

HEART OF THE HALL

FALL 2025

VOLUME VII

ISSUE I



Dear Reader,
The leaves are changing, the air is getting colder, and it is time for another edition of *The Heart of the Hall!* This edition marks both a return to the familiar and an expansion into new spheres. As always, I was very impressed by the hard work and dedication demonstrated by our wonderful writing and visual design staff. Therefore, I am happy to present our Fall 2025 edition.

Our first article is the second iteration of our series, *The Future Saints of Seton Hall*, which reflects upon the lives of our fellow Setonians throughout the University's history. Lisa Baldwin examines the conversion of our founder, James Roosevelt Bayley, paying special attention to the influence of Mother Seton on his incredible journey. Her insights illuminate the relatable nature of his struggles, making him a figure that current students can readily identify with.

The bulk of this edition is dedicated to the Nicene Creed. Celebrating its 1700th anniversary this past summer, this declaration of faith is shared by all the ancient Christian Churches. For example, the Roman Catholic Church, the Coptic Orthodox Church, and the Macedonian Orthodox Church all profess these same words as the foundation and summation of their faith. To commemorate this remarkable unity between disparate Churches, we have gathered students together to reflect upon the Creed, what it means to them, and what it means to their Church.

Brian Cadag shares his perspective as a Roman Catholic seminarian and how he deepened his understanding of the Creed. Speaking for the Coptic Orthodox perspective are Christy Beshara and Alexander Marinelli. Beshara reflects on how the Creed focuses both the official Liturgy and her own personal life. With a more historical approach, Marinelli expounds upon the journey of the Church Fathers that established and defended the Creed as we know it today. Finally, Nicholas Maksimov offers the least familiar angle on the Creed: that of the Macedonian Orthodox Church. He details the exceptional journey of his Church, beginning with St. Paul in the Acts of the Apostles all the way to his own grandmother.

This is the most ambitious collaborative project that *The Heart of the Hall* has ever attempted. Could there be a more auspicious occasion to bring together our voices in conversation and contemplation than the anniversary of the Council of Nicaea? I am immensely happy with the efforts of these writers and the work they have produced.

Finally, we close our edition with yet another foray into untrodden territory: creative writing. The first part of Joey Harrison's "Parable of the Runner" follows Cursor's journey through the race of life, all the ups and all the downs. The second and final part of this short story will be published in our next edition, Spring 2026.

While the seasons are changing, some things stay the same, namely the unending support of our wonderful advisors. I would like to thank Msgr. Dennis Mahon, Fr. Colin Kay, Fr. Nicholas Sertich, and Fr. Douglas Milewski for their dedication to this publication and the students who contributed. You make this publication possible, and for that you have the gratitude of our entire staff. Finally, thank you for reading and I hope you enjoy the Fall 2025 edition of *The Heart of the Hall!*

God bless,
Bridie McGlone, Editor-in-Chief.

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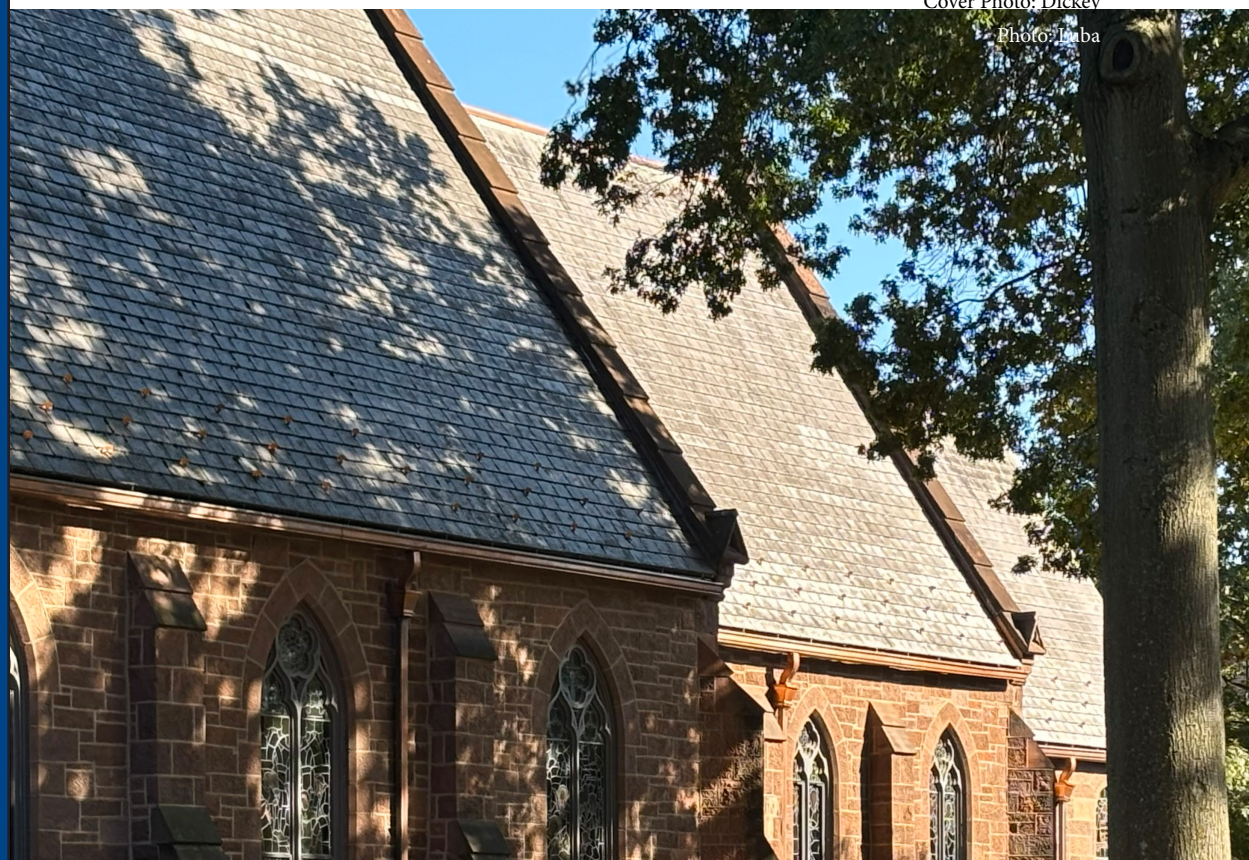




Photo: Luba

Future Saints OF SETON HALL

James Roosevelt Bayley

History is interesting to look back on, especially when it is your own. Everyone who sets foot on the campus of Seton Hall University is part of the legacy of our great founder, James Roosevelt Bayley. In 1856, Bayley founded this university, not only to pursue academic education but also to promote theological education. Physically and spiritually, he slowly built this college from the ground up, determined to provide a place where the Catholic faith he practiced could flourish. Although famous for his relentless advocacy for Catholic higher education, Bayley, the first bishop of Newark, was not always a Catholic. Some of us may know where he ended up, but few know how he got there. Without his individual transformation and motivation to share the Catholic faith, where would we all be?

