

The Confessor's Tongue for September 5, 2010

16th Sunday After Pentecost: Leavetaking of the Nativity of the Theotokos

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.

September 14: Exaltation of the Cross

On the 14th of September, the Church celebrates the Great Feast of the Exaltation (Elevation) of the Precious Cross. The Feast is the only one of the Great Feasts that does not commemorate some occasion in the life of either Christ or His mother. The day is a strict fast day.

The Feast commemorates two events: the finding of the Cross by St. Helen, mother of the Emperor Constantine, and the return of the Cross and its elevation before the faithful in 629, fifteen years after it was taken from Jerusalem by Persian invaders.

But more than this, the Feast calls us to celebrate Christ's glory and victory won on the Cross. Christ's agonizing death on the Cross was victory over Satan and sin, and the death of death. Thus we find the Cross indeed to be "precious" and "life-creating" for us. Christ's life-giving death on the Cross transformed it from a feared symbol of Roman public execution of criminals to the symbol of Christ's great love for mankind and of His victory over evil and the evil one. Hence we glory in the Cross of Christ, as St. Paul writes: "But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world."

At Vigil, there is a special ceremony of venerating the Cross. During the Praises of Matins, the priest vests fully. During the Great Doxology, he censes around the altar table three times. When the "Holy God" at the end of the Doxology is sung, he bears the Cross out of the altar to before the Royal Doors, and then deposits it on an analogion in the midst of the nave. Everyone sings "Before Thy Cross we bow down in veneration, O Master, and Thy holy Resurrection, we glorify" three times, doing a full prostration each time. Then as special hymns to the cross are sung, each person comes to venerate the cross, prostrating twice, kissing the cross, and prostrating again. Having venerated the Cross, each person comes to be anointed with the blessed festal oil and to receive blessed Litia bread dipped in blessed wine.

The Church also honors Christ's Cross on August 1st, the Third Sunday of Great Lent, and every Friday (and Wednesday).

We celebrate the Feast through its Leave-taking, September 21. We may replace our usual prayers at meals with the Troparion (before) and the Kontakion (after), and use them in our daily prayers as well. All the faithful should participate in the services celebrating this Great Feast of the Church.

Troparion tone 1

O Lord, save Thy people / and bless Thine inheritance. / Grant victory to Orthodox Christians / over the enemy; / and by Thy Cross / preserve Thine estate.

Kontakion, tone 4

As Thou wast voluntarily crucified for our sake, O Christ God, / so grant mercy to those who are called by Thy name; / make all Orthodox Christians glad by Thy power, / granting them victories over the enemy, / by bestowing on them the invincible trophy, Thy weapon of peace.

The Sayings of St. Anthony the Great

Abba Anthony said, "A time is coming when men will go mad, and when they see someone who is not mad, they will attack him, saying, 'You are mad, you are not like us.'

Saying 25 Sayings of the Desert Fathers

Commentary: What does it mean to be 'normal', to be 'sane'? "Normal" may be defined as "conforming with, adhering to, or constituting a norm, standard, pattern, level, or type; typical." "Sane" may be defined as "of sound mind, mentally healthy; having or showing sound judgment; reasonable." Scientists and doctors have done much research into human abnormalities and insanity but relatively little has been done to define rigorously in what constitutes human normality and sanity. In the popular mind, the concept of normalcy and sanity are derived from some sort of statistical average condition of humans based on observation. Those who differ markedly from that norm are not 'normal.'

Such a definition cannot content us. For Christians, it is Christ, and after Him, His Mother and the Saints, who show us what the sane and normal human being is. They are 'normal' according to what God intended for man when He made man in His own image. They are sane because their minds are illumined by God's Light and their bodies are in subjugation as servants to the illumined mind, which seeks to do God's will in all things as the only rational and proper course for man.

By any Christian understanding of 'normal', the vast majority of human beings are not normal and are not in their right minds, are not sane. They have 'gone mad' as St. Anthony says, though in the world and by the world, they are regarded as entirely 'normal.' Because the Christian person differs markedly from the world's daily experience of what it is to be human, the world considers the Christian to be mad and insane because he 'is not like us.' Hence, we should expect the world to consider us 'abnormal' and insane (though we should not intentionally give them reason to think so!—though all of us are called to be fools in the world's eyes for Christ's sake). Of course, we return the compliment: we gaze on the spectacle of life in our world and find insanity all around. How can they live like this, if, indeed, it can be called living at all?

