

The Confessor's Tongue for May 10, 2009

Fourth Sunday of Pascha: the Paralytic Christ is Risen! Indeed, He is risen!

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.

The Ministry of Coffee Hour

Coffee Hour has become an institution in the American Orthodox Church. Though not traditional, it serves an important end.

In times past in the Old World, people lived close to where they attended church. A village might have one church that everyone attended. A neighborhood in a city would have its local parish that those who lived in the area would attend. Hence, common worship in church was a continuation of a life already lived in common to a significant degree. People already knew each other outside of church, visited each other, worked together, ate together, helped each other, and so forth.

In these United States, and especially here in Denton, Texas, it is our common faith and worship that bring us to worship together. Most commonly, we do not live in the same neighborhood, very often do not even live in the same city, as people regularly commute up to half an hour or more to attend church, do not work together, and very often would not know each other at all but for Christ who unites us in His Church. In this context, Coffee Hour becomes an important, nay, nearly essential, means of deepening our acquaintance with one another, building friendships, and learning to love and support one another. It nourishes and strengthens our relationships and helps us to become a family and a community rather than just a collection of people who happen to come together on Sunday morning. (Our regular picnics also serve this end as well as providing a non-threatening event for non-Orthodox family and friends to come and get exposed to the Orthodox Church and Faith.)

At St. Maximus, we have had a substantial meal for Coffee Hour from the beginning by the common desire of the parish. This allows us to have fellowship as we eat together after our common participation in the one Cup and one Body of our Lord. We break the Eucharistic fast together and are nourished by food and fellowship.

We, the faithful of this parish, share this common ministry of Coffee Hour: by coming to church, by staying afterwards and not departing immediately every week, by providing food, and by helping to clean up. It takes some work, some effort, some planning, and a little sacrifice on our part. But if we can understand the greater good being achieved by it, we may better and more joyfully shoulder the burden of Coffee Hour.

The burden of Coffee Hour has grown as the parish has grown and there are more mouths to feed. To lighten the burden, we have recently divided the parish into four groups. Thus, everyone will participate in Coffee Hour one week out of four. Though this is frequent, because of the size of the

groups the burden on any one family should not be excessive or unreasonable.

Coffee Hour is a way to serve your brethren in Christ once a month by providing a meal for all. This meal need not be elaborate or cost a great deal of money—if one approaches it wisely. A pot of beans or rice, soup, roasted potatoes, etc., all will go a long way to feed people without costing much money. One can make soup to feed fifty without spending more than \$10-15, perhaps even less. A pot of beans to feed fifty costs no more than \$5. We should bring food according to our means out of love and our desire to serve. If we wish to provide an elaborate meal, we may; if we find we must keep it simple, we may. If our circumstances do not permit us to bring or prepare food at all, we can be diligent in helping to set up, take down, and clean up. Tables and chairs have to be set up and taken down each week; the church and the hall need to be cleaned and straightened and put back in order; the trash needs to be taken out and counters wiped down. All this is a contribution to Coffee Hour, and there are none of us who are unable to contribute at some level or other.

Let us embrace this as the ministry it is, and do it cheerfully without grumbling and complaining. As we prepare food, let us pray for those who will partake that we may all be bound more firmly together in love and may be built up and strengthened in our common Faith. And let us all stay as frequently as possible to partake of both food and fellowship that we many minister to one another. And let us guard our lips, lest through careless, frivolous, or critical speech we deprive ourselves of the grace given through Holy Communion. May our offering of ourselves to Christ's service at Coffee Hour be blessed!

The First Epistle of St. John the Theologian

Last week we began a Wednesday evening class on First John. This epistle though but five brief chapters is among the sublimest and most profound of the New Testament writings, addressing some essential questions. How can we be certain that we know God? How can we be prepared to resist Antichrist and not succumb to his seductions? What is the path to having true fellowship with God and our fellow man? How can we have fullness of joy? These and other questions are addressed in this Epistle, which we shall spend May and June studying.

Everyone is invited to partake of this rich feast for the soul. In the course of it, one will also be instructed in some methods of studying the Bible that one can use on one's own. So join us! We'll also make available St. Justin Popovich's commentary on the Epistle, who is formally being canonized in Serbia this month.

