; its decrees and canons were recognized by the entire Church, East and West alike.

Clearly, St. Photios, in the Councils of 867 and of 877, is shown to be staunch in his confession and defense of the True Orthodox Faith.

This brief overview of St. Photios’ accomplishments can serve as a starting point for the study of St. Photios’ life. Please consult “The Life of Saint Photius” translated by Ronald Wertz in *On the Mystagogy of the Holy Spirit* by Saint Photius Patriarch of Constantinople, translated by Holy Transfiguration Monastery. Copyright 1983 Studion Publishers, Inc. ISBN: 0-943670-00-4.

**DISMISSAL HYMNS**  
*Of Saint Photius. Fourth Tone*

**S**INCE thou wast of like ways with the Apostles, and a teacher of the world, O Photius, entreat the master of all, that peace be granted unto the world and great mercy to our souls.

*Another of Saint Photius Plagal of First Tone  
Let us worship the Word*

**A**S a radiant beacon of wisdom hid in God, \* and a defender of Orthodoxy revealed from on high, \* O blest Photius, blest Adornment of Patriarchs, \* thou didst refute the innovations of boastful heresy, O light of the holy churches,\* which do thou keep from all error, O luminary of the Dayspring on high.

*For Lord I have cried*

*Of the Hierarch. Fourth Tone. As one valiant*

**T**O the fire-breathing orator, \* to the teacher of all the world, \* let all us, the Orthodox, sing with one accord, \* praising with fair and most sacred hymns the beacon of piety, \* that true namesake of the light, \* the wise shepherd and great high priest \* of the Church of Christ, \* the illustrious Photius blest of God, Constantinople's godly pastor, \* the first in rank among patriarchs.

**OIKOS**

**T**HOU wast shown to be an Angel from among men O Father, who from the earth didst attain unto Heaven. Wherefore, as I consider thee rivaling the incorporeal choirs, I am amazed, and with longing I reverently cry to thee such things as these:

*Rejoice, thou through whom the Trinity is worshipped; rejoice thou through whom God is hymned rightly.*

*Rejoice, most upright canon of the Orthodox; rejoice, most steadfast rebuker of the iniquitous.*

*Rejoice, height of humility hard to reach for many; rejoice, depth of discernment too deep for the eyes of mortals.*

*Rejoice, for thou becamest the divine sacrificer of God; rejoice, for thou bringest to God many of the saved.*

*Rejoice, who with God's Martyrs dwellest together; rejoice, who art the monastic Saints' companion.*

*Rejoice, thou by whom the profane are undone; rejoice, thou by whom the faithful are confirmed.*

*Rejoice, O Photius most ven'erable.*

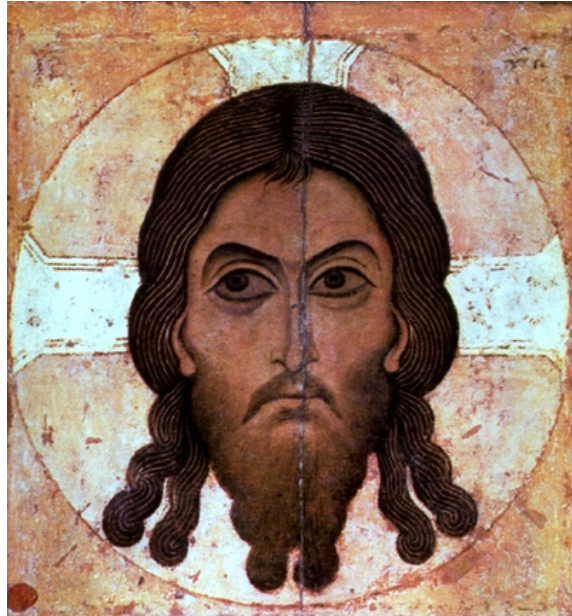
**SYNAXARION**

On the sixth of this month we commemorate our Father among the Saints Photius the Confessor, Patriarch of Constantinople, the Equal to the Apostles.

*Verses*

Praised be Photius, who with the sword of the Spirit  
Cut the poisoned adders to the Creed in pieces!

The sixth ended the exile of Photius.



† THE ICON NOT MADE BY HANDS  
(NOVÓBOROD)

**Saint Photius and the Triumph of Orthodoxy**

At the end of the period of the Ecumenical Councils that had formulated the dogmas about the Incarnation of the Word, St. Photius opened a new era in the struggle for true Church doctrine. Henceforth, the struggle would center above all on the truths associated with the mystery of Pentecost: the Holy Spirit, grace, and the nature of the Church. In other words, if during the period of the Ecumenical Councils the economy of the Person (Hypostasis) of the Son of God was set forward, the new era witnessed how theological thought and art were primarily oriented toward the Mystagogy of the divine Hypostasis of Our Lord the Holy Spirit.<sup>2</sup> This

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<sup>2</sup> St. Luke writes in Acts 15:18, “Known unto God are all His works which are from the beginning of the world.” The holy Fathers of the Ecumenical Councils do not bring forward any new teachings, neither do they define, as is the case with those who follow Augustine of Hippo, the Divine Essence. Their work is primarily that of a definite, clear proclamation of the Gospel “once delivered to the Saints” (Jude 3), and of setting limits (in Greek, ὄρος, a boundary, limit) to certain discussions in theology; the Greek word, ὄρος, (oros) carries neither a denotation nor a

turning point, which in many respects was decisive for the direction of the Church and its art were to follow, carried the stamp of the great hierarch and confessor Saint Photius Equal to the Apostles.

