

October 11: Sunday of the 7th Ecumenical Council

- Gospel Reflection on the Parable of the Sower from 2025:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fKYlkRih9PY>

- Previous Reflection on Titus 3:8-15 from July, 2026:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VeolmeETJcE>

The reading is from St. Paul's Letter to Titus 3:8-15

Titus, my son, the saying is sure. I desire you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to apply themselves to good deeds; these are excellent and profitable to men. But avoid stupid controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels over the law, for they are unprofitable and futile. As for a man who is factious, after admonishing him once or twice, have nothing more to do with him, knowing that such a person is perverted and sinful; he is self-condemned.

When I send Artemas or Tychicos to you, do your best to come to me at Nicopolis, for I have decided to spend the winter there. Do your best to speed Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way; see that they lack nothing. And let our people learn to apply themselves to good deeds, so as to help cases of urgent need, and not to be unfruitful.

All who are with me send greeting to you. Greet those who love us in the faith. Grace be with you all. Amen.

- Titus 3 is the apostolic reading to honor Sundays dedicated to the Ecumenical Councils:
 - Sunday of 4th Ecumenical Council from July 2026
 - Sunday of the 7th Ecumenical Council this coming Sunday
 - On the Sunday before Pentecost, the reading is from Acts because Acts is read during the Pentecost period.
- Certain Gospel and epistle passages are generally read in honor of certain days and seasons.
- For hierarchs of the Church (St. Nicholas, St. John Chrysostom, Sts. Cyril and Athanasios the Great, etc.) the **Matins** reading is **John 10:1-9**: "Truly, truly, **I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber; ² but he who enters by the**

door is the shepherd of the sheep. ³ To him the gatekeeper opens; the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴ When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. ⁵ **A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers."** ⁶ This figure Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them. ⁷ So Jesus again said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. ⁸ All who came before me are thieves and robbers; but the sheep did not heed them. ⁹ I am the door; if any one enters by me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.

- One of the key elements of the passage is that there are strangers trying to lead the sheep astray, and the job of the Shepherd is to protect and guide the sheep properly.
- The Divine Liturgy Gospel Reading for many hierarchs like St. John Chrysostom and St. Spyridon is the following:

John 10:9–16: I am the door; if any one enters by me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. ¹⁰ **The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy;** I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. ¹¹ I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹² **He who is a hireling and not a shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf snatches them and scatters them.** ¹³ He flees because he is a hireling and cares nothing for the sheep. ¹⁴ I am the good shepherd; I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵ as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶ And I have other sheep, that are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will heed my voice. So there shall be one flock, one shepherd.

- Again, the emphasis is on the fact that there are people seeking to harm the flock, and the Good Shepherd defends the sheep from those seeking to harm it.
- For other hierarchs, the Divine Liturgy readings is from Matthew 5:

Matthew 5:14–19: "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. ¹⁵ Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶ Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. ¹⁷ "Think not that I have come to

abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfil them.
¹⁸ For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. ¹⁹ **Whoever then relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but he who does them and teaches them shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.**

- Again, emphasis is placed on whether people will lead the flock astray through false teaching, or teach it properly.

In keeping with what these other passages say about what is expected of teachers and clergy and hierarchs of the Church in defending the faith and making sure that the people of God are taught properly, today's Epistle passage from the Letter to Titus is chosen to honor feast days dedicated to the Church Councils because it focuses on proper teaching. This verse is the key for why it is chosen for this day:

As for a man who is factious (airetikon), after admonishing him once or twice, have nothing more to do with him, knowing that such a person is perverted and sinful; he is self-condemned.

The Greek word αἵρεσις/*hairesis* has a long history before it carries the negative sense of “heresy” in Christian theology. The noun αἵρεσις/*hairesis* comes from the verb αἰρέω/*haireo*, which means to grasp something or to choose something. A *hairesis* is a choice. In Greek philosophy, the different schools of thought were different “choices,” so came to be called different *haireises*. The term had no negative sense whatsoever, and would well be translated into English as “philosophical school” or “philosophical sect.” The Jewish author Josephus relied on this term to show that the Jews were fully compatible with Greeks and Romans. In the same way that Greek and Roman philosophy was divided into different *haireseis*, Josephus said that the Pharisees and Sadducees were different *haireseis* of the Jewish way of life. This neutral sense of the term as a philosophical choice, however, disappeared in Christian theology. When Gnostics and others rejected the authority and teaching of the apostolic tradition, forming their own “schools” of thought, they were no longer making a neutral choice (*hairesis*) but they were creating heresy (*hairesis*), and the negative sense of the term is born.

- ***“After admonishing him once or twice.”***

Even when stressing the need for correcting false teaching, the emphasis is on maintaining unity and not on easily or casually excluding people.

- Internet debates
- The Church has boundaries, and we need to defend and explain those boundaries, but we shouldn't make them as difficult as possible.

- Sayings of the Desert Fathers, Abba Daniel 7:

This is what Abba Daniel, the Pharanite, said, 'Our Father Abba Arsenius told us of an inhabitant of Scetis, of notable life and of simple faith; through his naivete he was deceived and said, "The bread which we receive is not really the body of Christ, but a symbol." Two old men having learnt that he had uttered this saying, knowing that he was outstanding in his way of life, knew that he had not spoken through malice, but through simplicity. So they came to find him and said, "Father, we have heard a proposition contrary to the faith on the part of someone who says that the bread which we receive is not really the body of Christ, but a symbol." The old man said, "It is I who have said that"...

{Elaborate effort made to convince the brother}

... Then the old men said to him, "God knows human nature and that man cannot eat raw flesh and that is why he has changed his body into bread and his blood into wine, for those who receive it in faith." Then they gave thanks to God for the old man, because he had allowed him not to lose the reward of his labor. So all three returned with joy to their own cells.'

- Matthew 18:15-17: ¹⁵ "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his

fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother.

¹⁶ But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. ¹⁷ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

- The emphasis in all of these is on maintaining unity, not seeking to exclude people. We shouldn't rush to exclude. But... there are wolves. There are heretics. There are people whose continuing presence in the Church will hurt more than help.
- One of the best ways to ensure unity is to create a healthy environment. A healthy host expels germs not by driving them out but by making them uncomfortable.
- **St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 10:23-24**

²³ "All things are lawful," but not all things are helpful (**symferon**). "All things are lawful," but not all things build up. ²⁴ Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor.

- Symferon is not "helpful" but "expedient," where in Greek political rhetoric it meant to accomplish the greatest good for the most people.

- Here, when translated as “helpful,” it might lead one to imagine that it has in mind a personal ethic. Rather, it means to seek the common good
 - Arthur Schopenhauer: “Truth is like water that needs a vessel to carry it”
 - The Church spreads the faith
 - The Church defends the faith
 - But only because... the Church provides a place for the faith to be lived.
- Protect our parishes from false living and teaching by creating a healthy environment with education and a rich sacramental life, as well as a healthy social life. Create a culture that naturally conveys the truth of Christianity as a lived experience.
- Protect ourselves and our families...
- St. John Chrysostom uses the medical image of “preventive” medicine to talk about living an Orthodox life.