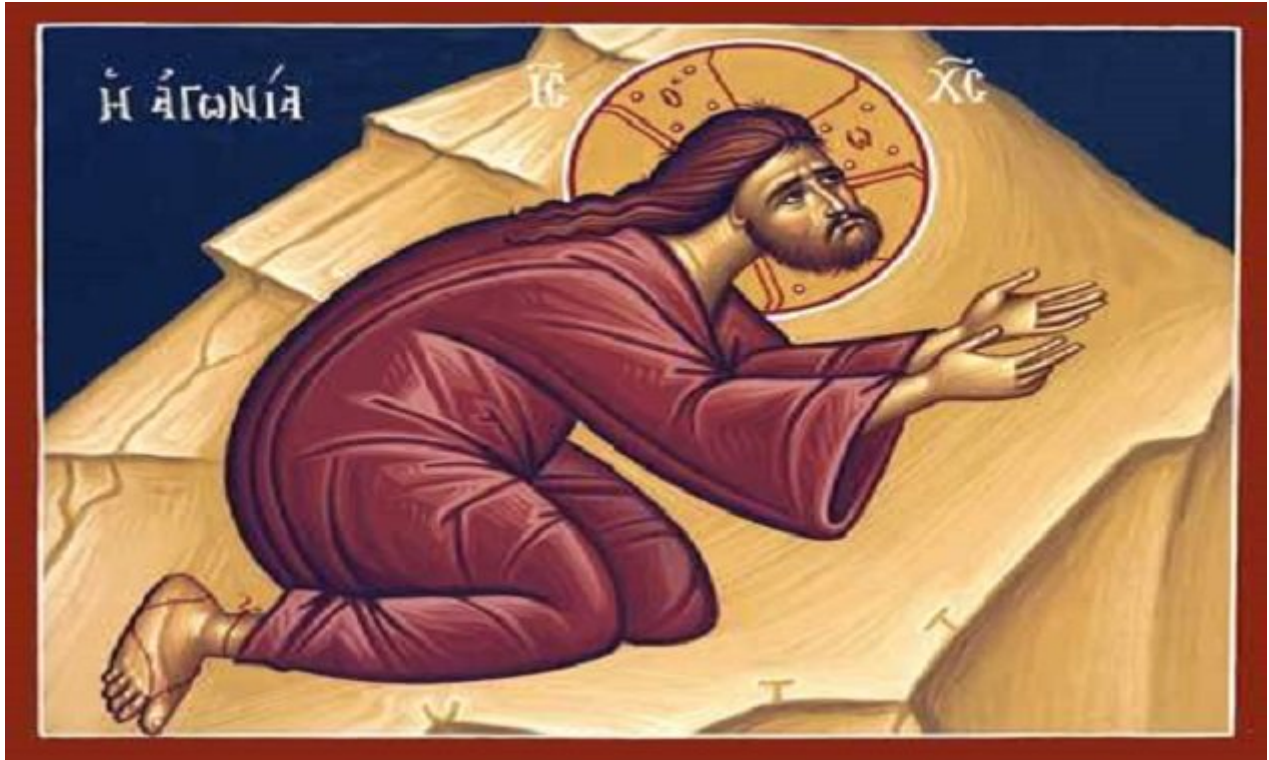
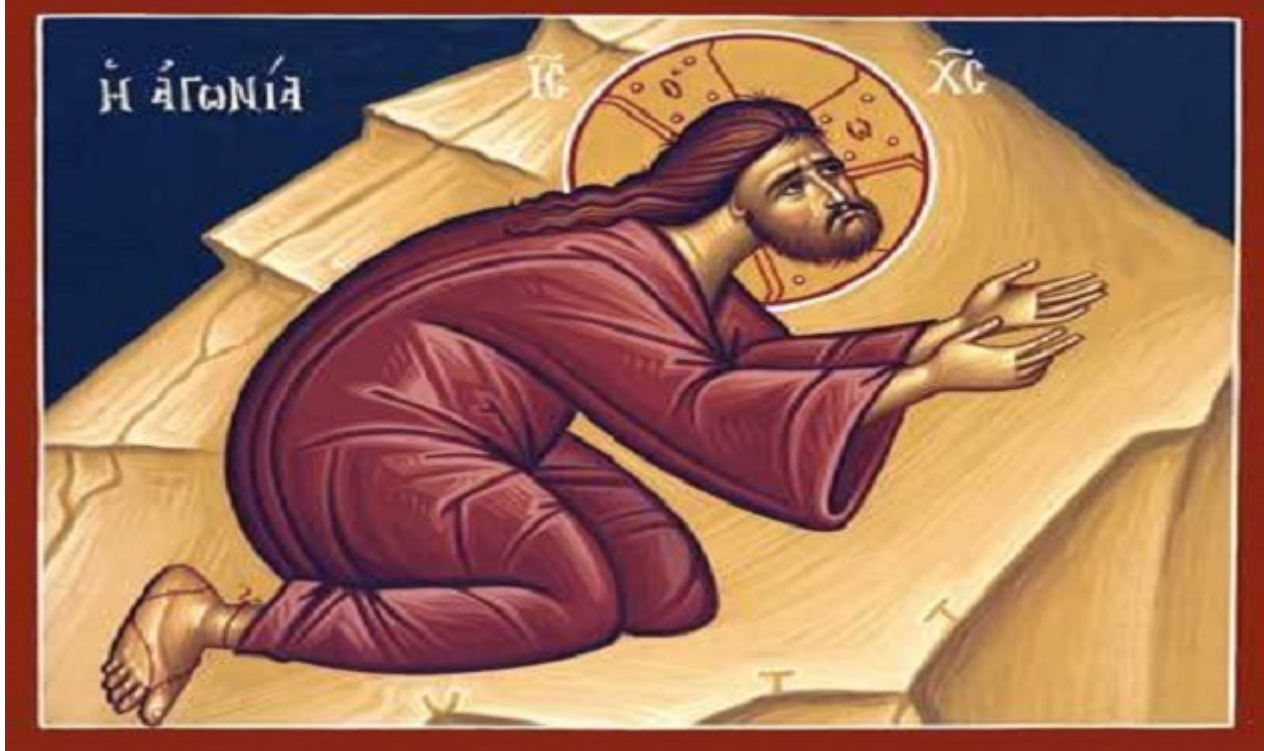


