

The Confessor's Tongue for October 26, 2008

18th Sunday After Pentecost: Great Martyr Demetrios

In honor of St. Maximus the Confessor, whose tongue and right hand were cut off in an attempt by compromising authorities to silence his uncompromising confession of Christ's full humanity & divinity.

26 October Great Martyr Demetrios

Born in Salonika (or Thessalonica), after the death of his father, he became governor of the city. Moved with zeal for the Christian faith, he began to openly preach the name of Christ and to teach the true faith to the inhabitants of Salonika worshipping idols. For this Emperor Maximilian commanded that St. Demetrius be imprisoned where he blessed St. Nestor for his martyr's asceticism (see Oct. 27) and then was pierced by spears in the year 306. Soon after his demise his faithful servant St. Lupus (see Aug. 23) was beheaded for his confession of Christ. The relics of St. Demetrius, exuding healing and fragrant myrrh, were found after a little bit of time during the digging of trenches for a new church. In church hymns St. Demetrius is praised as the "Ornament of Martyrs", "Defender of kings", "Co-Champion of warriors", "Consumer of enemies", "Enricher of the poor", "and Haven for those fleeing to him".

St. Nestor (October 27) suffered for Christ in Salonika in the year 306. He always indignantly saw how the king and one of the people Lyaeos, the imperial favorite gladiator, killed Christians for entertainment. With the blessing of St. Demetrius of Thessalonica (see Oct. 26), he "fearlessly" once went to the games and there, "bearing the divine armor of the invincible cross", defeated Lyaeos. The angry emperor then ordered to pierce the valiant young man with spears.

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We Must Be Faithful Where We Are

Protopresbyter Thomas Hopko

We are taught that to discover God's will for us, we must be faithful to Him where we are, faithful to and in the conditions in which He has placed us. One of the greatest obstacles to the discovery of one's vocation in life, which is a clear expression of our disobedience and self-will, is the desire to be someone else, someplace else, sometime else. We have all heard people say that, if only they lived in another place, or in another time, or with other people...then they could be holy. Or, if only they were married. Or, if only they were not married. If only this, and if only that! We must come to see how sinful such an attitude is, how crazy and deluded. It is simply blasphemy. And it may well be that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit which Christ says cannot be forgiven, for it dares to tell God that our failures in life are His fault for making us the way we are (Matthew 12:31; Luke 12:10).

God has made us who we are. He has put us where we are, even when it is our own self-will that has moved us. He has given us our time and our place. He has given us our specific destiny. We must come to the point when we do not merely resign ourselves

to these realities, but when we love them, bless them, give thanks to God for them as the conditions of our self-fulfillment as persons, the means to our sanctity and salvation.

Being faithful where we are is the basic sign that we will God's will for our lives. The struggle to "blossom where we are planted," as the saying goes, is the way to discern God's presence and power in our lives, to hear His voice, to accomplish His purposes, to share His holiness. Jesus said that only those who are "faithful in little" inherit much and get set over much. Those who are not faithful in the little things of life, and thereby fail to accept and to use what God provides, end up losing the little that they have, or—as Jesus says in St. Luke's Gospel—the little that they think they have, for even that "little" may exist only in their own deluded imaginations (Matthew 25:14-30; Luke 19:11-27; 8:18).

So, the summary of the whole thing is this: we must labor to do the smallest good and to avoid the smallest sin in the smallest, seemingly most insignificant details of life. We must accept who we are, where we are, when we are, and how we are, and struggle to sanctify our real state of existence by the grace of God; resisting the world, the flesh, and the devil, and gaining the Spirit of God through Christ in the Church. We must participate in the services and Sacraments, be fed on the Scriptures and imitate the Saints. We must seek out the help of the experienced, and heed their counsel and advice. And we must go to God Himself and say with a pure heart: "Thy will be done!" And He will see that we find our vocation and calling in life, and become the saints that He has willed us to be from the beginning.

The Offering of a Candle in Church

What does a person entering church do first of all? In nine cases out of ten — he buys a candle. Our joining the real Christian ritual begins with a small wax candle. It is impossible to imagine an Orthodox church without burning candles.

The interpreter of the Liturgy, the Holy Fool-for-Christ Simeon of Thessalonica (XV century), said that pure wax symbolizes the purity and innocence of people offering it. The wax is offered as a sign of our repentance for our obstinacy and willfulness. The softness and malleability of the wax speak of our readiness to obey God. The flame of the candle shows the warmth of love to God. We should not put up a candle just for the sake of the ritual, with our remaining cold. The outward action must be supported by a prayer, be it even a simple one expressed in your own words.