Bayley started his journey in Harlem, New York, in August 1814, where he was born into a prominent, upstanding Episcopalian family. Instinctively, like many boys of his time, Bayley followed and upheld tradition. Attending various schools over the years and often changing his course of study, he finally committed himself to becoming an Episcopalian

minister. The General Theological Seminary in New York was the place where Bayley became dedicated to serving his community, particularly the poor. Through serving poor Irish immigrants in New York, Bayley found himself alongside Catholic priests, who were extremely influential in his conversion. The acts of service he performed with them paved the way for him to see the importance of Catholicism's ministry to the poor. Then, when Bayley, in 1848, became the Rector of St. Andrew's Church in Harlem, he began interacting with more clergy from the Catholic Church. One of his many friends was John McCloskey, the pastor of St. Joseph's Church and a future cardinal. McCloskey, along with other friends, was a significant component in fostering Bayley's curiosity and interest in the Catholic faith. Slowly, and in part because of his friendships, Bayley began asking questions about the validity of the Episcopalian Church he had not considered before. There was something about the Catholic Church that he had an immense hunger for, and although some may have tried, no one could extinguish this passion that overcame him.

Every answer begins with a question, and Bay-

ley had countless questions. Through his theological inquiry, he threatened to disrupt his way of life. However, this was a decision made with the utmost care, reverence, and courage. During his years as a minister in New York City, Bayley wrestled with theological inconsistencies regarding the faith he was raised in. Imagine questioning the foundation of your life that is meant to be a guiding light. It is daunting, even frightening. By doing so, he disrupted generations of strong Episcopalian tradition in his family, just as Mother Seton, his aunt, did years prior.

Elizabeth Ann Bayley Seton was a convert to Catholicism from Episcopalianism, like her nephew. She faced tremendous hardship throughout her life, but this suffering allowed her to be drawn closer to Christ. The fruitfulness of her relationship with God led Mother Seton to start her life's work, ensuring Catholic education for young people. She may not have been physically present to guide her nephew, as she had passed years before in 1821, but her legacy was loud enough for Bayley to hear. Mother Seton continued to be a symbol of hope and perseverance in times of deep struggle and was consistently there for those undergoing spiritual unrest, with her heart and soul fully committed to God's message. Especially after his conversion, Bayley recalled her success often, admiring her intense devotion to Catholic principles and her reliance on the grace of God. Mother Seton worked tirelessly to provide education for countless people because she understood the importance of a faith-centered education. She founded the Sisters of Charity and the first free Catholic girls' school in Maryland, which inspired Bayley to form his own school one day.

However, other members of his family presented equally strong opposition. Leading the charge was his grandfather Richard Bayley, an imposing

figure of innovation and intellect who was particularly opposed to James's incessant theological inquiry. He is credited with numerous medical contributions that are still in practice today. His grandfather recommended that Bayley leave his home for a while to go to Rome because he was concerned about his interest in Catholicism. The European trip was pushed by his grandfather because he wanted Bayley to understand the disturbing nature of Catholics, in the hopes of turning him away from it for good. Ironically, this journey and exposure to the Catholic Church solidified his conversion. Bayley obeyed his grandfather's

advice, sailed across the Atlantic to Europe, and landed in Le Havre, France, after three weeks. He took his time on his trip, spending some weeks in Paris before finding his way to Rome. His grandfather hoped that he would be repelled by Rome and its Catholic culture, forcing him to come home, forever grateful to be Protestant. Unfortunately for Richard Bayley, his plan was dwarfed by God's plan for his grandson.

Bayley was an exceptionally educated man with a passion for reading. He was well-read across all genres, especially theology. In his personal diary, he credits the Fathers of the Church as a key influence in his conversion, alongside other experiences and people. He deeply admired the antiquity and authority of the Catholic Church. He was captivated by its rich history and everlasting traditions; he wanted something that could sustain him. In a letter to his Episcopalian friend, Bayley wrote, "...I asserted before I left home, and I still assert, that high church-manship led me to Rome ... It was the respect for Antiquity, and the testimony of the Fathers." The teachings of the Fathers of the Church are prevalent in numerous accounts of Catholic converts. These men are credited with shaping the





theology of the Catholic and Orthodox Churches, and they offer perpetual wisdom to their readers. Bayley admired them and continuously looked at their testimonies for advice and counsel. When exploring Catholicism, Bayley recognized that he could not make such a transformation without thoroughly contemplating it. Being an Episcopalian was a large part of his identity, and he knew that he must diligently research the Catholic faith to make a well-informed decision. Even while he was still a minister in Harlem, he read these readings, and this created an eagerness for him to learn further, eventually leading him on his fateful trip to Rome.

Too often, it is assumed that those who latch onto their faith are lacking something important in their life, whether it be money or community. Bayley, however, is proof that one's purpose is far beyond this earth. He witnessed the mountains that his aunt moved with tremendous faith in God, and he wanted to move those mountains, too. So, wondering where to begin his renewed faith journey, he turned towards the example of his aunt once again. Bayley entered the Catholic Church in Rome in 1842. He returned to the United States and was ordained a Catholic priest on March 2, 1844, in New York. Bayley moved through a variety of assignments in his first nine years of priesthood, gaining him wide experience. Gratefully follow-

ing the example of Mother Seton, he realized the vital role of Catholic learning institutions. So, some years later, after the formation of the Diocese of Newark and Bayley's consecration as Bishop in 1853, he continued the groundbreaking work his aunt began in Catholic schooling by founding Seton Hall University in Madison, New Jersey.

Seton Hall is the culmination of Bayley's individual transformation and courageous Catholic faith journey. Catholicism began appearing in his life in mundane ways through his friendships or the literature he read. This, however, did not lessen the monumental impact of Bayley's dreams and his influential relationship with his aunt. And maybe this is where we can most learn from our founder. Without the work of Mother Seton, James Roosevelt Bayley would not have become a Catholic. Despite his countless hours spent reading, he would not have seen the abundance of joy the Catholic faith can bring if it were not for her. The love of God brought her happiness and a purpose beyond this physical life. Her memory is nurtured by our presence at Seton Hall. She was a friend to many, including her nephew, including us. When we find ourselves in times of need, we ask Mother Seton to guide us just as she did her nephew. In classrooms across campus and disciplines, from nursing to business, the values of the Catholic faith are present in our curriculum. Everyone who participates at Seton Hall, whether it be students, parents, faculty, or staff, is the fruit of Bayley's conversion. Seton Hall continues to foster Catholicism by providing opportunities to connect faith with service. It is awe-inspiring to think about the puzzle pieces of God's plan and how they will always fit together. Seton Hall teaches, just as Bayley did, that questions are necessary. One act of courage, a simple question, may transform not only your life, but also the lives of countless others.

