

The Confessor's Tongue for May 10, A. D. 2015

Sunday of the Paralytic; St. Theodosius of the Kiev Caves

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 Sayings of St. Anthony the Great 16

A brother said to Abba Anthony, 'Pray for me.' The old man said to him, 'I will have no mercy upon you, nor will God have any, if you yourself do not make an effort and if

you do not pray to God.'
Saying 16 in *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*

Commentary: To be a Christian requires that we desire God, that we actively seek Him, that we pray, we give, we keep Christ's commandments. Indeed, the great commands to love God and love neighbor call us to action, not merely to have a passive feeling of warmth towards the objects of our love.

Some people, however, for whatever reason, will ask others to do for them what they will not do for themselves, as in this case. The monk seeks the prayers of the recognized holy man, thinking that having Anthony's prayers will be more effective than his own and save him. Yet Anthony discerns that the monk is seeking an easy way out and exhorts him to make the needed effort on his own behalf.

Some Christians might seek the same: sending their names to be commemorated at monasteries, asking for special prayer services for their living and dead, and going to see holy elders. But no number of requests for prayer by holy elders and the like will ultimately benefit us if we do not make our own effort to pray and keep Christ's commandments.

Prayer is something every Christian must practice. It is a particular demonic delusion that leads us to think we can leave the prayer for our souls to others. A monk named Nikita in the Kiev Caves Monastery long ago found this out the hard way. Young and willful, he sought to live as a recluse against the advice of his abbot who warned him of his inexperience and the dangers of being deluded by demons. In his pride, Nikita insisted he would not be deceived, and he got the blessing of the monastery's elders to live as a recluse. Soon after he started living alone, his cave was filled with a sweet fragrance and he heard a voice joining him in prayer. He assumed it was an angel, and he prayed that God would reveal Himself to him, face to face. The voice told him an angel would be sent to him to whom he must be obedient in everything. Soon a demon appeared in the guise of an angel. The demon told the young monk that he would pray for him, freeing the monk to study the Old Testament. In his inexperience, he obeyed. He soon knew the Old Testament by heart (but could not even open the New Testament) and began prophesying inspired by the demon. Laymen came to hear him. The elders realized he was in a state of delusion and rescued him. Once the demon was driven off, Nikita forgot the Old Testament, couldn't remember ever having read, and, indeed, had forgotten how to read. Later, after his repentance, he

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became bishop of Novgorod, was later canonized, and is known today as St. Nikita the Recluse (as he had no beard, he is depicted as beardless in his icon).

The prayers of others help strengthen our feeble efforts, and at some dark times of life, we may even be carried by the prayers of others. But the prayers of others, no matter how holy and powerful they may be, can never be a substitute for our own prayer. If the four friends carried the paralytic to Christ for healing, symbolizing the power of intercessory prayer to bring the spiritually paralyzed to Christ and to do for them what they cannot do for themselves, once healed, the former paralytic was then responsible to come to Christ and to the Temple on his own.

Our desire for God, expressed in our feeble efforts to pray and do His will, attracts God's grace to enable us to do and be what we cannot do and be by our own strength. If we have insufficient desire even to make a weak, inadequate effort, neither God nor a holy man can help us, for such help would mean God was compelling us against our will. Christ has accomplished man's salvation through the economy of his becoming man. Our participation in that salvation made available through Him depends on our desire and our will. As St. Maximus puts it, "The mystery of salvation belongs to those who choose it, not to those who are compelled by force." God's love for us means He allows us to choose our eternal destiny as much as our wrong choices grieve Him. Such is the mystery of God's love for us.

Fr. Justin Frederick

Midfeast Pentecost

On Wednesday of the fourth week we celebrate the Mid-Feast of Pentecost, i.e. half of the period from Pascha to Pentecost. This day we commemorate that event from the life of the Savior, when He on the Mid-feast of the Feast of Tabernacles taught in the temple about His Own Divine ministry and the mystery of water, under which we understand the beneficial teaching of Christ and the beneficial gifts of the Holy Spirit. The Mid-feast of Holy Pentecost is referred to among the ancient Christian feasts. If its beginning cannot be seen in the canons of the Apostolic [37] and Antiochian Councils [20] concerning the assembly of local councils during the fourth week of Pentecost, then in the time of St. John Chrysostom it is already existing and established by the Holy Church. In the fifth century Anatolius of Constantinople, in the seventh the Venerable Andrew of Crete, in the eighth St. John of Damascus, in the ninth the Venerable Theophanes the Confessor wrote church hymns for the Mid-feast, with which the Holy Church even now praises the Lord in the Mid-feast of Pentecost. Standing between the day of Pascha and