Prayers for the 24 Hours of the Day and Night

The following prayers are found as one prayer in the prayers before sleep of many prayerbooks. This is a collection of short prayers that can be used as the Jesus Prayer. They can also be used with bows or prostrations to help us focus on a particular area of need. If one wishes to use these prayers throughout the day, the hour for each prayer is indicated.

For the Day

0600 Lord, exclude me not from Thy heavenly blessings.

0700 Lord, deliver me from eternal torments.

0800 Lord, whether I have sinned in mind or thought, word or deed, forgive me.

0900 Lord, deliver me from all ignorance, forgetfulness, cowardice, and stone-like insensitivity.

1000 Lord, deliver me from every temptation.

1100 Lord, enlighten my heart which evil desires have darkened.

1200 Lord, as a man I have sinned: as a gracious God, have mercy on me, seeing the weakness of my soul.

1300 Lord, send Thy Grace to my aid, that I may glorify Thy holy name.

1400 Lord Jesus Christ, inscribe me, Thy servant, in the book of life, and grant me a good end.

1500 Lord, my God, even though I have done nothing good before Thee, grant by Thy Grace that I make a beginning of good.

1600 Lord, sprinkle the dew of Thy grace into my heart.

1700 Lord of Heaven and earth, remember me, Thy sinful, shameful, and impure servant, in Thy Kingdom. Amen.

For the Night

1800 Lord, accept me in penitence.

1900 Lord, abandon me not.

2000 Lord, lead me not into temptation.

2100 Lord, grant me good thoughts.

2200 Lord, grant me tears, the remembrance of death and compunction.

2300 Lord, grant me the thought of confessing my sins.

2400 Lord, grant me humility, chastity, and obedience.

0100 Lord, grant me patience, courage, and meekness.

0200 Lord, cause the root of good to dwell in me – Thy fear in my heart.

0300 Lord, grant that I may love Thee with all my soul and mind and to do Thy will in all things.

0400 Lord, protect me from certain people, demons, and passions, and from any other unseemly thing.

0500 Lord, I know that Thou doest as Thou wilt: may Thy will be in me a sinner, for blessed art Thou for ever. Amen.

The following prayers are useful before and after Confession.

A Prayer before Confession

St. Symeon the New Theologian

O God and Lord of all! Who hath the power over every breath and soul, the only One able to heal me, hearken unto the prayer of me, the wretched one, and, having put him to death, destroy the serpent nestling within me by the descent of the All-Holy and Life-Creating Spirit. And vouchsafe me, poor and naked of all virtue, to fall with tears at the feet of my spiritual father, and call his holy soul to mercy, to have mercy on me. And grant, O Lord, unto my heart humility and good thoughts, becoming a sinner, who hath consented to repent unto Thee, and do not abandon unto the end the one soul, which hath united itself unto Thee and hath confessed Thee, and instead of all the world hath chosen Thee and hath preferred Thee. For Thou knowest, O Lord, that I want to save myself, and that my evil habit is an obstacle. But all things are possible unto Thee, O Master, which are impossible for man. Amen.

Prayer After Confession

O Lord of mercy! Through Thy gracious goodness, my conscience is now unburdened of sins which oppressed me, and in the humblest manner of which I am capable, I revealed to Thy priest all my sins that I could recollect. I humbly beseech Thee: accept this confession and forgive me all my trespasses, those which I have forgotten, as well as those I have remembered. Grant me grace, Lord, to live more carefully hereafter and to refrain from my former vices, which I utterly detest. I firmly resolve never to be guilty of them, but especially my most bountiful and merciful Savior, enable me to withstand those temptations with which I am most troubled, and to avoid all occasions for offending Thee again. If a just man falls seven times in the day, how much more reason have I to fear for myself, O Lord, and dread that I shall not be steadfast in my resolution, having through my own frailty and vicious habits increased the natural blindness and weakness in which I was born.

Yet, O Lord, I firmly resolve through Thy merciful assistance, never to consent to any mortal sin, from which I humbly beseech Thee to preserve me while I live; as to my other sins and imperfections, I resolve to stand up against them and hope, through Thy goodness, at length to avoid them. Amen.

Upcoming Events 2009

25 May, Memorial Day Matins (8:30), Liturgy (10:00 a.m.), and Annual Picnic at noon.

16-19 August, Proposed men's retreat at Holy Archangels Monastery. Please let Father know if you are interested.

7 September, Labor Day Picnic

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!