The life of the Church, its thought and art, are marked by the exceptional personality and activity of this Patriarch, not only during this period but well beyond it. In the struggle against heresy, Photius possessed exceptional assets: he belonged to a family of confessors of Orthodoxy (he himself, his father, and his uncle had been anathematized by the iconoclasts). Combining a solid theoretical education with flexible, impeccable tactics, he clearly saw the road that was to lead to the defeat of the heresy. He reorganized the schools and other institutions of learning so that an effective apologetic could be mounted effectively to refute the rather thin positions advanced by the iconoclasts. The iconoclasts were dependent upon the sciences for their assault against the Orthodox. St. Photius' predecessor, St. Ignatius, stressed piety as the best response. By contrast, Photius viewed piety as insufficient; for him it was precisely the acquisition of knowledge that would stand as the standard-bearer in the fight against this heresy. St. Constantine, the future apostle of the Slavs, and a close friend of St. Photius, was named head of the centers of academic training. He appointed artists and learned men to begin the restoration of painting in the churches.

St. Photius was absolutely unbending in his stance against iconoclasm; in affirming this we would do well to regard our times at the opening of the twenty-first century as uncompromisingly iconoclastic, but without blood. Like the Fathers of the Seventh Ecumenical council, he viewed this heresy as a direct denial of the Incarnation of the Son of God for our sakes. In his letters to his godson, Michael, King of Bulgaria, he called the iconoclasts "Christ-fighters, worse than the Jews."<sup>3</sup> Elsewhere, he stated, "In your mind, you [iconoclasts], are conducting an ignoble war against Christ, not openly and directly, but by means of the icon."<sup>4</sup> Like the Fathers of the Seventh Ecumenical Council, he held the Icon to be rooted in Holy Tradition alongside Holy Scripture. He developed and clarified this line of approach. He drew attention to the primacy of seeing over hearing (a primacy emphasized in patristic writings), and was emphatic about the importance of

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connotation of any sense of definition, notwithstanding that preference in some modern discussions.

Saint Isaac the Syrian writes, "Faith is the door to mysteries," (Homily 46); and "the faith of the Saints" (Rev. 13:10), the holy Orthodox Faith, is the door to a lifetime of revelations and mysteries in the Church of God under Hierarchs who are faithful to the vows they made at their ordination to the Episcopate. A life in the uncreated Divine energies is what is meant by the word, 'Mystagogia'. If any Hierarch should ever break his vow (God forbid), the sheep at once should flee from him as a false shepherd for under such a wolf the faithful, potentially, lose any participation in God.

<sup>3</sup> PG 102: 695D.

<sup>4</sup> PG 101: 949D

teaching through the icon. The person who refuses the icon has already refused instruction by the Holy Scriptures. To venerate icons means to correctly understand Holy Scripture and vice versa.<sup>5</sup>

Now we touch upon the eschatological tenor of our Orthodox veneration of the Icon. Our relative worship corresponds to the prophecy of Sophonias (3:14-15).<sup>6</sup> Said the Fathers of the Seventh Ecumenical Council, "The one who venerates the icon, venerates the *hypostasis* of the One it represents"<sup>7</sup> because, as Saint Sophonias prophesies, "the Lord, the King of Israel, is in the midst of thee." The vision of Christ at His Second Coming presupposes a confession of His First Coming and the veneration of the image of His person, or *hypostasis*, that points to it. Here we recall the second Troparion of the fourth ode of the canon of the Icon of the Holy Face (in Church Slavonic): "In former times, Moses, having asked to see God was able to contemplate God only obscurely, seeing His Back; but the New Israel sees Thee, our Deliverer, clearly face to face." The icon not only teaches us things about God; it makes God Himself known to us. [In the icon of Christ, we contemplate His divine Person in the glory with which He will return, that is, in His glorified, transfigured face.](#)

We also represent the Theotokos, the angels and all the saints. This is because in the eyes of the Council, the image of a saint and above all the Mother of God represents, like the image of Christ, a visible prefiguration of the age to come: "the glory which thou gavest Me, I have given them" (Jn 17:22). When He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is" (I Jn. 3: 2).