the day of Descent of the Holy Spirit, the Mid-feast serves as a bond between these two great Christian celebrations: together with the continuing celebration of the first of these the Mid-feast reminds us of the approach of the feast of the Descent of the Holy Spirit, and also the feast of the Ascension of the Lord. "Let us glorify, brethren, - the Holy Church appeals to us, - the resurrection of Christ the Savior, and having reached the middle of the feast of the Master, let us most closely keep the commandments of God, that we may also be worthy to celebrate the Ascension, and the Coming of the Holy Spirit (*The Praises, Verse after Glory, Both now and Ever by Anatolius*)"; "Having reached the middle of the divine feasts let us who are godly wise hasten to learn the fulfillment of the divine virtues (*canon 1, Ode five, Troparion 1*)."

Bulgakov Handbook, Fr. E. Tarris, trans.

The Church: Her Nature and Task

Fr. Georges Florovsky

It is impossible to start with a formal definition of the Church. For, strictly speaking, there is none which could claim any doctrinal authority. None can be found in the Fathers. No definition has been given by the Ecumenical Councils. In the doctrinal summaries, drafted on various occasions in the Eastern Orthodox Church in the seventeenth century and taken often (but wrongly) for the "symbolic books," again no definition of the Church was given, except a reference to the relevant clause of the Creed, followed by some comments. This lack of formal definitions does not mean, however, a confusion of ideas or any obscurity of view. The Fathers did not care so much for the doctrine of the Church precisely because the glorious reality of the Church was open to their spiritual vision. One does not define what is self-evident. This accounts for the absence of a special chapter on the Church in all early presentations of Christian doctrine: in Origen, in St. Gregory of Nyssa, even in St. John of Damascus. Many modern scholars, both Orthodox and Roman, suggest that the Church itself has not yet defined her essence and nature. "Die Kirche selbst hat sich bis heute noch nicht definiert," says Robert Grosche. Some theologians go even further and claim that no definition of the Church is possible. In any case, the theology of the Church is still *im Werden*, in the process of formation.

In our time, it seems, one has to get beyond the modern theological disputes, to regain a wider historical perspective, to recover the true "catholic mind," which would embrace the whole of the historical experience of the Church in its pilgrimage through the ages. One has to return from the school-room to the worshipping Church and perhaps to change the school-dialect of theology for the pictorial and metaphorical language of Scripture. The very nature of the Church can be rather depicted and described than properly defined. And surely this can

be done only from within the Church. Probably even this description will be convincing only for those of the Church. The Mystery is apprehended only by faith.

The Greek name *ekklesia* adopted by the primitive Christians to denote the New Reality, in which they were aware they shared, presumed and suggested a very definite conception of what the Church really was. Adopted under an obvious influence of the Septuagint use, this word stressed first of all the organic continuity of the two Covenants. The Christian existence was conceived in the sacred perspective of the Messianic preparation and fulfilment (Heb. i, 1-2). A very definite theology of history was thereby implied. The Church was the true Israel, the new Chosen People of God, "a chosen generation, a holy nation, a peculiar people" (1 Pet. ii, 9). Or rather, it was the faithful Remnant, selected out of the unresponsive People of old. And all nations of the earth, Greeks and Barbarians, were to be coopted and grafted into this new People of God by the call of God (this was the main theme of St. Paul in Romans and Galatians—cf. Ephesians ch. ii).

Already in the Old Testament the word *ekklesia* (a rendering in Greek of the Hebrew *Qahal*) did imply a special emphasis on the ultimate unity of the Chosen People, conceived as a sacred whole, and this unity was rooted more in the mystery of the divine election than in any "natural" features. This emphasis could only be confirmed by the supplementary influence of the Hellenistic use of the word *ekklesia* meaning usually an assembly of the sovereign people in a city, a general congregation of all regular citizens. Applied to the new Christian existence, the word kept its traditional connotation. The Church was both the People and the City. A special stress has been put on the organic unity of Christians.