Life in the Church (Petros Panayiotopoulos)

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Shortly before He was taken away to be put to death, Christ turned to His heavenly Father and addressed Him in fervent prayer. The prayer is so important for the spiritual formation of the Church that it's known in Greek as the "Archiepiscopal Prayer". In it, Jesus prays for the disciples He's leaving and, at the same time, reveals the Person of the Divine Father and His relationship with the Son. Today, the Sunday of the Holy Fathers of the 1st Ecumenical Synod in Nicea, we shall recall this prayer in the Gospel reading (*Jn. 17, 1-13*)



If we look carefully at the content of this prayer, we can see immediately the concern of Christ, the Chief Shepherd, for his flock. For a start, He promises it eternal life, that is, knowledge of God. This is the road's end for those who have chosen to remain close to Him and to observe His commandments.

These are the people who have accepted the divine teachings. It's these people who belong to God and believe in Christ's mission in the world. It's these people who will remain in the world and work on behalf of the divine will, which is the unity of everyone in Christ and the coming of the divine Kingdom. It's these people who choose unity as a way of life, in accordance with the example of the relationship between the Father and Son: *that they may be one as we are*".

These are the basic coordinates of our lives on this earth. If we wish to call ourselves the Lord's disciples, we have to know that He takes care of us, He looks after us and keeps us safe. We have to follow His own path, in accordance with the words He Himself left for us, however difficult and uphill this may be. In the end, communion with Him awaits us. We belong to this world, but our true homeland and destination is heaven, the divine embrace which awaits us. As Saint Paul says: "For we have no lasting city here, but seek the one to come" (*Heb. 13, 14*).

And this alignment with God has certain requirements and particular fruits. The basic requirement, as we see, is unity. We all know well enough that the gravest error we can commit is to distance ourselves from the Body of the Lord, in other words, schism. And, on the other hand, the crowning moment of our worship of God

is Holy Communion, union with His spotless Body and Blood. Finally, the central fruit of communion with God is joy. The joy we shall taste in its fullness in the life to come, but of which we already have a foretaste in this present existence.

So let's make sure that the difficulties of life don't defeat us. We have an all-powerful protector and ally at our side. Let's remain united in the bosom of the Church, so that we may enjoy the blessing which the Lord has vouchsafed us.