By Lisa Baldwin

THE FIRST COUNCIL OF NICAEA

A.D. 325

We believe in one God the Father all powerful, maker of all things seen and unseen. And we believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the only-begotten begotten from the Father, that is from the substance of the Father, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten not made, consubstantial with the Father, through whom all things came to be. Both those in heaven and those on earth; for us humans and our salvation he came down and became incarnate, became human, suffered and rose up on the third day, went up to heaven is coming to judge the living and the dead. And we believe in the Holy Spirit.

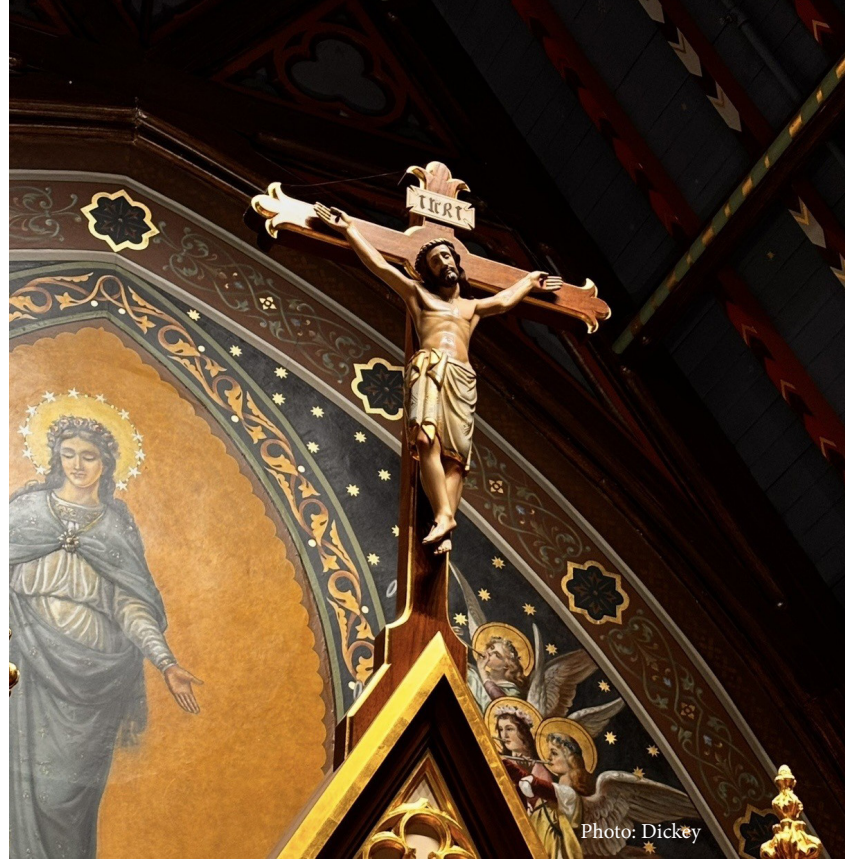
This is the text of the Nicene Creed as promulgated by the Council in 325 A.D. The slightly longer version universally known by the Churches reflects additions made by the Council of Constantinople in 381 A.D.

Into the West

The Creed in Catholic Life and Spirituality

Every Sunday at Mass, Catholics throughout the world profess the Nicene Creed. This profession of faith unites believers across languages, cultures, and generations in one common declaration: “*I believe.*” But the Creed is not merely a set of memorized words because it is the compacted summary of the Catholic faith, created in the early centuries of the Church amid challenges to the truth of who Christ is. The origins of the Nicene Creed are rooted in the struggle of the Church to articulate clearly the mystery of Christ’s divinity and humanity. In the early centuries, Christians universally worshiped Jesus as Lord, but different interpretations about His nature threatened the unity of the faith. After extensive debate, the Nicene Creed was promulgated in 325, drawing from the baptismal rite that Catholics were using 100 years prior. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* states in paragraph 185: “Whoever says ‘I believe’ says ‘I pledge myself to what we believe.’ Communion in faith needs a common language of faith, normative for all and uniting all in the same confession of faith”. This means that when recited at Mass it is not a set of words that is recited, but it is a profession of faith that demands personal assent as we commit ourselves to the truths of the Gospel.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church also describes the Creed as “a synthesis of faith” (187), as it brings together the essential truths of salvation in a structured way. Each article builds upon the other, forming the whole of Christian belief. Beginning with the words “I believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth,” shows that there is one God who is the Creator of all things. This also outlines



the first Person of the Trinity and leads into the next section which focuses on Jesus Christ where the Creed affirms both His divinity “God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God” and His humanity, “for us men and for our salvation He came down from heaven... and became man”. The life, passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ are spoken in the Creed as they are events that are real and true. They help people see that Jesus came into time and became man so that we can enter into heaven through Him. It continues by explaining the Trinity and how the Holy Spirit is “the Lord, the giver of life.” The Holy Spirit is the third Person of the Trinity who sanctifies, inspires, and dwells within the Church. The Creed concludes with faith in “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church,” the communion of saints, Baptism for the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Here, the Creed binds together the mystery of the Trinity with the lived reality of the Church’s sacramental and eschatological mission.

To profess the Creed authentically, one must understand its meaning as the words alone are insufficient unless the believer is equipped with knowledge of what they mean. For example, to say Christ is “consubstantial with the Father” requires us to grasp that our salvation rests upon His divinity (Jn 10:30). To profess

belief in “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church” means recognizing the Church’s mission and our role within it (CCC 830–833). We must both know and believe the words that we recite each week but before we can believe we must know what we are saying.

For myself it took two years of being in the seminary to see truly the depth of the Creed. Then I began to believe the Creed in its entirety and say truly “*I believe*” each week. I am not saying that one would have to go through seminary to understand the Creed; rather it took a great priest telling myself and my brothers that we should be serious in our recitation of the Creed and asked us if we really believe what we say. Now each Sunday instead of simply saying the words along with the rest of the congregation I am closing my eyes and praying the words that have been with us for 1,700 years. These words transcend time as they not only unite the Church throughout history, but it also unites the Mass, and all of us participating in that across the globe. The Creed is said between the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist to serve as a bridge in the great symphony of the Mass. From hearing the readings from Scriptures to partaking in the Eucharistic feast that was established by Jesus, the Creed unites both liturgies by reminding those present what our faith is.

