

The Confessor's Tongue for June 14, 2009

All Saints

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 Sunday of All Saints

On this the first Sunday after Pentecost, we remember the Saints, God's holy ones, of all ages. The word 'saints' literally means 'holy ones', from the Greek word *hagios*, or holy. We Christians are all called to be holy as God is holy, so all of us are predestined by God and called to be saints. The Church's canonized Saints are those Christians whose lives clearly manifested a fullness of Christ's presence in them by which they have been made holy, or 'set apart' to God and purified from sin to such a degree that the Church holds them up as examples to us.

A saint is not one who lived a perfect life free from sin, but is one who faced his sins, repented, confessed, and forsook them and allowed Christ to cleanse him and live in him. We, too, are going through this process to the degree we cooperate with God, seek Him, and submit ourselves to Him daily.

A saint is not one who is necessarily an example in every way. The Martyrs are honored for their willingness to lay down their lives for the sake of Christ, as are Confessors. The Russian royal family was canonized as holy 'passion bearers' for the Christian faith and fortitude they showed in their last year as prisoners living with the constant threat of death. St. Boris and Gleb are Russian princes who allowed themselves to be killed by murderers sent by their ambitious brother rather than to resist him and cause the people to suffer through civil war.

We are not called to emulate the all the particulars of a saint's life. Some of them had some strange and even extreme practices which were needful for them, but which would not be recommended for us. For example, St. Herman of Alaska secretly wore chains under his clothes for many years. We are called to emulate his love for God and others, his life of prayer and service and missionary zeal, not his wearing of chains.

May we all embrace our vocation to be saints and pursue it diligently as we ponder the lives of the saints and are inspired thereby. *Fr. Justin*

The Apostles' Fast

One of the four fasts of the year, the Apostles' Fast, also known as the Peter & Paul Fast, begins on the Monday after the Sunday of All Saints (one week after Pentecost) and ends with the Feast of Peter & Paul on June 29 (July 12 old style). Thus, this is a fast of variable length, and for those of us on the "Modified Julian Calendar" (or so-called "New Calendar"), the fast is already shortened by 13 days. During this fast, we abstain from meat, dairy, fish, wine, and oil. The days of the fast when fish, wine, or oil are permitted are indicated on your parish calendar.

Each lenten season is a time for us to prepare to for the Holy Mysteries of Confession and

Communion, especially if we receive Holy Communion less than once a month.

We keep the fast not only by changing our diet and the amount we eat, but, more importantly, by abstaining from sin, devoting more time to prayer, spiritual reading, and church services, and increasing our almsgiving.

Homily: On How the Love of God is Shed into Men's Hearts

St. Nicholas of Zicha (+1956)

"Because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us." Romans 5:5

Love is joy, and anoints the human heart with joy. Love is strength, and anoints the human heart with strength. Love is peace, and anoints the heart with peace. And from joy, strength, and peace is born fortitude, and love anoints the human heart with fortitude.

The love of God, like a fragrant oil, is shed upon our hearts in no other way than by the Holy Spirit, the all-good and all-powerful Spirit. Though we are utterly undeserving of it, the Spirit of God pours the divine Law of God into our hearts in the Mystery of Chrismation. But we sometimes neglect this love and estrange ourselves from God by sin, and fall into spiritual weakness. And the Holy Spirit, unable to dwell in an unclean vessel, departs from our hearts. When the Holy Spirit departs from us, joy and strength, peace and fortitude depart at once with Him, and we become miserable, enfeebled, disturbed, and afraid. But the all-good Spirit of God only puts Himself at a distance from us; He does not abandon us completely. He does not abandon us, but rather offers us, as to sick men, medicines through the Mysteries of Repentance and Holy Communion. And when we have cleansed ourselves anew by repentance and Communion, then God the Holy Spirit makes His abode in us again and pours the love of God into our hearts. We fall down and get up; we fall down again and get up again. When we fall, the Spirit of God stands beside us and lifts us up, if we desire to be so lifted. And when we are on our feet, the Spirit of God stands in us until, through our sinfulness and stupidity, we fall again. And so we are by turns a fruitful meadow and a wasteland, sons of repentance and of perdition, of fullness and emptiness, of light and darkness.

O all-good Holy Spirit, our God, do not depart from us either when we need Thee or when we do not feel the need of Thee. Abide with us until our death, and save us for life eternal. To Thee be glory and praise forever. Amen.

