



4/17 December 2017

TWENTY-EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST -- Tone 3

According to the Patristic Orthodox Eortologion...

Troparion of St. John of Damascus, Tone 8: O instructor of Orthodoxy, teacher of piety and purity, / beacon for the whole world, John most wise: / by thy doctrines thou hast illumined all. // O instrument of the Spirit, entreat Christ God, that our souls be saved.

Kontakion of St. John, Tone 4: Let us hymn John, the honored and divinely eloquent speaker and hymnographer, / the instructor and teacher of the Church, / the opponent of the enemy; / for taking up the Cross of the Lord as a sword, / he hath cut down all the falsehood of heresies, / and as a fervent intercessor before God // he bestoweth forgiveness of transgressions upon all.

John of Damascus

John of Damascus (675-749) who is also sometimes called John the Damascene, is one of the great theologians of the Eastern Orthodox Church. He is best known for his battle against the iconoclasts in an attempt to defend and restore the use of icons and pictures of Christ to the Eastern Orthodox Church.

Biography

John was born in Damascus to Christian parents. His family represented the Christians at the court of the local Muslim leader. John originally took over this role from his father, but could not ignore the call of the church. He gave up this job to become a monk in the monastery of St. Sabas outside of Jerusalem. He spent his most productive years as a monk, but was ordained a priest later. After his death he has been canonized as a saint and was declared a doctor of the church.

Iconoclast Controversy

In 726, Emperor Leo III ordered the destruction of a bronze icon of Christ that stood over the doors of the imperial palace. This set off in earnest the iconography controversy that culminated in Nicaea II in 787 and later the final restoration of icons in 843 still celebrated today as the Triumph of Orthodoxy by the Eastern Church. John of Damascus weighed in on this controversy in at least three works in four years. John defended the making and using of images by using the fact that the invisible God had become visible in Jesus Christ. He appeared in flesh, and can thus be imaged. He was able to critique Emperor Leo the third because by this point the Byzantine Empire did not extend into the Middle East. John effectively worked under the protection of the Islamic leaders. John often backed up his arguments with quotations from the fathers of the church in earlier ages. He did this to show how the position of using and allowing images was one that was entrenched in the history of the church. Thus, Leo III and his supporters were not following the church, but rather overthrowing the tradition laid down by the fathers. John of Damascus and other supporters of icons were called iconophiles while those who supported the destruction of the images were called iconoclasts. The Western church generally sided with John and the other iconophiles by opposing Leo's appointments to the Patriarch of Constantinople and calling a council that anathematized anyone who opposed the practice of making and using images. Leo's son, Constantine V, followed in his father's footsteps and responded to the attacks of the popes by calling a council of his own, the Council of Hieria. Here opposition to icons became the official position and anathemas were given out to those who supported icons. John of Damascus was dead by the time this council met, but he was singled out by the Council of Hieria for special condemnation. After the Empress Irene came to the throne, another council was called in 787. This council became the Second Council of Nicaea where John of Damascus and his views were approved. The theology of iconography defended and set forth by John of Damascus is still the position of both Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches today^[1].

Other Notable beliefs

John of Damascus was not just a hero to the Eastern Orthodox Church, but was respected in the West as well. When it came to the issue of the day that divided the East and the West, namely the filioque clause inserted into the Nicene Creed, John tried to take a middling position. The West held that the Spirit proceeded from the Father and the Son, while the East preferred the original phrase the Spirit proceeded from the Father and left the Son out completely. John tried to find middle ground in this growing dispute by offering up a solution. He was willing to go as far as saying the Spirit proceeds from the Father through the Son, but he would not say The Spirit was from the Father and the Son[^] [2][^].