

The Confessor's Tongue for October 18, 2009

19th Sunday after Pentecost; Holy Apostle & Evangelist Luke

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.

October 18: St. Luke

Holy Apostle and Evangelist Luke came from Syrian Antioch and from his youth devoted himself to the sciences. He fully studied Hebrew law, Greek philosophy, painting and the medical sciences (Col. 4:14). St. Luke heard from the mouth of the Lord Jesus Christ His teaching in Jerusalem and accepted him as the Messiah. But after the descent of the Holy Spirit, he preached Christ in Antioch where he was a coworker with the Apostle Paul. Together with the Holy Apostle Paul he also was in Rome (Col. 4:14; Philemon 1:23; 2 Tim. 4:11). After the death of Apostle Paul, St. Luke preached Christ in Italy, Dalmatia, Gallia, Macedonia and Achaia. When he was 84 years old St. Luke visited Libya and Upper Egypt. After that he preached in the Greek city of Thebes. In that same city the holy apostle also died a martyr, being hanged from an olive tree by the pagans. St. Luke was the first to write holy icons (Refer to May 21, July 28 and October 12). Besides the Holy Gospels, Holy Apostle Luke wrote the book, "The Acts of the Apostles".

The Christian People in the Divine Liturgy

We all know that in the Church, the priest cannot serve the Divine Liturgy by himself. It takes at least one other person to represent the people of God and to sing the responses, to say 'amen.' Every person who attends the Liturgy with faith, who attends to what is taking place, and who sings the responses "Lord, have mercy" and "amen" and "to Thee, O Lord" participates in the consecration of the Gifts and their becoming Christ's Body and Blood by the power and operation of the Holy Spirit.

Thus, it is fitting that, at the epiclesis (invocation of the Holy Spirit), when the priest says, "And make this bread the precious body of Thy Christ", the people hear it and respond with 'amen.'

Until now, we have not done this here at St. Maximus. The prevalent practice in the Church has been for the priest to pray this quietly in the altar while the deacon is appointed the 'amen' to say. Moreover, our bishop did not want this part said aloud as some have long been doing, so we followed his instruction. But he is now doing this aloud as is our Metropolitan, who has no objection to it.

Your priest has increasingly thought that all the faithful should be assisting at the consecration of the gifts by offering their 'amen'. The altar servers have said the amens for the Deacon we don't have and for the people, but when serving alone, your priest has felt uncomfortable in saying these amens in your place. Thus, in the next week or two, you may expect this change at the Divine Liturgy.

The choir will sing "We hymn Thee, we bless Thee, we give thanks unto Thee..." as they do now. When the hymn is finished, the priest will say "Again

we offer unto Thee this rational and bloodless worship, and we call upon Thee, and pray Thee, and supplicate Thee: Send down Thy Holy Spirit upon us and upon these Gifts set forth—And make this bread the precious Body of Thy Christ." With the choir leading, you will respond "amen!" The priest will then say, "And that which is in this cup the precious blood of Thy Christ," after which you will respond again "amen!" Then the priest will say: "Making the change by the Holy Spirit." Your response is a triple 'amen.' The priest will then continue "That to those who partake thereof the [the gifts] may be unto cleansing of soul, unto forgiveness of sins, unto communion of Thy Holy Spirit, unto fulfillment of the Kingdom of heaven, unto boldness toward Thee, not unto judgment nor unto condemnation."

My prayer is that this will facilitate your attentive, reverent, and prayerful participation in the Divine Liturgy to a greater degree and will make clearer just what we are doing and why.

Praying with the Psalter

From the Church's beginning, the Psalter has been her basic prayer book. To this day Psalms comprise a large part of the fixed portions of the services. Three Psalms are read at each of the canonical hours—First, Third, Sixth, and Ninth—and at Little Compline. Matins begins with the Six Psalms and ends with the last three Psalms of the Psalter, and Psalm 50 is tucked away in the middle of the service. Vespers begins with Psalm 103 and uses four more at "Lord I have cried" (140, 141, 129, 116). Divine Liturgy uses Psalms 102 and 145 as its first two antiphons, and every service draws on the Psalter for its Prokeimenon. Psalm 50 is part of the daily morning prayers for many Orthodox Christians, and Psalms 22, 23, and 113 are part of an Orthodox Christian's preparation for Holy Communion. The 150 Psalms are divided into twenty roughly equal portions known as 'kathismata'. One kathisma is prescribed to be read and every Vespers (except Sunday night or any evening after a Vigil) and two kathismata at Matins. Thus in the course of the week all twenty kathismata of the Psalter are read sequentially in addition to the Psalms that are read as fixed parts of each service.