I recall one of the times in which I participated in a Divine Liturgy from the Byzantine Catholic Church where I was unfamiliar with the flow of the Liturgy. During the liturgy I was brought solace when the Creed was being recited as I was able to participate prayerfully in a part of the Divine Liturgy that I have

been partaking in my whole life. Additionally, when looking back at how much the Creed has impacted my life I call to mind the Philippines, as my parents immigrated from there. This country was given the Faith about 400 years ago, and when it arrived they were professing the same Creed that I do today. It is beautiful to see the connections across time as our faith unites us together as it points to the one who we are worshipping and about to receive in the Eucharist.

The Nicene Creed is at once ancient and ever new. Born from the Church’s struggle to articulate the truth of Christ and the Trinity, it remains today the concise summary of Catholic faith. Each article proclaims the saving work of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and each profession binds us more closely to the Church and her mission. The Creed is not meant to remain on our lips alone as it must take root in our hearts and shape our lives. By studying and understanding its meaning, we strengthen our faith and can prepare ourselves in the Mass to receive Jesus in the Eucharist. By professing it with conviction and belief, we bear witness to the world. Every time we stand together at Mass and declare “I believe,” we echo the voices of the bishops at Nicaea and Constantinople, the martyrs who shed their blood for the faith, and the countless saints who lived the Creed to the fullest. To profess the Creed is to stand in communion with the entire Church past, present, and future and to proclaim with one voice the truth that sets us free (Jn 8:32).

**By Bryan
Cadag**

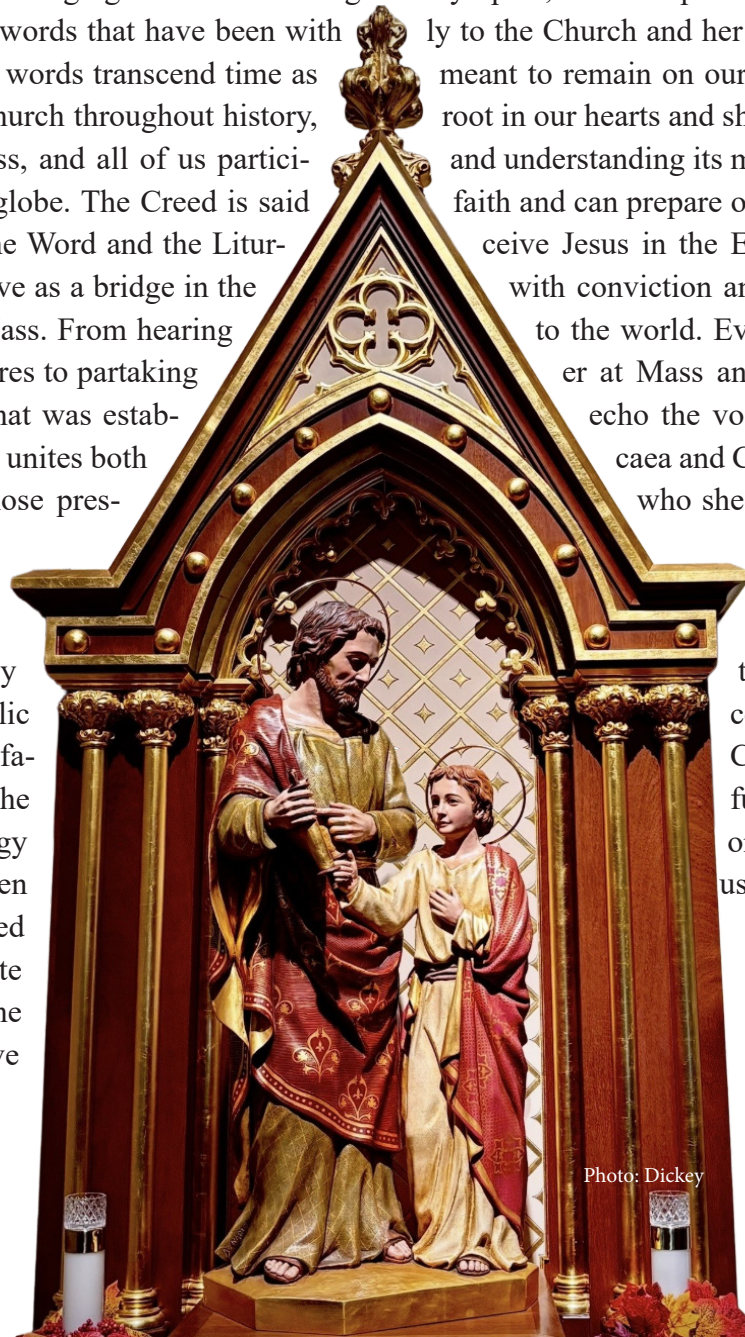


Photo: Dickey

TURNING TO THE EAST

The Coptic & Syrian Fathers' Impact on the Nicene Creed



Every Sunday morning that I walk into my parish for liturgy, I see the same Coptic icon: St. Athanasius holding a scroll of Nicaea's decrees, standing above Arius as the other clergymen at the Council surround him in prayer. The icon is a beautiful art piece and properly conveys the victory of the 318 bishops at the Council, where Athanasius served as a deacon, over heresy by the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Yet, despite the obvious importance of this painting whenever I pass by it, I often forget that these were real men in history dealing with real problems 1,700 years ago—not just characters in a painting meant to tell a tale that Christians have already heard for the one-hundredth time. It was not until I did the research and read the Church histories for this article that my eyes were opened to the true theological vigor of these men and the sheer amount of ridicule and persecution that they endured to preserve the faith that our Savior handed down through His Apostles. With that being said, I would like to reflect on the lives and theology of Sts. Alexander, Athanasius, and Eustathius of Antioch—three men from the Coptic and Syrian tradition who dedicated their lives to giving us the Creed that we as Eastern and Western Christians have now recited for almost two millennia.

As Pope of Alexandria during the outbreak of Arianism, St. Alexander was a patient but careful man who labored for unity in the Church above all. Because Arius was an Alexandrian priest and made the city the epicenter for the heresy, it was vital that St Alexander

respond quickly to guard the rest of Christianity from such dangerous theology. At first, many priests who had heard Arius preaching had visited Alexander and ridiculed him for not immediately removing the heretic from the priesthood. However, wishing to deal with the issue in patience so as not to disturb the Church, Alexander hosted a private meeting between the clergy where Arius could fairly express and defend his ideas. It was then decided at this meeting that his theology was erroneous. After the decision, the Pope presented him with forgiveness if he repented of his teachings; only when Arius refused this offer did Alexander respond loudly and authoritatively.

