

My Beloved Ones,

This coming Sunday, 50 days after Pascha and 10 days after our Lord's Ascension, we shall celebrate the Holy Feast of Pentecost; the beautiful day when the Holy Spirit was sent by God the Father to His Church, as Christ Himself had promised. The Feast of Pentecost is a special day, when the now divinely inspired Apostles, began to fulfill the Lord's mission to evangelize over all the earth.

The following Monday, as the Feast of the Holy Spirit, is all the more meaningful, since His All-Holiness, our Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew has worked to convene the first Pan-Orthodox Council in over a thousand years, on the island of Crete (June 16th-27th).

Up until the East-West schism, those Patriarchates that participated in the first seven Ecumenical Councils were the five ancient Sees (Constantinople, Antioch, Rome, Jerusalem and Alexandria). At this time, in spite of their cultural differences, each Patriarchate was under one government: that of the Byzantine Emperor. With the creation of the modern nation-state, great care has been taken to bring all of the now 14 autocephalous (that is, self-governing) Orthodox churches together; these are the Patriarchates of: Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem, Russia, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria, Georgia, Cyprus, Greece, Poland, Albania, the Czech Lands and Slovakia.

It is important to remember that many things can change in a thousand years. Some of these churches are not overly familiar with the Synodical system that governed all the ancient churches—though the principle is still in their blood. Some churches are now accustomed to working in much closer conjunction with their local governments. I speak of this to stress that the Evil One seeks to prey upon our human understanding and ways of thinking, thereby sowing discord among us. This does not mean however, that there is no room for healthy discussion, so long as it is conducted with love.

In spite of these difficulties, the Council is still going to proceed as scheduled. Truly, it has been in the planning for a very long time: from Patriarch Athenagoras in 1960s, to preliminary discussions all the way at the beginning of the 20th century. We autocephalous Churches are all one family in Christ, and though a family might sometimes disagree, there is still affection and love.

As we prepare to convene the Holy and Great Council, the prayers of you, the faithful: old and young, male and female alike, are fervently sought. Pray as One in Christ that all the representatives of the Orthodox Churches may be enlightened, to renew the preaching of the Gospel in a darkened world, all for the glory of His Name.

+ALEXIOS
Metropolitan of Atlanta

