

The Confessor's Tongue for November 1, 2009

21st Sunday after Pentecost; Holy Unmercenary Physicians

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.

November 1: Wonderworkers and Unmercenary Healers Comas & Damian

Brothers by birth, they were born in Asia. Their father was a Greek pagan, and their mother, Theodotia, confessed the Christian faith. She became widowed in her youth and led a pious life, accustoming her children to a charitable life and teaching them good works. Brought up in strict piety, Cosmas and Damian from infancy tried to fulfill the law of God, and having come of age, like two candlesticks shone with good deeds. In order to better bring benefits to their neighbor, they were occupied with medical science, learned the healing properties of herbs and plants, and became skilful physicians. From their success of healing the infirm, they "neither received anything from anyone for doing this, for they did this not for the sake of their estate, to enrich themselves with gold and silver, but for the sake of God". They "helped not only people, but also cattle". Having lived in peace and hardworking, they quietly departed to the Lord, and were buried in Fereman in Mesopotamia and "in accordance with their holy repose granting healing flowing in abundance to all."

Today instead of the service for Ss. Cosmas and Damian, we have celebrated the Synaxis of all Unmercenary healers in the Church, which commemoration is appointed for the first Sunday in November.

Homily on the Call of All Christians to Become Saints

St. Nikolai of Zicha

To the saint which are at Ephesus... (Ephesians 1:1)

Note: In Greek, Slavonic, and Russian, the word 'saints' is the same word that is translated as 'holy': hagios, or svyatoi. Hence, the English word 'saint' means 'holy one'—a person who is holy. Fr. JBAF

The Apostle calls the Christians in Ephesus 'saints'. He does not call one or two of them saints, nor one group of them, but all of them. Is this not a wondrous miracle of God for people, not in the wilderness but in a city—and an idolatrous and corrupt city—to become saints? That married men who sire children, who trade and work, become saints! Indeed, such were the first Christians. Their dedication, fidelity, and zeal in the Faith as well as their holiness and purity of life, completely justified their being called 'saints.' If in latter times saints have become the exception, in those earlier times the unholy were the exception. Saints were the rule. Therefore, we must not wonder that the Apostle calls all baptized souls in Ephesus 'saints' and that he has an even loftier name for all Christians, i.e., 'sons,' the sons of God (Galatians 4:6). Christ the Lord Himself gave us the right to call ourselves such when he taught us to address God as *Our Father* (Matt 6:9).

O my brethren! Do we not say to God every day: "Holy God?" Do we not call the angels holy? Do we not call the Mother of God holy? And the prophets, apostles, martyrs, and the righteous? Do we not call heaven holy and the Kingdom of Heaven holy? Who then is able to enter into the holy Kingdom but the saints [holy ones]. Therefore, if we have hope for salvation, we also have hope for holiness.

O Holy God, who dwellest in the holy place and resteth among the saints and callest the holy to Thyself and showest mercy to them, help us also that we may become holy—in words, in thoughts, in deeds—to Thy glory and our salvation. To Thee be glory and praise forever. Amen.

November Namedays

- 8 Michelle Frederick (Archangel Michael)
- 8 Blaine (Michael) Rivas
- 8 Michael Rodgers
- 24 Katherine Frederick (Great-Martyr Katherine)
- 24 Ekaterina Chernaya
- 27 Emmanuel Lyda (James the Persian)
- 30 Corey (Andrew) Rivas (Holy Apostle Andrew)

November Birthdays

- 2 Joseph Birthsel
- 4 Mat. Michelle Frederick
- 9 Geoff Stevenson
- 11 Derek Sancer
- 14 Anastasia Sancer
- 14 Corey (Andrew) Rivas
- 23 Raina Joines
- 24 Wendy Jackson
- 25 Fr. Justin Frederick

On the Sanctity of God's House

Ultimately, it is we who believe who are the house of God and the temple of the Holy Spirit. The Kingdom of God is within us, and in the temple of our hearts we may encounter Christ who is enthroned there. We cultivate this intimate relationship with Christ throughout our earthly life and strive to present ourselves as holy before Him, a worthy dwelling-place for His holiness.

Yet we Christians also set aside special buildings as places for us to gather to worship the one God made manifest to us in Jesus Christ. Those buildings, commonly called churches, are consecrated, set aside, for the sole purpose of worship and prayer. To be holy means to be set aside for special, not common use. Thus the inanimate temple of God in which we meet for worship is not to be treated as common, as just another building.

