Apostolic Encyclical of His Eminence, Archbishop Stephen,
On the Commemoration of the Holy Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council
and the 1700th Anniversary of the Council of Nicaea (325–2025)

To the beloved faithful of the Church of God, and to all who call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity and truth: grace, peace, and unity be multiplied from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Thessalonians 1:2).

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

On this blessed and radiant Sunday, June 1, 2025, as the Church lifts her voice in thanksgiving for the Holy Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council, we mark not only a solemn liturgical commemoration but also a moment of singular historical and spiritual magnitude: the 1700th anniversary of the First Ecumenical Council held in Nicaea in the year of our Lord 325.

It was in that sacred assembly—gathered under the providence of God, convened by the Emperor Constantine, and illumined by the Holy Spirit—that the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church bore unified witness to the apostolic faith, proclaiming with boldness and clarity that the Son of God is "Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one essence [ὁμοούσιος] with the Father."

The Council of Nicaea stands as a radiant pillar in the life of the Church, for it did not establish a new doctrine, but faithfully preserved the deposit once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 1:3). The Nicene Fathers—bishops, confessors, and martyrs—spoke not with innovation but with the authority of truth. In the words of St. Athanasius the Great, who bore witness to the Council and defended its teachings, “The Fathers did not invent new things; they confessed what they had received.”

The Nicene Creed is not the legacy of one ecclesiastical tradition but belongs to the entire household of God. It is a common inheritance, a theological and spiritual treasure entrusted to all who confess Jesus Christ as Lord. Despite the divisions that have

emerged in the centuries since, the First Ecumenical Council remains a magisterial touchstone for all Christians, calling us back to our roots and forward to unity in truth.

We address not only the faithful of the Orthodox Catholic Church, but also all our separated brethren in Christ—those who bear the name Christian and hold dear the Scriptures and the creeds. The Nicene confession of Christ as consubstantial with the Father is our common doctrinal anchor, a shared dogmatic grammar that continues to speak with force, precision, and hope.

The Nicene Council is not a relic of antiquity, but a living expression of the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16), discerned in the Holy Spirit through the sacred conciliar process of the Church. Its decisions are not simply historical artifacts, they are the judgment of the Church guided by the Paraclete, bearing enduring authority and calling for ongoing assent.

The Nicene Fathers were not philosophers of abstraction, but shepherds concerned with the salvation of souls. They discerned that to compromise on the divinity of Christ was to compromise the very economy of salvation itself. For, as St. Gregory the Theologian insists, "That which He has not assumed, He has not healed." If Christ were not truly God, He could not truly save.

This conciliar authority is not of man, but of God (Galatians 1:12). It calls us today to reaffirm the conciliar method as the mode by which the Church breathes, acts, and speaks. In a world increasingly fragmented, the Council of Nicaea reminds us that true authority is exercised in communion, under the yoke of Christ, and in faithfulness to apostolic doctrine.

We therefore issue this encyclical as a summons to return, not merely to the memory of Nicaea, but to its truth. Let all churches and ecclesial communities that claim apostolic roots hear the Spirit's call through the voice of the Fathers: to confess together the unbroken Orthodox and Catholic faith of the undivided Church.

The Creed of Nicaea—unaltered and unadulterated—is a covenant of truth that demands our fidelity. In a time when relativism blurs the lines of truth, and when doctrinal indifferentism threatens the clarity of Christian witness, the voice of the Council speaks with renewed urgency: "Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you" (1 John 2:24).

Let us be clear: the 1700th anniversary of Nicaea is not a mere occasion for historical celebration. It is a kairos, a divinely appointed time, inviting us all to rediscover the fullness of Christ's truth, not as isolated theological systems, but in the living communion of the Church—the Body of Christ, the pillar and bulwark of the truth (1 Timothy 3:15).

In our own age, confusion reigns not only in the realm of doctrine but in anthropology, ethics, and meaning itself. The denial of Christ's divinity, once the error of Arius, now reappears in secular guise—in the denial of transcendence, of divine order, and of the human person made in the image of God.

Against this tide, the Church must speak with the same clarity and charity as the Fathers of Nicaea. For the Nicene proclamation is not only about Christ—it is about who we are in Him. If Christ is truly God, then the human person is truly called to divinization (2 Peter 1:4). If Christ is consubstantial with the Father, then our hope is not fantasy but promise, not illusion but destiny.
As St. Cyril of Alexandria taught, "The mystery of Christ is the mystery of our salvation." And as such, the Church must be the conscience of the world, offering not only critique but healing, not only truth but mercy. The conciliar witness of Nicaea offers a framework of fidelity, unity, and transcendence in an age of fragmentation, isolation, and despair.

Let us, therefore, beloved in Christ, renew our vows at the font of Nicaea. Let us hold fast to the Creed, not as a mere symbol but as a confession that shapes our worship, structures our lives, and anchors our hope. Let the holy bishops, presbyters, deacons, monastics, and faithful of every rank take up the Nicene faith with fresh resolve and with the boldness of the martyrs.

I call upon all Orthodox Catholic Bishops throughout the world, especially the esteemed heads of the Patriarchal and Autocephalous Orthodox Churches, to come together in solemn assembly this year in Nicaea, the sacred city of the First Ecumenical Council to bear witness to the Faith for which so many faithful Orthodox Catholic Christians have shed their blood and given their lives. Let us gather not merely in memory, but in living witness to the Apostolic Faith — that immutable and unalterable truth handed down once for all to the saints. With one voice, let us proclaim this Faith that was solemnly confessed and declared at Nicaea, standing united in our commitment to preserve and protect it with unwavering conviction. And as we remember the sacrifices of those who stood firm in defense of the truth, let us resolve with fervent zeal, with courage undaunted, to uphold this same Faith, even unto the shedding of our blood, should we be called to bear witness for the sake of Christ and His holy Church.

Let us also implore the Holy Trinity to grant that the unity of faith confessed at Nicaea may soon be visibly manifested in the unity of the Body of Christ—that the prayer of our Lord Jesus may be fulfilled: "That they may all be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You" (John 17:21).

May the Holy Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council intercede for us, that we may walk in their footsteps and remain steadfast until the end.

To Him be glory, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

Issued this 1st day of June, 2025
+Archbishop Stephen
Primate of the Italo-Greek Byzantine Orthodox Catholic Church