Christianity from the very beginning existed as a corporate reality, as a community. To be Christian meant just to belong to the community. Nobody could be Christian by himself, as an isolated individual, but only together with "the brethren," in a "togetherness" with them. *Onus Christianus—nullus Christianus*. [One Christian—no Christian]. Personal conviction or even a rule of life still do not make one a Christian. Christian existence presumes and implies an incorporation, a membership in the community. This must be qualified at once: in the *Apostolic* community, i.e. in communion with the Twelve and their message. The Christian "community" was gathered and constituted by Jesus Himself "in the days of His flesh," and it was given by Him at least a provisional constitution by the election and the appointment of the Twelve, to whom He gave the name (or rather the title) of His "messengers" or "ambassadors."⁵ For a "sending forth" of the Twelve was not only a mission, but precisely a commission, for which they were invested with a "power"

(Mark iii, 15; Matt, x, 1; Luke ix, 1). In any case as the appointed "witnesses" of the Lord (Luke xxiv, 48; Acts i, 8) the Twelve alone were entitled to secure the

continuity both of the Christian message and of the community life. Therefore communion with the Apostles was a basic note of the primitive "Church of God" in Jerusalem (Acts ii, 42: *koinonia*).

The Incarnation is being completed in the Church. And, in a certain sense, the Church is Christ Himself, in His all-embracing plenitude.

Christianity means a "common life," a life in common. Christians have to regard themselves as "brethren" (in fact this was one of their first names), as members of one corporation, closely linked together. And therefore charity had to be the first mark and the first proof as well as the token of this fellowship. We are entitled to say: Christianity is a community, a corporation, a fellowship, a brotherhood, a "society," *coetus fidelium*. And surely, as a first approximation, such a description could be of help. But obviously it requires a further qualification, and something crucial is missing here. One has to ask: in what exactly this unity and togetherness of the many is based and rooted? what is the power that brings many together and joins them one with another? Is this merely a social instinct, some power of social cohesion, an impetus of mutual affection, or any other natural attraction? Is this unity based simply on unanimity, on identity of views or convictions? Briefly, is the Christian Community, the Church, merely a human society, a society of men? Surely, the clear evidence of the New Testament takes us far beyond this purely human level. Christians are united not only among themselves, but first of all they are one—in Christ, and only this communion with Christ makes the communion of men first possible—in Him. The centre of unity is the Lord and the power that effects and enacts the unity is the Spirit. Christians are constituted into this unity by divine design; by the Will and Power of God. Their unity comes from above. They are one only in Christ, as those who had been born anew in Him, "rooted and built up in Him" (Col. ii, 7), who by One Spirit have been "baptized into One Body" (1 Cor. xii, 13). The Church of God has been established and constituted by God through Jesus Christ, Our Lord: "she is His own creation by water and the word." Thus there is no human society, but rather a "Divine Society," not a secular community, which would have been still "of this world," still commensurable with other human groups, but a sacred community, which is intrinsically "not of this world," not even of "this aeon," but of the "aeon to come."

Moreover, Christ Himself belongs to this community, as its Head, not only as its Lord or Master. Christ is not above or outside of the Church. The Church is in Him. The Church is not merely a community of those who believe in Christ and walk in His steps or in His commandments. She is a community of those who abide and dwell in Him, and in whom He Himself is abiding and dwelling by the

Spirit. Christians are set apart, "born anew" and re-created, they are given not only a new pattern of life, but rather a new principle: the new Life in the Lord by the Spirit. They are a "peculiar People," "the People of God's own possession." The point is that the Christian Community, the *ekklesia*, is a *sacramental community: communio in sacris*, a "fellowship in holy things," i.e. in the Holy Spirit, or even *communio sanctorum* (*sanctorum* being taken as neuter rather than masculine—perhaps that was the original meaning of the phrase). The unity of the Church is effected through the sacraments: Baptism and the Eucharist are the two "social sacraments" of the Church, and in them the true meaning of Christian "togetherness" is continually revealed and sealed. Or even more emphatically, the sacraments constitute the Church. Only in the sacraments does the Christian Community pass beyond the purely human measure and become the Church. Therefore "the right administration of the sacraments" belongs to the essence of the Church (to her *esse*). Sacraments must be "worthily" received indeed, therefore they cannot be separated or divorced from the inner effort and spiritual attitude of believers. Baptism is to be preceded by repentance and faith. A personal relation between an aspirant and his Lord must be first established by the hearing and the receiving of the Word, of the message of salvation. And again an oath of allegiance to God and His Christ is a prerequisite and indispensable condition of the administration of the sacrament (the first meaning of the word *sacramentum* was precisely "the (military) oath.") A catechumen is already "enrolled" among the brethren on the basis of his faith. Again, the baptismal gift is appropriated, received and kept, by faith and faithfulness, by the steadfast standing in the faith and the promises. And yet sacraments are not merely signs of a professed faith, but rather effective signs of the saving Grace—not only symbols of human aspiration and loyalty, but the outward symbols of the divine action. In them our human existence is linked to, or rather raised up to, the Divine Life, by the Spirit, the giver of life.

