



GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AUSTRALIA

PARISH OF THE ANNUNCIATION OF OUR LADY, “EVANGELISMOS”

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FATHERS OF THE FIRST COUNCIL

The early Church of Christ had many problems. They had to endure the waves of persecutions by the Roman pagans from without and the seeds of heresy from within. In order to make clear the position of the Church, Emperor Constantine called a General Council, a great assembly consisting of 318 Holy Fathers of the Church who gathered in the city of Nicaea (Asia Minor) in the year 325AD. This First Ecumenical Council decided many issues relating to the date of celebration of Easter, the Nicene Creed, and that Christ is truly God, of one substance with the Father and begotten, not made, from all eternity. Thus the Arian heresy that Christ is not God; not equal to the Father; was created by God (a mere creature) and there was a time when the Son of God did not exist, was condemned by the Holy Fathers and the basis of the Nicene Creed was ratified.

EPISTLE: The Reading is from the Acts of the Apostles [20:16-18, 28-36] For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus, so that he would not have to spend time in Asia; for he was hurrying to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the Day of Pentecost. From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church. And when they had come to him, he said to them: “You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived among you....Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will

come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears. So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. I have coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me. I have shown you in every way, by labouring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all.

EXPLANATION: Paul summons the Elders of Ephesus to Miletus to cheer them on for the future that they may bravely bear all things, both the parting from him, and the external and internal trials and persecutions about to take place in the Church. **(20:16-18)** We learn from this meeting that the Church is living and growing; it has already developed a pattern of permanent leadership in terms of "**Elders**" (ie. presbyters) and "**overseers**" (ie. bishops) and false teachers and heresies will arise from inside the Church, and she must be protected through godly clergy and laity. **(20:28)** For example, Ephesus was the scene of the Third Ecumenical Council in 431AD, which preserved the doctrine of the two natures of Christ in one Divine Person against the heresy of Nestorius who denied the hypostatic union of the two natures and maintained that these 2 separate persons in Christ. The Church ruled that even though Christ is Complete God and Complete Man, the union between His divine nature and His human nature took place in such a unique way that one did not disturb the other. **(20:29-30)** St Paul worked with earnestness (with "tears") night and day warning each one of the Elders to uphold the faith without seeking profit or reward and to work to sustain themselves and to help the poor and needy, for as Christ says, "**It is more blessed to give than to receive.**" But where necessary, there

is nothing wrong in accepting food and accommodation from the “faithful” (basic needs). (20:31-35)

GOSPEL: **The Reading is from the Gospel of St John [17:1-13]** Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: “Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him. And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. I have glorified You on the earth, I have finished the work which You have given Me to do. And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself; with the glory which I had with You before the world was. I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world. They were Yours. You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word. Now they have known that all things which You have given Me are from You. For I have given to them the words which You have given Me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came forth from You: and they have believed that You sent Me. I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours. And all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine, and I am glorified in them. Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are. While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name. Those whom You gave Me I have kept; and none of them is lost except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. But now I come to You, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves.

EXPLANATION: Here Christ show His love for His Apostles by praying for them and dedicating Himself to God. First of all Christ prays for Himself, for the strength to offer Himself on the Cross. The “hour” refers to His death. His focus is on heaven. He is not concerned with His own well-being, but only with doing the Father’s will. By being glorified

through His death on the Cross, the Son will also glorify the Father. God is glorified when salvation and eternal life came to His people. Christ Himself chooses the time to be offered up on the Cross. He voluntarily willed to ascend the Cross as the sacrificial lamb of God for the sins of the world. **(17:1)** Jesus asks His Father for the strength to **“drink the cup”**, that is, to bear the sufferings about to befall Him, and to finish His work of salvation. **(17:2)** **“Eternal life”** is participation in divine life – an ongoing, loving knowledge of God in Christ. **(17:3)** Prior to His Incarnation, Jesus shared the heavenly glory of the eternal Father. Christ prays that such glory be restored to Him after He has perfected the work which He was sent to do. **(17:4-5)** Next, Jesus prays for His Apostles (**“the men whom you have given me”**) who gladly received the Word of God (**“kept the Word”**) and who love the Father and follow the Father’s will. **(17:6)** They know that all of Christ’s teachings are truly from the Father and that He teaches with divine authority. **(17:7-8)** Christ prays to God to bless His disciples, the Twelve He will later extend His prayer to all believers to come. But He does not ask God to bless the **“world”** – the portion of humanity which exists in direct opposition to Him, refusing to repent thus standing under judgment. These people do not belong to Christ and the Father. Christ especially asks that the Father keep His disciples from the power of the Evil one. While Christ was in the world He kept them safe, but now He is **“no longer in the world”**, but is **“coming”** to the Father, and they themselves still have to remain in the world and are exposed to the devil’s cunning. If the Father **“keeps them in His Name”**, they will be one with Christ, even as the Father and Son are one. If God will protect them from the world, the disciples will remain together, sharing the unity of love that each exists between the Father and Son and remain separate from the world. **(17:11)** While Jesus was still with them, He was **“keeping them”** and **“guarded”** them. Because of Christ’s watchfulness and love **“none of them were lost except the ‘son of perdition’ ”** (Judas Iscariot) who was lost in order **“that the Scripture might be fulfilled”**. **(17:12)**