Candles are indispensable during church services. The newly baptized and those undergoing the mystery of marriage are holding candles. The burial service is read in the presence of many burning candles. Believers are forming a procession of the

Cross holding candles and shielding the flame from the wind with their hands. There are no strict rules about the number of candles to be put or any definite place to put them. To buy a candle is a small sacrifice to God, a sacrifice which is voluntary and not burdensome. A big and expensive candle is not more gracious than a small one.

Those who come to church regularly usually put several candles: to the icon celebrated on that day—it is usually placed on the lectern in the center of the church; also to the icons of the Savior and the Holy Theotokos—in a prayer for the your living relations, to the Crucifix on a small rectangular table holding candles for the departed to rest in peace. If you wish you can put a candle to any icon of a saint or saints.

Sometimes there are so many burning candles on the candleholder in front of an icon that there is no room to put yours. You should not put out somebody else's candle for the sake of yours, it would be better to ask someone working in the church to put it there later. Do not be embarrassed by somebody putting out your candle when the service is over — the sacrifice has already been accepted by God. You should not listen to tales about the necessity to put a candle only with your right hand, about the misfortunes to happen if the flame of your candle went out, and that it is a deadly sin to melt the candle at the bottom in order to fix it better in the candleholder, etc. There are many superstitions associated with church and all of them are meaningless.

Your beeswax candle is pleasing to God. But He appreciates the burning ardor of your heart much more. Our spiritual life and participation in service cannot be limited to putting up a candle. The candle itself would not deliver us from sins, would not bring us closer to God, neither will it give us strength for resistance in the invisible battle. A candle is full of symbolic meaning, but we are saved not by a symbol, but by a real entity — God's grace.

Raising Children: Laying the Foundations

Bishop Irenaeus

How can we cultivate religious feeling in our children's souls, which will later bear fruits of faith and piety? How can we breathe religious feeling into our children?

Parents can achieve this by teaching the basic truths of our holy faith to their children while they are yet very young. Don't be frightened! Every mother can do it; it is very simple.

With simple, heartfelt words, let her speak as often as possible to her young children about their compassionate and good Heavenly Father, who loves them so much and gives them every good thing....

The mother should also tell her children about the birth of Jesus Christ....She should also tell them about his passion and death on the Cross, explaining that the Lord suffered all this because men were so bad. Then every child will immediately understand that he should not be bad. Then let the mother

continue and speak about the Resurrection and the Ascension....

Then she can tell him about the Mother of God....and the holy angels, especially about his guardian angel, who loves good children!....

Every day she should take her child to the icon corner, make the sign of the Cross herself and then trace it on him with his own little hand. In this way she will gradually teach him to make the sign of the Cross and pray by himself. Finally, and most importantly, she must not fail to bring her child to church and the Spotless Mysteries every Sunday....

How easy it is to inspire in a small child love and reverence for the Divine Services of the Church! It is enough to make him understand that in church, the Lord, who is present everywhere, is more perceptible—the God who loves children so much and who calls them also to Himself. Consequently, in church we must stand quietly, carefully make the sign of the Cross and pray....

Teach [your child] to pray to God when he is young. He can pray, however small he is. Since he asks his parents for everything he wants, why can't he ask his Heavenly Father? Just begin teaching him when he is small, and pray will gradually become a necessity for him. Regularly say morning and evening prayers together with your children, as well as the prayers before and after meals, so that they won't come to the table like unreasoning beasts to their manger, but will learn that, if we want gifts from God, we must ask and thank Him for them. Every child should know the "Our Father," the "Rejoice, O Virgin Theotokos," and other short prayers.

It is a very grievous thing that common family prayer has almost completely disappeared in our age. Indeed, it is exactly for this reason that we see so many unhappy families and so many failures in child-rearing — men have ceased to pray....

You see now, dear parent, why it is necessary to teach children piety even from their infancy. You see that mothers especially must teach their children faith, godliness, and prayer even before they start to go to school....Teach by words, but most of all, by example. In vain will catechists and teachers labor later to make your children good, godly Christians, if the foundations were not laid at home....

Upcoming Events 2008

- 26 October, Sunday, 5:00 p.m. OCF meeting at rectory with group from Plano.
- 27 October, Monday, 8:00 p.m. 'Credo' Concert at church.
- 1 November, Saturday, 9:00 a.m. at St. Seraphim's in Dallas: Consecration of Abbot Jonah to the Episcopacy.
- 9 November, Sunday: Visit of Bishops
- 15 November: Nativity Fast Begins, Baptism of Marcos Garcia
- 12-13 December: All-Night Vigil & Liturgy for St. Herman of Alaska.

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!