Indeed, if God is come to man in human flesh, if Jesus Christ is the God-man come to reveal God to us and to open the way for us to become partakers of the Divine nature eternally, if our life is hid with

Christ in God and apart from Him there is no true life, then to follow Christ and be a Christian in the fullest sense of the word is the supremely rational path to follow. To live any other way, to follow any other path is insanity and folly. It is to be in denial about the ultimate nature of reality. To be a Christian is to accept the reality of life in this universe as it is and to live in conformity with it. Hence it is the only rational path, for every other path denies the fundamental reality of God become man.

Because of our markedly different views of what is 'normal', we should not court the world's good opinion of us at the expense of compromising the Faith or moderating the Christian way of life to be more acceptable to the mad denizens of this world. If we have any Christian savor worthy of Christ, we shall always appear out of step with the world, and in the world's eyes, our life not governed by fear of death and the philosophy "eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow we shall die" will be irrational and mad. They think to be a Christian is to be in denial of reality, to be deluded by promises of "pie in the sky." But the heavenly Bread of Life has come down from heaven to us; He is Emmanuel, God with us, God who nourishes us with Himself. He is not a fond hope of "pie in the sky bye and bye..."

Christ, His Mother, and the Saints show us what it is to be normal. Let us keep our eyes on them and not care unduly for what the world thinks of us.

Fr. Justin Frederick

On Greeting Our Visitors

Each of us at some time will probably be called upon to welcome non-Orthodox visitors to our church. Here is what we should and should not do.

Greet them warmly. If they look lost, see if they have any questions. Answer their questions concisely. Offer them a service book to follow the service. If the service has begun, open the book and show them where we are. Let them know that they are welcome to sit down if they need to, even if others around them remain standing. Invite them to coffee hour afterwards. If the church is full, you may offer to bring them in and help find them a place to stand.

Please do not pour on them a flood of unsolicited information about any aspect of church life. Basic principle: if they ask, answer; if not, refrain. Don't try to convince them of the truth of Orthodoxy or the error of wherever they may be. Give them space to observe without being put upon. After the service, if you see them, you may ask if they have any questions, answering them if you can or referring them to the priest. You may offer to introduce them to the priest. Be a host, and point them to coffee hour.

But otherwise, give them space, and let our words about the Church be prompted by their questions rather than our zeal. We have observed at times that certain among us, through well-intentioned zeal attempting to pour upon them the riches of Orthodoxy, have rather nearly drowned them in the flood.

On the Divinity of the Son and His Unity of Being with the Father

St. Nicholas of Zicha

"He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father." John 14:9

"Lord, show us the Father and we shall be satisfied," says Philip. With these words, the Lord Jesus replied to him: "Have I been so long time with you, and yet thou hast not known Me, Philip? He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father." This is the Lord's reply to His disciple. Philip had desired to see God with his bodily eyes. He had beheld Christ for three years, and did not know Him as God. Why? Because at that time, before the descent of the Holy Spirit, Philip looked with bodily sight upon the body—that is, he looked with his earthly eyes on the Lord Christ as man. He did not yet see the divinity of the Son of God incarnate, and sought to see God the Father.

"He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father." By this, the Lord does not mean to say that the Son of God is the Father; no, but that He and the Father are of one being. Insofar as God was able to reveal Himself to men, He revealed Himself through God the Son, who appeared as man to men. God the Father did not become incarnate, nor did God the Holy Spirit. God the Son alone became incarnate.

How, then, could He reveal His Father to the bodily sight of moral men? Precisely because the Son became incarnate, Himself to reveal to men both Himself and the Father and the Holy Spirit, consubstantial divinity, triune in Person. "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father." The Lord is here thinking of His divine nature. In this, He is utterly united with the Father and of one being with Him. If Philip had at that time been able to see the divine nature of Christ, he would not have made the request: "Show us the Father." Of course, he was not able to see the divine nature, which is spiritual and visible, but he could see, and see clearly, the great works of Christ as a revelation of His divine nature.

Today, my brethren, there are some who say: "Show us God, and we shall believe!" Say to them: "We show you the Lord Christ: believe, then." "I Have been with you for nineteen centuries, O men, and do you still not know Me?" Nineteen centuries filled with His glory, His miracles, power, grace, and mercy, and with His saints and martyrs! And still there are morons who ask: "Where is God?"

O Christ the Lord, our God, open the spiritual eyes of those who do not yet see, that they may see the magnificence of Thy glory. To Thee be glory and praise forever. Amen.

Upcoming Events 2010

- 14 September: Elevation of the Cross, Liturgy 7:00 a.m., Vigil Monday night at 7:00.
- 26 September: Annual Meeting, 11:30 a.m.
- 22 December, Wednesday: Metropolitan Jonah visits at Vespers.

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!