ASSEMBLY OF CANONICAL ORTHODOX BISHOPS
OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Sunday of Orthodoxy 2026

Encyclical

Dearly beloved faithful in Christ,

On the first Sunday of Great Lent—the **Sunday of Orthodoxy**—we joyfully commemorate the restoration of holy icons to the life of the Church. This feast celebrates the unity established by the Seventh Ecumenical Council (787) and the final restoration of icons in 843 under the leadership of Empress St. Theodora, together with her son, Emperor Michael III, and Patriarch St. Methodios. Today, the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America carries this legacy forward, manifesting that same spirit of unity. In this light, "Assembly of Bishops Sunday" is now observed nationwide in conjunction with this historic celebration.

In his first letter to the Corinthians, Saint Paul's ancient plea still resonates: he calls us to be "united in the same mind and the same judgment," leaving no room for division (1 Cor 1:10). This mandate, paired with the celebration of the Sunday of Orthodoxy, reminds us that the restoration of icons was more than a historical event—it was the restoration of Church unity itself. It was the victory of faith over fear and the reality of a God incarnate over a distant deity. Just as we honor holy icons, we are called to see the icon of Christ in one another. By standing firm like the Saints of the 8th and 9th Centuries, we move past our differences to embrace the grace that unites us in the Body of Christ.

As we celebrate Assembly of Bishops Sunday – along with the Sunday of Orthodoxy – we encourage you all to learn about the Ministries of the Assembly as well as to support our sincere efforts for Orthodox Christian Unity through the steadfast and generous gifts of your time, talent, and treasure.

With Paternal love in Christ and prayers for a blessed Lenten journey, on the 1st of March, 2026.

† ὁ Ἀμερικῆς Ἐλπιδοφόρος

† ELPIDOPHOROS
Archbishop of America
Chair
and the members of the Executive Committee of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America