As his response, St. Alexander wrote a letter which emphasizes unity within the Church as a biblical commandment and the duty of Christians to work with one another toward this goal. He begins the letter to the bishops by explaining his desire to maintain peace:

Inasmuch as the Catholic Church is one body, and we are commanded in the holy Scriptures to maintain 'the bond of unity and peace,' it becomes us to write, and mutually acquaint one another with the condition of things among each of us, in order that 'if one member suffers or rejoices, we may either sympathize with each other, or rejoice together.' (1)

Within the mystical Body of Christ, any harm done to one member is harm done to the rest. Thus, Alexander carried out his papal duties to warn the other Churches so that they may not suffer from the present danger of false doctrine. Moreover, the bishops at Nicaea greatly praised the Pope for his efforts in establishing a unified date for Easter, which was the secondary controversy at the Council. In the *Synodal Letter*, they write that Alexander "at his advanced age has undergone extraordinary exertions in order that peace might be re-established among you" (1). Honored by those

around him, St. Alexander was a long-suffering pope who dedicated the latter half of his life to maintaining the unity of the Church and keep his people on the path to salvation.

Alexander departed this life shortly after the events of the Council and left his position to his beloved deacon Athanasius. Although Athanasius became Pope after the Council of Nicaea concluded, the Arian heresy persisted as a stain on the Church for many decades, prompting him to dedicate much of his writing to defending the Council's decisions and expanding upon them.

To the distress of many Christians, the Arians had argued that the Son of God did not share the same essence (*ousia*, in Greek) as God the Father and was a creature that had only become the "Son" after His

creation; simply put, the Son was created by God out of nothing rather than existing eternally with Him, which was contrary to the Church's belief. In response to this, Athanasius set out to explain the two categories of sonship in the Bible and prove that the Son's

relation to the Father was unique from us. The first sense of sonship is that which Moses writes about: becoming a child of God through grace and moral improvement; this is the case with Adam, Enoch, and the thief on the cross. The second sense, however, is akin to Abraham and Isaac. In *Defense of the Nicene Definition*, Athanasius explains the Son's relationship to the Father within this context:

(. . .) it remains then to say that the Son of God is so called according to the other sense, in which Isaac was son of Abraham; for what is naturally begotten from any one and does not accrue to him from without, that in the nature of things is a son, and that is what the name implies. (2)

The Son's relationship to the Father is similar to that of a biological son—He shares his nature and gener-

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ates directly from him. Unlike us who were “given the power to become sons of God” (Jn. 1:12), the Son has always been the Son of God even before creation, affirmed by St. John who exalts him as “the one and only Son, who came from the Father” (Jn. 1:14).

In his response to the arguments against the uniqueness of the Son to the rest of creation, Athanasius was also forced to defend the Council’s phrase “of the same substance” or *homoousios*, in Greek, in reference to the Son’s relationship to the Father. In an attempt to discredit the Council, Arius and his followers had accused the bishops of using unbiblical terms to settle theological disputes. Athanasius pointed out the hypocrisy in this claim, mentioning that it was the Arians’ deceitful wordplay that forced them to resort to extra-biblical philosophy. In the same work, he writes that this phrase was necessary to distinguish the Son from creation:

For neither are other things as the Son, nor is the Word one among others, for He is Lord and Framer of all; and on this account did the Holy Council declare expressly that he was of the essence of the Father, that we might believe the Word to be other than the nature of things origi-

nate, being alone truly from God. (2)

Thus, it was not in an attempt to falsify doctrine that the Fathers at Nicaea began to use “of the same substance” but a necessary solution to defend Christ’s position as the only-begotten Son of God.

Despite the victory at Nicaea and Athanasius’ vigorous attempts to defend the Council’s decrees, the rest of his life would be characterized by persistent ridicule, false accusations, and multiple exiles. The first major instance of these conflicts was when Emperor Constantine, in an honest but ignorant attempt at restoring unity, allowed Arius to return to Alexandria. Refusing to allow Arius back into the Church, Athanasius was met with a threat by the emperor to depose and send him into exile. Arius and his followers were greatly pleased by this and planned to wield the emperor’s anger to remove Athanasius from the city and spread their doctrine. They fabricated multiple false cases accusing Athanasius of sorcery and treason, successfully deceiving Constantine into exiling him. This was only the first of many exiles that he would suffer in his lifelong struggle with the Arians.

Finally, we turn to St. Eustathius, a colleague of



Photo: Luba

Athanasius and the Patriarch of Antioch during and after Nicaea. Because of the unfortunate fact that most of his writings were lost, we do not know his exact arguments against the Arians or the main themes of his theology. Thankfully, however, the documented Church histories of Socrates and Sozomen preserve the basic details of his contentions with them and the persecution that he suffered alongside Athanasius.

Just as in Alexandria, the Arian controversy had persisted in Antioch after Nicaea. As tensions increased, an independent synod was convened in Antioch by Eustathius to deal with his main opponent and partner of Arius, Eusebius Pamphilus. Eusebius and the other Arian bishops had refused to accept the phrase *homoousios* and argued that Eustathius' reasoning for defending it was because he believed in the heresy of Sabellius, who taught that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were merely different manifestations of God (1). Moreover, Eusebius deceitfully made a serious accusation against the Patriarch; bribing a pregnant woman to bear false witness against him, the bishops accused Eustathius of committing fornication with her and being the father of the child. Regrettably, these deceptions succeeded. Outnumbered by clergymen with malicious intent, Eustathius had rightfully exposed Eusebius for perverting the Nicene Creed but was unjustly deposed after the synod.

Eustathius' deposition incited strong reactions from the people, driving many of them to riot against the synod's decision. However, with virtuous patience and love befitting a patriarch, he wrote to his people and urged them to have faith that he will be taken care of as he believed his exile was the will of God (3). Just like his colleague Athanasius, Eustathius humbly bore great persecution in his endeavor to defend the faith preserved in the Nicene Creed.

There is a great chance that we have the Nicene Creed memorized yet almost never reflect the sentences being said; I myself am guilty of this and I would



gamble that countless Christians throughout the last 1,700 years have been as well. It was not until I began the research for this article that I returned to reciting it slowly, meditating on the theology being proclaimed. The single greatest benefit of this research, however, was reading the history behind these holy men and the struggles that they endured for the sake of truth. Sts. Alexander, Athanasius, and Eustathius dedicated their lives to defending the true Sonship of our Lord Jesus Christ and preserving the unity of the Church. They were met with hatred and two of them even suffered exile, yet through it all they did not waver. Instead, they maintained a spirit of faith and love with the hope that the future Christians could know the true Son of God; this is not only the case with these three Fathers but the other 315 present in the Council from a multitude of cities as well. When we recite the Creed and celebrate its 1700th anniversary, let us remember the struggles of these saints and the Holy Spirit's fulfillment of our Lord's promise, which was that the gates of Hades shall not prevail against His Church. Glory be to the Holy Trinity forever, amen.

By Alexander Marinelli

(1) Socrates Scholasticus, *Church History*, ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, n.d.), Ch. VI, IX, XXIV

(2) Athanasius, *Defense of the Nicene Definition*, ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, n.d.), §10, §19.

(3) Sozomen, *Church History*, ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, n.d.), Ch. XIX.