Here at St. Maximus, we have been blessed by the building God gave us early in the history of this mission. Yet as the mission has grown, the available space has decreased, which has forced us to use the church proper, space that should be set aside for prayer and worship only, for other, common

purposes. A place set aside for holy conversation with God is also used for common conversations with one another; the place where we receive the heavenly food doubles as a place for us to consume earthly food. Though this has been necessary, it also has negative consequences for us.

On the one hand, we may do this because although blessed, our building has not been and never will be consecrated as a church. It merely serves as a temporary solution to the need for a place to worship God. Once we have built a proper church and it has been consecrated, the space occupied by our current church will be returned to common use.

On the other hand, our use of our worship space to for eating and fellowshipping at coffee hour, Pascha, and picnics causes us to treat what should be treated as holy, set aside for a special purpose, as common. One moment we solemnly receive Christ's body and blood; the next moment we are merrily chatting with each other as we eat and drink in the same space.

Thus, once the space that is now the rectory becomes common to the parish, our first priority will be to use no longer the church for coffee hour, casual conversation, classes, etc., but to treat it as holy, set aside for prayer and worship. This will require the breaking of habits we have developed over several years. It may not be easy for some, but it need not be difficult. As we come to a deeper realization of who it is who dwells within us and before whom we stand in church, we shall naturally wish to treat the place we meet with Him as holy—both the Church building, and our own souls and bodies.

Fr. Justin Frederick

The Nativity Fast

The Nativity Fast begins in two weeks and lasts for forty days, ending with the Liturgy on Christmas Day. Now is a good time for us to prepare and plan for the fast: gather recipes, plan meals, prepare for almsgiving, adjust our schedules so that we may pray more effectively, read more of the Scriptures, and, in general, plan how we may keep the fast to our spiritual benefit and profit.

On Wednesdays at 12:30, we shall be studying the works of St. Theophan the Recluse. This will be a good opportunity for spiritual reading and discussion during the Fast.

Perhaps we may wish to read through the New Testament during the Fast? Now is the time to plan. If we read two chapters from the Gospels each day (with nine days of reading three chapters) and four chapters from the rest of the NT (with nine days of reading five chapters) we may finish the whole NT in forty days.

Perhaps we have needed to take a look at our prayer rule, to adjust it, strengthen it. Now is the time to set our hearts on seeking God's face in prayer and determining how and when each day we shall do this.

Christmas has long been a time for giving, but much of that giving is focused on our families and friends. Perhaps we wish to give alms to those less fortunate than we or to those who are in need. Now is the time to plan that giving lest it be lost in the competitive with Christmas shopping. We might consider the mission trip to St. George's in the Rio Grande as a way to give.

Perhaps we realize that we have been taking in too much of the world through movies, internet, video games, music, television, radio, novels, etc., and that our mind is too full of thoughts about many things to think clearly about God and hear His voice. Now is the time to plan how we may cut back on such entertainments so that we might not have minds full of noise and endless thoughts and find the room silence affords us to meet God.

Finally, the Nativity Fast is difficult for us because the world feasts before the Feast and fasts (diets) after it. The endless round of pre-Christmas Christmas parties (or in proper modern speak 'Holiday parties') makes it difficult for us to keep the Fast before the Feast. Now is the time to plan as well as we can to keep the Fast and then to commend ourselves to God and His grace to help us keep it and help us up quickly if we fall.

Naturally, all Orthodox Christians, regardless of how often they commune, should prepare themselves for a thorough Confession and Holy Communion during the Fast.

If you have any questions about how you should keep the Fast, please see your priest or spiritual father.

Fr. Epiphanius, *Life & Teaching* (+1989)

With miracles, the Lord does not give a certificate of correctness of people's faith. He does them out of His love for His creatures.

On account of all those who have difficulty with the matter of the Lord's miracles, Father Epiphanius stressed: When someone accepts the Resurrection of Christ—in other words, that Christ is God—then he can easily explain all the miracles.

Upcoming Events 2009

- 15 November Nativity Fast begins.
- 22 December, Tuesday, 7:30 p.m. Holy Unction served.
- 13 February 2010, 6:00 p.m. Forgiveness Vespers, Great Lent Begins.
- 26-27 February 2010 Metropolitan Jonah visits.

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!