**Encyclical Letter of the OCA Bishops on
Marriage**

"... the two shall become one flesh." (Ephesians 5:31)

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

We find it imperative to address you on an issue of crucial importance for the Christian life. An increasingly secularized world tends more and more to neglect the traditional biblical understanding of marriage and family. Misunderstanding freedom and proclaiming the progress of a humanity supposedly too mature, sophisticated and scientific to follow Christ's Gospel, many have abandoned its moral demands. The consequences are plain for all to see: the family is disintegrating, legalized abortion is killing millions of unborn children, corrupt sexual behavior is rampant. The moral foundations of society are collapsing.

We, the bishops of the Orthodox Church in America, therefore proclaim anew to you, the flock entrusted to our care, the great and holy vision of marriage that is gloriously preserved and manifested in the doctrine, liturgy and canonical tradition of the Church. We do not make this proclamation in the name of an outdated conservatism or because we consider our present society intrinsically more corrupt than the past generations. We speak because we are concerned for the welfare and salvation both of you, the members of our flock, and of all men. We speak of "that which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our own eyes ... concerning the word of life" (John 1:1). We speak because we know the Truth of the Gospel of Christ to be the eternal Truth, the one needful thing, the good portion (Luke 10:42) for all men, in all times and places.

Many - Orthodox, non-Orthodox, and even non-Christians - admire our beautiful Marriage Service. Our task is to show them the vision that this Service reveals, a vision of marriage as an icon of the Trinitarian life of God Himself, and to indicate the responsibility and commitment that this vision of marriage implies.

We therefore appeal to all of you who are responsible for the life of our parishes and for the future of our youth to make a common effort to provide appropriate guidance and help to all in matrimonial matters, both through your own personal examples of pure and upright lives and undefiled marriages and also through words of exhortation and explanation, "knowing how you ought to answer everyone" (Colossians 4:6), and through programs of education.

From the Old Testament Scriptures we learn that God created man "in His own image," "male and female He created them" (Genesis 1:27), and, since that beginning, "a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24), Man and woman are mutually complementary, and this complementarity, expressed in their union and common activity, reflects the very

image and likeness of God. This spiritual basis of marriage clearly transcends, without suppressing, the fleshly union of the bodies. Fleshly relations when separated from spiritual ones are depraved; they must be woven into the pure and total love between a man and a woman united in marriage.

In the New Testament Scripture, from the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, we learn that marriage is a unique and unbreakable union of husband and wife joined by God Himself: "What God has joined together, let no man put asunder" (Matthew 19:6). The Marriage Service likewise makes it clear that the bridegroom and the bride are united not by themselves, but by God: "For by Thee is the husband joined unto the wife" (Marriage Service). For this reason the Orthodox Marriage Service is devoid of any oaths or marriage vows on the part of the couple. Their desire and freely given consent are certainly necessary for the marriage, for sacraments are not acts of magic that eliminate the need for human cooperation. Yet no vow or oath can possibly join a man and a woman together in the gracious and absolute way called for in Christian marriage. The true Christian marriage is effected by God Himself. In such a union, described by St. Paul as "a great mystery" (Ephesians 5:32), human love and desire for companionship become a love pervaded and sanctified by divine grace: water is transformed into the good wine, as it was at the wedding feast in Cana of Galilee. In a Christian marriage husband and wife manifest in their own lives the union between God and His beloved people; between Christ, the Bridegroom, and the Church, His Bride (Ephesians 5:32). God accompanies husband and wife, bringing them into a unity which will be revealed as perfect and eternal in His Kingdom, and filling their lives with the Holy Spirit so that selfishness and division may be overcome. He sanctifies and purifies their total relationship. According to the prayers of the Marriage Service, God communicates to those being joined in unity and love, faith and oneness of mind, holiness, purity and chastity, joy and glory, and the possibility for eternal life. He unites them in body and spirit, heart and mind.

Obviously, Christian marriage will never find its ultimate fulfillment and happiness in this world. Like all things in Christ, marriage too must pass through the cross, through temptation, suffering, trial and finally death, before coming to its ultimate consummation in the Resurrection and the Kingdom of God which will come in power at the end of the ages. All this Christian couples experience as they strive to realize in their own lives the great gift given to them by God in marriage: "Thou hast set upon their heads crowns of precious stones; they asked life of Thee, and Thou gavest it them" (Psalm 21, the Prokeimenon of the Marriage Service). For those who fight the good fight as good and faithful servants, the crowns become their eternal reward as witnesses to Christ and the wedding garments are transformed into robes of salvation and eternal glory.