Living the Creed

Faith Rooted in History, Alive Today

Every Sunday, as the congregation of the Coptic Orthodox Church gathers to worship, familiar words rise in unison: “*We believe in one God, God the Father, the Pantocrator...*” These words form the Nicene Creed, a declaration of faith that has shaped Christian identity for 1,700 years. This year marks yet another anniversary of the Council of Nicaea, where the Creed first took form. For us as Coptic Orthodox Christians, the Creed is not only a statement of doctrine but also a living prayer, woven into the Liturgy, sacraments, and personal devotion of every believer.

Baptism is the foundation of the Christian life, and from the very beginning, it is tied to the Creed. In the baptismal room, parents recite it on behalf of the child, welcoming him or her into the Body of Christ. To be Coptic Orthodox is to confess this faith, and Baptism seals that belonging. The Creed then carries into the worship of the Church, recited during what was traditionally called the Liturgy of the Believers. In the early centuries, catechumens—those preparing for Baptism—would leave at this point. The Eucharist was, and remains, the confession of faith lived and fully embraced by the baptized. Today, catechumens remain present, but the meaning is unchanged. To receive the Body

and Blood of Christ is to stand in conviction of the Creed. That is why Baptism is inseparably connected to the Eucharist, and why our Church does not practice open Communion. The sacrament is not hospitality; it is Communion in the one Faith.

The Creed is integral not only to the Liturgy and the sacraments but also to daily devotion. In the Agpeya, the Coptic Orthodox Book of Hours, it is recited at the beginning of nearly every hour. Its repetition grounds daily life in the same truths confessed in church. Whether at home, at work, or in solitude, the Creed provides stability. It is a reminder that the God we worship in the Liturgy is the same God who

*In a time when so much is
changing and truth often feels
blurry, it reminds me of
what I know with certainty.*

walks with us through ordinary hours. For many of us, the Creed becomes a spiritual anchor. When doubts arise or when life feels uncertain, its words offer clarity. Each phrase carries profound theology: Christ is not only the Son of God but “Light of Light, true God of true God.” The Holy Spirit is not a distant force but “the Lord, the Giver of Life.” These are not abstract formulas but truths that give shape to personal faith.

The Creed also guides my daily living. In a time when so much is changing and truth often feels blurry, it reminds me of what I know with certainty: who God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are, and what

our calling is as His Church. Believing in one God, the Creator of Heaven and Earth, calls me to care for what He has made. It is not just an abstract idea but a daily responsibility of stewardship. Confessing Christ as Savior challenges me to forgive and to love, even when my instinct is to do the opposite. Acknowledging the Holy Spirit as the Giver of Life draws me back to prayer, where I am renewed when life feels heavy. As a leader on campus and in the Church, this truth steadies me. The Creed strengthens my voice when I guide others, reminding me that what I speak and live is not my own opinion but the faith that has been passed from generation to generation. It is not just words we recite on Sunday. It is truth rooted in my heart, shaping how I live and giving me courage to lead with conviction when so much else feels uncertain.



Photo: Mark Naoum

The Creed's hope in "the life of the world to come" lifts our eyes to eternity, where salvation reaches its fullness. Equally important, it unites believers across time and place. When a Christian in Egypt, America, or Ethiopia recites the Creed, he or she joins voices with saints of the past and the faithful around the globe. In the Coptic Orthodox understanding, to confess "one holy, catholic, and apostolic Church" is to proclaim that the Church is sanctified by Christ, universal in its fullness, and built on the faith of the Apostles. The Creed reminds us not only of who God is, but also who we are in Him—redeemed people belonging to the one Body of Christ, preserved in holiness, universality, and apostolic faith.

To the Coptic Orthodox Church, the Creed is more than an ancient theological text written centuries ago; it is an ongoing reminder of our Lord Christ, our God, who is beyond time, and because of this, He died

and rose for us, and continues to redeem and perfect us. The Creed serves as a constant reminder of this fact. Each phrase carries truth that can take root in our lives, shaping how we think, pray, and act. Born out of theological conflict, the Nicene Creed remains a testament to unity and clarity. It connects us as Orthodox Christians to the wisdom of the early Church while also serving as a shared confession across much of Christianity, embraced in the liturgies of Orthodox, Catholic, and many Protestant traditions. Central to our worship, sacraments, and daily prayer, the Creed continues to shape both communal life and personal devotion.

To know the Creed is to walk step by step through the story of Jesus Christ—the beauty of His love for us, and the depth of the sacrifices He endured for our salvation. Its words are as relevant in our daily struggles as they were in the halls of the Council. And just as the first Apostles, guided by the Holy Spirit, gathered at the Council of Jerusalem to decide matters of faith for the whole Church, so too was the Creed the fruit of that same Spirit at work centuries later. In the words of the Apostles, "For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things" (Acts 15:28). The Creed stands in that same stream of Spirit-inspired decision, an inheritance that flows from the Apostles all the way back to Christ Himself.

The truth of the world seems to shift day by day, but the truth expressed in the Nicene Creed, handed down by the Holy Spirit through the Apostles from Jesus Christ, has not wavered. This is why every Sunday I will stand with joy and gratitude, beginning to recite the words: "*Truly we believe...*"

By Christy Beshara

In the Life and Church of Europe's First Christians: The Macedonians

I live in two worlds. An English-speaking one, and a Macedonian-speaking one. This is not merely about an ethnicity, a last name on my back; it is, instead, about a reverence for the teachings of Christ that begins in Acts 16:9-15. Here the Apostle Paul is called to bring the Gospel into Europe, and Lydia, a Macedonian, becomes the first known European convert of Christianity. A seller of purple cloth, she was a successful businesswoman. Paul and his companions went outside the city gate of Phillipi, where they found Lydia. And the Lord “opened her heart to respond to Paul’s message” (Acts 16:14), and she was made anew with Christ. Following her conversion, she invited Paul and his companions into her home, thus making a Macedonian home the first European Christian gathering place. Two thousand years later, I am blessed to practice the Gospel of my ancestors before me.

As we celebrate the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea, I call upon the way in which my country’s Church connects to the Creed. Much like its Western counterparts, we begin with “Верувам во еден Бог (I believe in One God),” but differ in our application of the Byzantine Rite, with the Divine Liturgy of St. John Christendom and St. Basil the Great.

Something that many are unaware of is the fact that for a nation with so few inhabitants, Macedonia has such a substantial historical background in the foundation of Christianity. The leader of the Church is the Archbishop of Ohrid, a position which dates back to the 10th century, and it functioned as a self-governing archbishopric under the Byzantine Empire. Even under the tsardom of Bulgaria, the Church functioned as not only a regional Church, but one of great importance for all current-day Macedonia—a beacon of Christianity in an area of the world variably ruled by Islam and communists. This autocephalous nature of the Church allowed it to persist through times of changing governance and control.

