

The Confessor's Tongue for May 25, A. D. 2014

Sixth Sunday of Pascha: Sunday of the Healing of the Blind Man

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.

On Spiritual Blindness

According to the teaching of St. Tikhon of Zadonsk, "whatever is physical darkness for the eyes is a sin for the human soul". "The spiritual darkness so darkens and blinds the eyes of the soul, that the sinner walks like the blind: he doesn't know where the path leads him; he doesn't see before him the torment of an eternal death in which he might fall; he doesn't distinguish vice from virtue, evil from good, truth from lies, true good fortune from evil fortune, and, thus, seeing he does not see and acts by touching like the blind. Does he live in good fortune? He becomes violent, as an untrained and unrestrained horse, and does not see that with this good fortune God draws him to Himself as a father of a little child draws an apple. Will misfortune visit him? He grumbles, is indignant and blames, that as if he told a lie; he makes complaints and says a malicious word: "Am I a liar? In what have I sinned? Am I really more sinful than others? Am I worthy of this? Does my work deserve this?" "He justifies himself, being full of every kind of untruth; he cleanses himself, being all besmirched; he considers himself unworthy of temporal punishment, but worthy of the eternal; he praises his merits, which stand for nothing". "All of creation, the heaven, the sun, the moon, the stars, the earth and its fulfillment, as if by mouth "tells of the glory of God" (Psalm 16:2); but the blind sinner does not feel the majesty of His glory and does not tremble".

God, both through creation and by His word, reveals Himself for everyone; but the sinner, like a deaf person, does not hear His word and does not recognize the Lord. He hears the name of God, but he does not recognize God: he hears the voice of the Lord only with carnal instead of spiritual ears, and therefore, hearing he does not hear and seeing he does not see. When God is preached by His holy word, then His sacred will is also preached; but the sinner doesn't know it and does not make it his own. His omnipotence and majesty is preached, before which the sinner is not humble. His righteousness is preached before which the sinner is not afraid and does not honor. His truth is preached before which the sinner does not believe. His omnipresence is preached, before which the sinner does not show reverence. He does not show it because does not recognize Him. His most wise reason is preached, in which the sinner does not discern. His highest holiness is preached which the sinner does not honor. His supreme authority is preached which the sinner does not obey. His awesome glory is preached which the sinner does not honor. His timeless goodness is preached, in which the sinner makes no effort to participate. His fearful judgment is preached before which the sinner does not tremble, and so forth.

Thus, the sinner is like "the man out of his mind who cannot know, and the stupid who cannot understand" (LXX Psalm 91:7) God and the acts of God. "And not only in relation to God, but also in relation to his neighbor, i.e. to any human, the blind man is a carnal and unenlightened man. We see that a person does evil to his neighbor, which he himself does not want; and does not do good to him, which he himself wants. We see that he is indignant and angry at the one who offends him, he abuses, abases, blames, discredits, lies about him, steals, kidnaps, takes away that which is his, and does other offenses; but he himself does such evil, or repays evil with evil, is not ashamed and does not sense this. On the other hand, he wants his neighbor to be merciful to him and not leave him in need, for example: to quench his thirst and to give him drink when he thirsts, clothe the naked, welcome the stranger into his home and to comfort the sick and visit those in prison and do other works of mercy for him, all of this he wants; this truth is indisputable; but he himself does not want to do the same for a neighbor. We see that this evil is self-love, an untruth and blindness in Christians, who either silently pass by their neighbors living in misery as if not seeing them, or they are ashamed to ask: what can I do for them? Many have plentiful food and a magnificent table for themselves, but do not care about a hungry neighbor; others wear all kinds of expensive clothes, and do not care about their naked neighbor; others build rich, large and tall houses and decorate the rest of the building, but for their neighbor who does not have a place to lay his head and to rest they do not care; they have silver, gold and other riches, comfortable for soul and life, that is kept whole and is saved, but there is no care for their neighbor who is burdened with debt...

We see this self-love and untruth in Christians: for not only do they do evil, but also they don't do good for their neighbors—there is the untruth. But, what is even worse, we see that many Christians are not ashamed and are not afraid to steal, to kidnap and to be cunning, to flatter, to lie, to deceive, to slander, to scandalize, to denounce, to abuse, to commit adultery and make other offenses against their neighbor that they themselves would not want. All this comes from blindness".

From S. V. Bulgakov, *Handbook for Church Servers*, 2 ed., 1274 pp. (Kbarkov, 1900), pp. 0586-0589. Translated by Archpriest Eugene D. Tarris © all rights reserved

The Ascension of Our Lord Jesus Christ

The Great Feast of the Ascension is commemorated on the fortieth day after Pascha, which always falls on a Thursday. It has a post-feast of nine days, concluding on the Friday before Pentecost.