Marriage is the most perfect realization of love between a man and a woman: two become one. Love unites in such a way that two lives become one life in perfect harmony. This love, sanctified by God, is the great source of the happiness which is sought in marriage, and in it lies a power that transforms both those who love and those who are loved. Because of this transforming power of love, all the difficulties and defects in family life can be overcome. True love never ceases, whether in this world or in the age to come. Faithfulness and confidence must reign in marriage, for there can be no deception in love. When husband and wife are united by love, they share a common life and help each other in everything they do, for their love for each other expresses itself in mutual help and support.

Such love implies a relationship in marriage which is total in character. Husband and wife must live not for purely individual gratification, but for each other, for such is the meaning of true love. Marriage must be offered to God continually and consciously, and it must always be rooted in the life and teachings of the Church. Husband and wife can achieve their final glorification in the age to come only by self-sacrifice for the sake of one another in this life unto the glory of God. Christian marriage is a specific application of one of Christ's fundamental teachings: "He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake will find it" (Matt. 10:39).

The greatest miracle of this divinely sanctified love of marriage is the procreation of good, fair and holy children. In the image of God who brings forth life in love, the Christian marriage, a unity in love established by God, brings forth holy and good life (1 Cor. 7:14).

The perfect marriage can only be one, single and unique. The prototype of marriage, the unity between Christ and His Church, excludes multiple marriages: Christ has only one Church; the Church has no other Christ. Even death cannot break the bond of perfect love. Therefore, the Church does not advocate second or third marriages, even for widows or widowers; rather, they are tolerated as condescension to human frailty and weakness, while fourth marriages are totally forbidden.

The crowning which takes place in the Marriage Service reveals the bridegroom and the bride to be a new community in Christ. The husband is the head of this community, as God is the head of Christ (1 Corinthians 11:3) and as Christ "is the head of the Church" (Ephesians 5:23). His headship is not a power over his wife and family, but a divinely-given responsibility, to be discharged after the image of Christ, the perfect man. ". . . a man approved of God among you" (Acts 2:22). His headship is a service of love and sacrifice. He is to nourish and cherish his wife and family "as Christ does the Church" (Ephesians 5:29). The wife is the helpmate of her husband, his beloved companion for life, his source of joy and wellbeing. In Eve, the mother of life, the fullness of life was revealed, for without her Adam

was alone and had no companion fit for him (Genesis 2:18). As the bearer of life in the conception of children, the wife has an immediate concern for life and its quality. It is she who gives content to the life of her husband and family: purity, kindness, peace, gentleness and the concern for others. Her true adornment is "the imperishable jewel of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious" (1 Peter 3:4).

To live up to its high calling, the Christian family must be firmly established in the Faith. Husband and wife must strive to learn more about the Faith and to accept its teachings as the law of their life. It must become for them the authority, against which all else that they read, hear or see is tested and evaluated. It is especially important that the Christian family participate in the life of the Church; by praying at home, by coming to the church services, by participating in the sacraments, by observing the Church's fasts and feasts and by keeping her traditions. It is also important that the Christian family participate in the general life of their parish and have as friends those distinguished by a firm personal faith and purity of life.

Each Christian must seek the advice and guidance of the pastors of the Church. Especially before entering into marriage, Orthodox men and women must contact their pastor, so that he might explain the true nature of marriage in the Church and help them better to understand all the demands of a truly spiritual and moral family life. Each family likewise must continue to live under the guidance and with the help of the Church and her pastors.

With the help of God all the difficulties and misfortunes which are inevitable in life will be overcome, because what is impossible for man is possible for God. With faith in God, the husband will be truly capable of leading the family in the way of salvation toward the Kingdom of God, loving his wife and his children more than himself. With the help of God, the wife will be capable of being a source of purity, holiness and love for the entire family. And the children born for God in such a family from the beginning will be brought up as Christians. Such a family will be a beautiful model and source of faith, goodness and kindness for all those around it.

The Christian ideal of marriage and family, manhood and womanhood, is incomparably more exalted, balanced and fulfilling than those broken, one-sided or totally erroneous ideologies of today's world which reduce the meaning of human life to the satisfaction of sexual appetites, material security, or to other such limited functions and desires. In Christ man is revealed as son and friend of God. He is able to become a member of Christ in soul and body. In the Christian marriage, he is able to achieve an eternal, unique and total union in love.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ: be true men and women. Be faithful to the Christian ideal of marriage and family. Let our Christian families be

united in mutual love and concern. Husbands and wives: love each other; love your children. Children: respect your parents. "Submit yourselves one to another in the fear of God" (Ephesians 5:21). "Mortify immorality, impurity, evil desire ... on account of these the wrath of God is coming" (Colossians 3:5-6).