With the coming of the Ottomans in the 14th century, all of Macedonia came under their control. The Archbishopric of Ohrid retained some autonomy in the empire, with Christians being recognized by the sultanate as a distinct people. It preserved Church Slavonic liturgy not only in Macedonian territories, but also in Albania, Greece, Serbia, and Bulgaria, where ethnic populations resided. The Ottomans confused the situation by placing the Macedonian Church under the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople.

Both outside Hellenic Churches and the Ottoman Empire increased pressures to abolish common Church practice in the lands, until it became no more. In 1767, Sultan Mustafa III, at the request of Patriarch Samuel I of Constantinople, abolished the Archbishopric of Ohrid. Its dioceses and bishops were fully absorbed into the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Services shifted to the Greek language, Greek bishops moved into Macedonian lands to give service, and Hellenization of the Slavonic Church began to take form.

During the time period of the Ottoman Empire’s waning, Macedonian reformers and thinkers began to credit their efforts to form an independent state through a revival of the Church, for the people, and for God. Nationalism throughout Europe grew, religious identity and national identity became intertwined.



Photo: Maksimov

People were no longer content with their religious restrictions in the Ottoman Empire. Bulgaria established an exarchate in 1870, with Serbia close behind it, but this forced Macedonians to choose between the two—with little to no theological difference between them, and no possibility of a return of the Archbishopric of Ohrid.

In the era of the two World Wars, the Macedonian territory was under the rule of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. The Serbian Orthodox Church was thus reinstated, presiding over the territories of Macedonia and removing the Church's autonomy once again. Nevertheless, parishes across the territories—especially the immediate lands that the Ohrid Church influenced, such as Pelagonia Valley—still had ties to local tradition, saints, and monasteries, which were indispensable to retaining an identity. Following World War II, Macedonia became one of the constituent republics of Yugoslavia whose distinct language and culture was, ironically, accepted and recognized by the Socialist dictator of the time, Josip Broz Tito. This fostered a clear revival of a call to restore the national Church.

In 1958, after nearly two hundred years of a nationless, Churchless state, a clergy-laity assembly established the restoration of the Ohrid Archbishopric as the true Macedonian Orthodox Church. Dositej II became the first archbishop. In 1967, the Macedonian Church declared full autocephaly in its mother city, Ohrid. Confronted with regional frustration and opposition, especially from the Church of Constantinople, it enjoyed the recognition of the Yugoslav Communist government.

Macedonia declared independence from Yugoslavia in 1991, and in 2022, the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople recognized the Macedonian Church as canonical, restoring Communion, and ushering a new time of religious success and independence in Macedonia. The current archbishop, who has led the Church since 1999, is

Archbishop Stefan.

The Nicene Creed, being the ultimate foundation of the Macedonian Orthodox Church and the articulation of their faith, it coincided with its endurance throughout history. The clear belief that “Jesus Christ is True God from True God” not only unified believers within the territory but preserved doctrinal stability for Macedonians. The Creed provided and still provides today a theological unity by affirming a Holy Trinity and creating a foundation for worship. Early councils were thus continued through this Creed, and what the Macedonian Church is now is a final product of the continuation of the key elements established 1,700 years ago.

I was Christened in the town of Sveti Nikole, Macedonia, shortly after my first birthday. My official entrance to the Church, it signaled my first Holy Communion and the accepting of Christ into my entire life. My godparents renounced Satan and confessed the Creed to the priest. I was dipped three times in the holy water—each time done in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—and then received Chrismation, or the anointing of holy oil on my skin. Clothed in white garments, a single snip of my newborn hair was cut from my scalp—a symbol of my first offering of my humanity to God Almighty. I then received my Holy Communion, receiving the Eucharist in the great hall of the Sveti Nikola (Saint Nicholas) Church that



Photo: Maksimov

day. A life not only destined but supported by God, the Christening I received ensured that my soul, embalmed and protected by the Holy Trinity, was blessed in the utmost ways. While this was akin to my Catholic friends, I soon began to realize the differences between Church practices.

In my youth, I was self-conscious to proclaim the religion of my forefathers, not as an aspect of embarrassment but as a matter of understanding. My Western Christian neighbors did not understand why I would celebrate Christmas on January 7th, or celebrate Saint Nicholas' Day on December 19th, hosting multiple families in my home, feasting to the good works of a man who lived centuries ago. For it was not just the way in which the saint lived, but the people he affected, the children he healed. He made the world a better place through the teachings of Christ, and as an impressionable child, this stuck to me.

How our Church has nourished a tight community rooted in our Faith is maybe best shown in a personal encounter between my Baba (grandmother), Dusanka Cvetkovska, and her former neighbor Archbishop Stefan. The two had a cobblestone wall that separated their properties in the village of Dobrusevo. Recently, the Saints Kiril and Metodij Church in Cedar Grove, New Jersey hosted him, as well as his diocese, to partake in Church service for an entire weekend, including a grand cultural dance. Seated at the table with his fellow bishops, Church attendees were encouraged to go up to him, kiss his right hand, and ask for his blessing. My grandmother, who lives hundreds of miles away, rarely visits New Jersey. However, when she heard that he was coming, there was no way she was going to let the chance pass. She grabbed my sister and me by our wrists, and

pulled us across the tables of bishops and clergymen to where he sat. We all kissed his hand, but before we left, my Baba sat there and began to speak in his ear. Not making anything of it, my sister and I walked back to our table, observing the conversation. My Baba and Archbishop Stefan hugged, and she walked over, a tear in her eye.

"What is wrong, Baba?" I asked with genuine concern.

"He is okay with the fig trees," she answered curtly. Little did I know that my Baba had grown long fig trees on her property, spilling over to his. Not knowing what he would say, he took her hand, and reassured her, for they were "*samo komshi* (only neighbors)."

Thus, this exemplifies the tradition and humanity of where I come from. Religion and national identity are intertwined. What it means to be a good person is not only to do good and forgive others, but to love God; for he loved us, so why should we not in turn love each other?

To feel within me not only a national, but a religious energy that courses through my blood, and the blood of my forefathers, is a gift only ordained by God. By allowing God into my home, my heart, and my soul, I have seen the same holy promises that were proclaimed and understood by my ancestors long ago. To be the same blood as the first Europeans to hear the word of Christ is not only a gift, but a fortune that I intend to pass on to my children, and their children,

so the Word is never lost. The Creed that was embraced across my lands so long ago has culminated into a warm, human reality that has encompassed the teachings of Christ.

It is truly a gift to have shared my story, thank you, and God bless. Бог да биде со вас.