The Ascension marks the end of our Lord's earthly work and his triumphal return to Heaven.

Ascension is preceded on Wednesday by the Leavetaking of Pascha, which marks the end of the forty-day Paschal season. With the leavetaking of Pascha, we cease saying the Paschal greeting and the Paschal troparion.

During the nine days of the Ascension, we say or sing the troparion and kontakion of the Feast at meals and during our usual morning and evening prayers. We may say (or sing) the troparion once in place of "O Heavenly King" as well.

Ascension, Troparion, tone 4

Thou hast ascended in glory, O Christ our God, / granting joy to Thy disciples by the promise of the Holy Spirit. / Through the blessing they were assured / that Thou art the Son of God, / the Redeemer of the world.

Ascension, Kontakion, tone 6

When Thou didst fulfill the dispensation for our sake / and unite earth to heaven; / Thou didst ascend in glory, O Christ our God, / not being parted from those who love Thee, / but remaining with them and crying: / I am with you and no one will be against you!

Giving Thanks in All Things: The Life of St. Arethas of the Kiev Caves

It is indeed fitting to give thanks to God for all that comes to pass. We should thank the Lord not only for what is good but for misfortunes as well, for both the righteous, like Job, and sinners are benefited by trials. Truly, a great sinner may be transformed into a perfect saint by ill fortune as was the case with the holy man of whom we shall now tell.

There was a monk named Arethas who lived in the Monastery of the Caves. He came from the city of Polotsk, and in his cell he had much hidden wealth. So greedy was he that he never gave a penny as alms to the poor nor spent anything even on himself. But one night, thieves came and stole all that he possessed. Because of this, he was cast into great sorrow and almost died of grief. He began to make accusations against the innocent, troubling many without cause, and all the brethren besought him to cease his search for the robbers. They sought to comfort him, saying, "Brother, cast thy care upon the Lord, and He will nourish thee." But Arethas did not wish to hear them and drove them all away with his sharp replies.

A few days later, Arethas fell into a grievous illness and was near death, but he still did not cease to complain and to blaspheme. The Lord, however, who loves man and "who willeth that all men be saved," showed mercy to him. As Arethas was lying sick on his bed like a dead man, not having spoken for many days, he suddenly began to cry out, wailing, "Lord, have mercy! Lord, forgive me! I have sinned, O

Lord! All things are Thine, and I regret not the loss of my riches."

Arethas then quickly arose from his bed of illness and explained to the brethren the reason why he had cried out. He described to them the vision, saying, "I saw both angels and a company of demons, who came to me and began to quarrel over the riches which had been stolen from me. The demons said, 'He did not thank God that these things were stolen from him: he cursed Him. Therefore, he is ours, and you must hand him over to us.'

"Then the angels said to me, 'O wretched man! If you had thanked God that your wealth was stolen, it would have been counted as alms as were the possessions Job lost. Whoever gives alms willingly has great merit before God, but when riches are stolen from a man, it is clear that he has been tempted by the devil. He has not willed this to happen, even if he does endure it thankfully. The devil brings this upon a man to make him blaspheme. But the grateful man ascribes all things to the will of God, and so his loss is counted as almsgiving.'

"When the angels said this to me, I cried out, 'Lord, forgive me! I have sinned, O Lord! All things are Thine, and I regret not the loss of my riches!'

"Immediately the demons vanished, and the angels were filled with joy. They counted as alms the silver I had lost and then departed."

When the brethren heard this, they glorified God, who guides sinners to the path of repentance and reveals to them the great power of gratitude. Thus corrected by God, the blessed Arethas entirely changed both his thoughts and ways for the better. All were amazed and said with the Apostle, "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound."

St. Arethas' feast is celebrated October 24.

On the Icon of the Theotokos & Prayer Elder Cleopa of Romanina (+1998)

When you see the icon of the Mother of God with the Christ Child in her arms, do you know what you are seeing? Heaven and earth! Heaven is Christ, He who is higher than the heavens, the Maker of heaven and earth. And the Mother of God represents the earth, because she is of our descent. She is from the royal and priestly lineage.

Prayer is the nourishment and life of the soul. Just as the body dies without food and drink, so also the soul dies without prayer.

Upcoming Events 2014

- 26 May: Memorial Day Picnic at noon; Liturgy at 10:00 a.m.
- 29 May Holy Ascension
- 8 June Holy Pentecost
- 30 June—4 July St. Peter the Aleut Youth Camp

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!