This vision will also be the theological framework for the content of the icon. Thus, in the nineteenth century, Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow applies the words of St. Paul to the icon, "And we all, who with unveiled face, behold as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image, from glory to glory, as from the Lord, the Spirit (2 Cor. 3: 18 ). Philaret says the following:

Notice that St. Paul does not speak of himself but of *all*. Consequently, he is not speaking of the distinctive privilege of a man inspired by God, but of an action, a state that is available to a great number and, to a certain degree, to *all*. He says, *And we all, with unveiled face, behold the glory of the Lord*. That is, we behold not only the face of Jesus Christ but His *glory*...We do not watch like passive spectators, but we present our soul to the luminous face of Jesus Christ, like a mirror, to receive His light.

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<sup>5</sup> *Hom.* 73, Greek ed. of Aristarchos (Constantinople, 1901), vol. 2, 304-5.

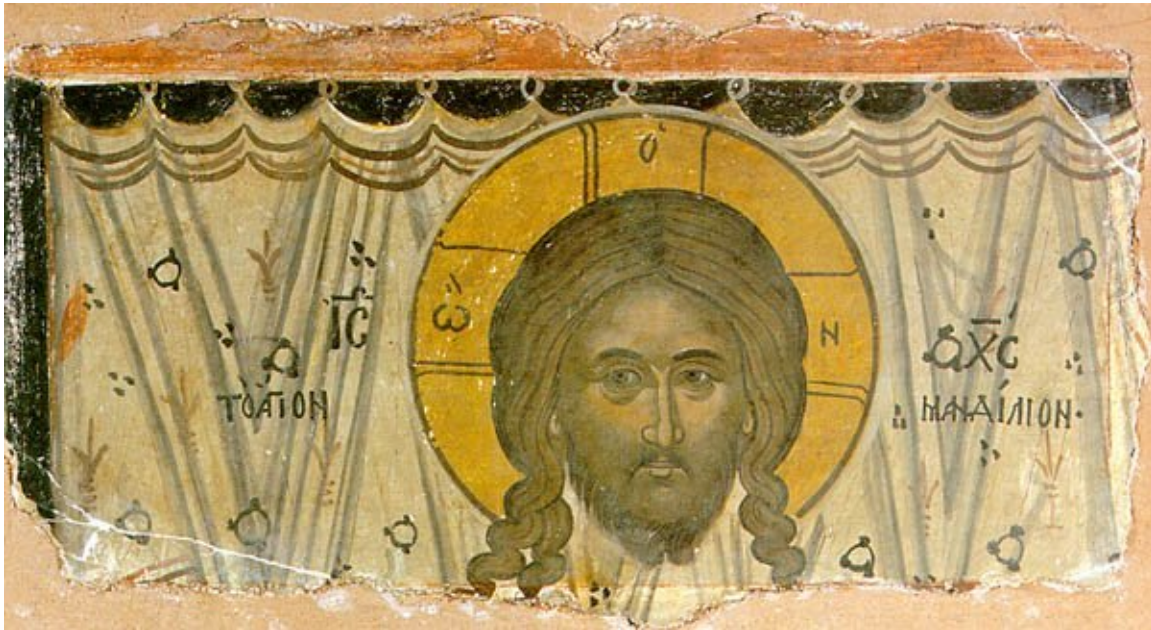
<sup>6</sup> Rejoice, O daughter of Sion; cry aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem; rejoice and delight thyself with all thine heart, O daughter of Jerusalem. The Lord has taken away thine iniquities, He has ransomed thee from the hand of thine enemies; the Lord, the King of Israel, is in the midst of thee: thou shalt not see evil any more. (Sophonias 3: 14-15 LXX).

<sup>7</sup> Mansi XIII, 377-80.

Our Father among the Saints Photius the Great, First in Rank among Patriarchs, and Equal to the Apostles.

*If We are being transformed into the same image; then we steadfastly strive to grow in the likeness of the image of Jesus Christ.*<sup>8</sup>

*See Theology of the Icon, vol. II Leonid Ouspensky tr. A. Gythiel © 1992  
St Vladimir's Seminary Press Crestwood NY 10707-1699, pp. 210-217 (Ed)*



## † THE HOLY FACE Ἀχειροποίητα

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<sup>8</sup> Homily on the consecration of a church dedicated to the Icon of the Holy Face (November 17, 1855). *Sermons*, vol. III (Paris, 1866), 232. In the nineteenth century, Saint Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow explained, as can be seen, the power of the image upon the believer in the same context as St. John of Damascus.

(It is important for us here in America, over 150 years after Saint Metropolitan Philaret delivered his sermon, to remember that Russia was then an Orthodox land, strong in her draught of the strength of the Holy Spirit as imparted by holy Tradition. Our English translation of the texts quoted above in the KJV by early seventeenth century Protestants does not have the sense that Church Slavonic brings to us. St. Seraphim, in his *Conversation* with A.N. Motovilov shortly before the Saint's repose in 1833, is illuminated by the Holy Spirit, as is Motovilov. Metropolitan Philaret's Sermon and the *Conversation* deal with the same truth: In this life, through our life in the Mysteries of God in the Church, *we are being transformed into the same image* as we resolutely struggle to grow in the likeness of the image of Jesus Christ.)