**By Nicholas
Maksimov**



Photo: Maksimov



Photo: Luba

The Parable of the Runner Part 1

The Sun, the great light, brought forth life upon the world. That is the only proper way to start this parable. The radiant, unblemished ball of light was vital; it provided energy for all the creatures below and gave them life. The Sun would descend from the heavens into the depths so that it could rise again the next day, bringing light to the land. During the sunrise, rays of red and blue, like blood and water, gushed forth across the horizon. These rays, the first few lights of the day, would chase back the curtain of shadow, revealing the dew-stained grass park.

The park was diverse, full of plains, rivers, forests, and mountains. It was here that a great race would

take place. Now, the race and its course should be familiar to you. It is one we all must take, a race humans have endured since the dawn of time.

This race was one of many; nothing particular or special about it. About seven million races had passed under the watchful gaze of the Sun. Each one was just as important and extraordinary as the last.

Now, on one brisk spring morning, the racers emerged under the shadows of the trees. The teams of racers were more numerous than the stars in the sky, each team containing their own unique culture and ethnicity. Of the countless racers, there was a young boy named Cursor. He wore a crescent smile across his

face, eager for the race to begin. His story was one of many. It was neither greater nor inferior to the others. Yet he was one of the few who learned the truth about how to run the Race.

An official stepped out from the starting line. “On your mark. Get set. Go!” the official shouted, followed by the sharp bang of his pistol.

The racers rushed off like a river of water. They left the shadows beneath the trees and were greeted by the Sun’s warm light. A crowd cheered them on with words of encouragement. Most racers had a coach or two who would explain the rules of the race while leading them through the first lap. The coaches often held their racers’ hands as they entered the more difficult terrain of the course.

Cursor spent the first lap exploring. When he first saw the broad brown oak trees, he stopped. He climbed up the tree, adoring the angelic view from above. Upon seeing a patch of ruby red roses and plum purple lilies, he stopped. He took a deep breath, savoring their sweet fragrance. Cursor only ran when he was dashing across a field of emerald, green grass while he played tag with a couple of other racers. After the game, he walked to his coaches who were a few strides ahead of him. He fell into their arms and gave them a hug as he rested his tired body. He would then look at the Sun, resting in the baby blue sky, and thank it for the beautiful day. Reflecting the sun’s brilliant light was a white dove. Its wings flapped steadily as it sang beautiful hymns of glee to the Sun. Cursor stretched out his hands and pretended that he was a dove. Truly, Cursor’s race was full of laughter and joy.

Now, there was a time when Cursor was running in a dark forest. A few strands of Light trickled through the pure, gorgeous, green leaves. There was never a place so beautiful as this forest. Turning left, he saw the prettiest bush with luscious fruit. So,

Cursor, seeing that the fruit was desirable, a delight to the eyes, reached out to pluck it from the bush. As Cursor plucked the fruit, he tripped and fell into the bush. Thorns like fangs bit into Cursor’s flesh, causing chilling blood to drip from his body. Cursor turned his head up, and his heart sank. Ahead of him was the dove to whom he looked up. Blood had infected its once pure feathers. Its body was a mangled mess of flesh and feathers. Oozing out of the dove’s flesh was a never-ending flow of writhing worms. The vile filth of the dead slivered throughout the body, consuming it until there was nothing left.

Cursor could not bear the scene that he saw. How could a bush so beautiful hold a secret so disgusting? He left the bush with tears streaming down his face. The calm spring wind turned hot and humid. It burned the scars on his skin. The flowers around him started to wilt from the blazing glare of the Sun. The pure green leaves started to fade. Spring had departed, and summer had arrived. There was a ringing bell.

The first sector of the race was complete.

“Faster! Faster! The voices cried as Cursor entered the second portion of the course. Cursor looked out at the crowd and spotted his coaches. His coaches joined the crowd, shouting, “Pass People! Pass People! You need to move up to the front pack!”

Cursor followed the voices of the crowd and increased his strides, passing as many people as possible. Yet, it was not easy, for the other racers had their own vision of success, which led them to exert themselves through the pangs of strife.

Next, the racers entered a desert. Cursor slowed his pace when he saw the first hill. The impassible mound made from the grittiest sand loomed over him like a giant. Cursor’s eyes scattered to his coaches. Most of the coaches, including Cursor’s, stood to the

He fell into their arms and gave them a hug as he rested his tired body. He would then look at the Sun, resting in the baby blue sky, and thank it for the beautiful day.

side, they did not offer to hold their hands, but they did cheer and shout for their runners. The applause caused a flame to ignite inside Cursor's heart. He charged up the hill, slipping once on the orange sand, but rising again to continue his sprint. Throughout the horrible climb the Sun showed little mercy. Its streaming red rays flogged Cursor's body like a ruthless task master. Cursor responded by grinding his teeth while the pleasant image of catching up to the front pack gave strength to his arms and legs.

The uphill was followed by a series of more hills that stretched off toward the horizon. Through the treacherous course, Cursor watched as racer after racer fell victim to their own personal injuries: broken legs, twisted ankles, and torn calves. Cursor wanted to help them in their agony, but he could not risk falling behind. Fortunately, the only time coaches were directly involved in the race was to comfort and console their injured athletes. However, some unfortunate runners did not have a good coach to comfort them, so they had to grind their teeth and clench their knuckles as they endured the torment. Other racers found the pain too hard, so they would cut the course, seeking an easier advantage over others.

Without direct guidance from his coach, Cursor had to experiment with his own race strategy. Upon descending a hill, Cursor extended his arms and legs, gliding down the dune. The momentum he gained carried him through the next set of hills he climbed. On the flat desert plain Cursor tried to maintain a consistent rhythm in his strides. When Cursor arrived at an oasis, he would stop for a minute to drink the fresh cool water from a nearby teal stream.

Now eventually Cursor came to the end of the desert and was faced with two paths. He wanted to take the path to the left, which led through a wilderness where the trees protected him from the Sun. His coaches commanded him to go right, which led up a massive hill, for they feared that Cursor would twist an ankle in the wilderness.

Cursor turned right and immediately cursed the names of his coaches, for the heat from the Sun was unbearable as bitter sweat seeped into his mouth. By the time Cursor reached the top, ten racers had passed him. Once again, the path split off between another hill and the wilderness. His coaches directed him toward the hill, but this time, Cursor was done listening to his coaches. He shook the dirt off his feet and spat at his coaches, declaring, "No longer shall you be the master over my life. I am free of you, for I have seen much on my run. Enough to form my own path." With those words, he departed into the dark, moist embrace of the wilderness. He never looked back, and he never saw his coaches again.

A cool, chilling wind caused his back to shiver, pushing him further down the path. The current came swiftly, like a thief in the night. It ripped a few leaves off their branches, away from their fellow brethren. Summer was long gone, but Autumn had arrived. There was a rattling bell.

The second sector was complete.

By Joey Harrison



Photo: Luba

MEET THE



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