Indeed, the traditional Psalter of the Church is set up as a prayer book. It prescribes the usual sequence of opening prayers to preface the reading of the Psalms; a kathisma is read which is followed by the basic sequence of prayers "Holy God..." "All Holy Trinity..." "Our Father..." four short troparia, and a prayer special to the kathisma. Then the next kathisma is read with a similar sequence of prayers following it. With this basic procedure, one may easily pray as long as one wishes, either much or little.

One may well keep Vigil by reading the Psalter for a good portion of the night.

The importance of the Psalter for prayer in the church may be seen not only in its use in the services, but also by the ancient canon which requires that for a man to be a candidate for the episcopacy, he must know the Psalter by heart. This is another way of saying that a bishop must be a man of prayer. If he is, he will have prayed the Psalter sufficiently to have it by memory. This may strike us as unlikely for one to have memorized the Psalter, but if one prays them and hears them daily in the same translation, over the course of a few years, with a little effort, one could well have the whole Psalter memorized. In our general sloth and weakness of mind, we do not commit much to memory in our day and we doubt our mind's ability.

The Psalter's inspired words speak to every human condition and express the cry of man's heart to God. The Church has found there not only a book of prayers, but also a manual for prayer and for spiritual warfare as she wrestles not with enemies of flesh and blood but the passions and the demons. She also finds Christ there, knowing the Psalter to be a prophetic book which says much about her Master and Savior, especially about His life on earth in the flesh.

This complete version of the Orthodox Psalter now exists in English in two editions, one which has recently gone on sale and another which is available online with Russian and English on facing pages. Several versions of the Psalms have been available without the prayers, and one translation of the prayers between the kathisma without the Psalms, but until very recently, no one had yet put it all together in English.

We do well to make the Psalter a part of our daily prayer rule. Even to add but a psalm or two each day to our prayers will have great effect on our minds and souls over time. May all of us make profitable use of the God-given treasure of the Church.

For Consideration

St. Nikolai of Zicha

"Insofar as ye did it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye did it unto Me" (Matthew 25:40), says the Lord. It is the same in the giving of alms as it is in Communion: in Communion, under the form of bread and wine, we receive the living Lord Christ Himself; when giving alms, in giving to the poor we give to the living Lord Christ Himself. There was a man in Constantinople who had a rare compassion. Going through the streets of the city, he put his gift into the hands of the poor and immediately went on his way to avoid hearing their thanks and becoming known. When one of his friends asked him how he had become so compassionate, he replied: "One day in church, I heard the priest say that what we give to the poor we give into the hands of the Lord Christ Himself. I didn't believe this, thinking that it couldn't be so, Christ being in heaven. Once, though,

on the way home, I saw a poor man standing in the beggar's place—and the face of Christ shining over his head. Someone passed by and gave the beggar a piece of bread, and I saw the Lord stretch out His hand, take the bread, and bless the giver. From that moment, I've always seen that Face over the heads of the beggars, and therefore, with great fear, I give all the alms I can." *From the Prologue*

Three Kinds of Believing

The Venerable Bede

- 1) To believe God
- 2) To believe that God is
- 3) To believe in God

Truly it is not all the same when it comes to the matter of belief. The *first* kind of belief is to believe that things that God speaks are true. Many, even the wicked, are able to believe that the things God speaks are true; they believe that they are true and do not wish to make them their own because they are too lazy to do anything about them. The *second* kind of belief is to believe that God exists. Even the demons are able to believe, however, that He is God (James 2:19). The demons even believe that Jesus is the Son of God (Luke 4:41). The *third* kind of belief is to rightly believe in God and be Christian not only in name but also in action and way of life. Without love, faith is empty; with love, it is the faith of a Christian; without love, it is the faith of a demon.

St. Symeon on Why We Give Alms

Do not think at all, brother, that God is at a loss and is unable to feed the poor, and for this reason commands you to show mercy to them and highly values this commandment. Far from it! But Christ has taken that which the devil through covetousness has wrought against us for our perdition, and through almsgiving has turned to our good to make it redound for our salvation. What do I mean? The devil has suggested to us that we appropriate the things that were provided for our common use and hoard them for ourselves, so that through this covetousness he might make us liable to a double indictment and thus subject to eternal punishment and condemnation—the one, of being unmerciful, the other, of putting our hope in hoarded up wealth instead of in God. For he who has wealth hoarded up cannot hope in God, as is clear from what Christ our God has said, "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." *St. Symeon the New Theologian, Discourse 9*

Upcoming Events 2009

24 October, End Times Talk, Fr. Dimitri Cozby, St. Barbara's Fort Worth, 4:00 p.m.
25 October, Blessing of Automobiles after Liturgy
15 November Nativity Fast begins
13 February 2010 Forgiveness Sunday, Vespers, Great Lent begins
26-27 February 2010 Metropolitan Jonah visits.

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!