Priest's comment: Marriage has been largely destroyed in our land through our own carelessness, our redefinition of marriage to serve our own selfish ends, our disdain and disregard for God's design, and through liberalized divorce laws allowing 'no-fault' divorces. The marital atmosphere is highly polluted with lies, distortions, and prevailing bad practices which makes it very difficult for us to breathe the pure air of marriage as intended by God. We have to fight to cleanse our own minds of the poisonous and distorting lies about marriage around us and to labor diligently to abide in Christian marriage ourselves (or prepare ourselves for Christian marriage) and to teach our children by word and example what marriage should be. The enemy strikes us hard on this front, knowing that he can do maximal harm to us and our children by tearing down our marriages.

From St. Theophan the Recluse on Prayer

Prayer is the test of everything; prayer is also the source of everything; prayer is the driving force of everything; prayer is also the director of everything. If prayer is right, everything is right. For prayer will not allow anything to go wrong.

Every prayer must come from the heart, and any other prayer is no prayer at all. Prayer-book prayers, your own prayers, and very short prayers, all must issue forth from the heart to God, seen before you. And still more must this be so with the Jesus Prayer.

The principal thing is to stand with the mind in the heart before God, and to go on standing before Him unceasingly day and night, until the end of life.

You must never regard any spiritual work as firmly established, and this is especially true of prayer; but always pray as if beginning for the first time.

Father Epiphanius Theodoropoulos

From His Life and Teachings (+1989)

To someone who mentioned to him in Confession that he placed the Fasts among the smaller obligations and for this reason did not keep them, but "strove to be correct in the basic elements of our Faith", Fr. Epiphanius replied:

"Won't you tell me, did you come here as a repentant sinner to receive remission, or as a lawgiver? If the first is the case, you cannot place fasting in the secondary elements of Christian life. If the second is the case, you are not a disciple of Christ and I cannot read the prayer of absolution over you."

To another spiritual child who told the elder that he didn't accept fasting, the elder replied:

"Fasting is an institution of the Church. It was given as a law in Paradise. The Prophets fasted, as did Moses, the Lord Himself, the Apostles, the Fathers. If you continue not to fast and hold on to this viewpoint, then change Elders!"

That's what I told him. If, however, he told me: "You know, Father, I accept fasting as the Church ordains, but I cannot fast so much. I am trying, however to achieve something," I would tell him: "I accept you, my little child. Try as much as you can to live up to what our Church says." But to tell me, "I don't accept fasting!" Who are you? What are these things you are saying? Do you hear them?

Parish Notes

Our new, permanent altar table has been completed by Fr. Michael Storozuk. Someone with a pickup truck is needed to go get it this week at his home in The Colony. Please see Fr. Justin if you are willing to go or will loan your truck.

A Letter to the Parish from the Mission Council

Dear Members of St. Maximus Parish,

The Mission Council would like to make you all aware of a recent decision made at our April and May 2009 meetings.

Determining that it was in the best interest of our parish to gain more space for further growth, we decided to borrow \$12,500 from our Building Fund Savings account to give to Fr. Justin and his family to help them purchase a house in the neighborhood. Once they move out in the fall and we are able to use the whole building for ministry, we should have sufficient space to grow to the point where we shall be able to build our new church.

- ❖ This money will be repaid to the Building Fund by special pledges, special offerings, and requisitions from the general fund as cash flow permits.
- ❖ We are encouraging members of the parish to make pledges to assist in the return of this money to the building fund.

If you have any questions or concerns, please see one of the Mission Council members.

In Christ,

Louise Newcomb, secretary
Frieda Gluschenko, treasurer

Anna Stokes
Patrick St. Jean

Derek Sancer
Sbdn. Anthony Stokes

Upcoming Events 2009

- 29 June – 3 July, Summer Camp ages 8-18 at Camp Grady Spruce
- 19 July Sunday: Dinner with Metropolitan Jonah for the Nativity of Our Lord Monastery, 7:00 p.m. at Bent Tree Country Club, \$40 a person, \$75 a couple. R.S.V.P. (469) 556-6179; info@monasteryfriends.com
- 16-19 August, men's retreat at Holy Archangels Monastery.
- 7 September, Labor Day Picnic