The Church as a whole is a *sacred* (or consecrated) community, distinguished thereby from "the (profane) world." She is the *Holy Church*. St. Paul obviously uses the terms "Church" and "saints" as co-extensive and synonymous. It is remarkable that in the New Testament the name "saint" is almost exclusively used in the plural, saintliness being social in its intrinsic meaning. For the name refers not to any human achievement, but to a gift, to sanctification or consecration. Holiness comes from the Holy One, i.e. only from God. To be holy for a man means to share the Divine Life. Holiness is available to individuals only in the community, or rather in the "fellowship of the Holy Spirit." The "communion of saints" is a pleonasm. One can be a "saint" only in the communion.

Strictly speaking, the Messianic Community, gathered by Jesus the Christ, was not yet the Church,

before His Passion and Resurrection, before "the promise of the Father" was sent upon it and it was "endued with the power from on high," "baptized with the Holy Spirit" (cf. Luke xxiv, 49 and Acts i, 4-5), in the mystery of Pentecost. Before the victory of the Cross disclosed in the glorious Resurrection, it was still *sub umbraculo legis*. [Under the Shadow of the law]. It was still the eve of the fulfillment. And Pentecost was there to witness to and to seal the victory of Christ. "The power from on high" has entered into history. The "new aeon" has been truly disclosed and started. And the sacramental life of the Church is the continuation of Pentecost.

The descent of the Spirit was a supreme revelation. Once and forever, in the "dreadful and inscrutable mystery" of Pentecost, the Spirit-Comforter enters the world in which He was not yet present in such manner as now He begins to dwell and to abide. An abundant spring of living water is disclosed on that day, here on earth, in the world which had been already redeemed and reconciled with God by the Crucified and Risen Lord. The Kingdom comes, for the Holy Spirit is the Kingdom.⁶ But the "coming" of the Spirit depends upon the "going" of the Son (John xvi, 7). "Another Comforter" comes down to testify of the Son, to reveal His glory and to seal His victory (xv, 26; xvi, 7 and 14). Indeed in the Holy Spirit the Glorified Lord Himself comes back or returns to His flock to abide with them always (xiv, 18 and 28) . . . Pentecost was the mystical consecration, the baptism of the whole Church (Acts i, 5). This fiery baptism was administered by the Lord: for He baptizes "with the Holy Spirit and with fire" (Matt, iii, 11 and Luke iii, 16). He has sent the Spirit from the Father, as a pledge in our hearts. The Holy Spirit is the spirit of adoption, in Christ Jesus, "the power of Christ" (2 Cor. xii, 9). By the spirit we recognize and we acknowledge that Jesus is the Lord (1 Cor. xii 3). The work of the Spirit in believers is precisely their incorporation into Christ, their baptism into one body (xii, 13), even the body of Christ. As St. Athanasius puts it: "being given drink of the Spirit, we drink Christ." For the Rock was Christ.

By the Spirit Christians are united with Christ, are united in Him, are constituted into His Body. *One body*, that of Christ: this excellent analogy used by St. Paul in various contexts, when depicting the mystery of Christian existence, is at the same time the best witness to the intimate experience of the Apostolic Church. By no means was it an accidental image: it was rather a summary of faith and experience. With St. Paul the main emphasis was always on the intimate union of the faithful with the Lord, on their sharing in His fullness. As St. John Chrysostom has pointed out, commenting on Col. iii, 4, in all his writings St. Paul was endeavoring to prove that the believers "are in communion with Him in all things" and "precisely to show this union does he speak of the Head and the body." It is highly probable that the term was suggested by the Eucharistic experience

(cf. 1 Cor. x, 17), and was deliberately used to suggest its sacramental connotation. The Church of Christ is one in the Eucharist, for the Eucharist is Christ Himself, and He *sacramentally* abides in the Church, which is His Body. The Church is a body indeed, *an organism*, much more than a society or a corporation. And perhaps an "organism" is the best modern rendering of the term *to soma*, as used by St. Paul.

Still more, the Church is the *body of Christ* and His "fullness" *Body and fullness (to soma and to pleroma)*—these two terms are correlative and closely linked together in St. Paul's mind, one explaining the other: "which is His body, the fullness of Him Who all in all is being fulfilled" (Eph. i, 23). The Church is the Body of Christ because it is His *complement*. St. John Chrysostom commends the Pauline idea just in this sense. "The Church is the complement of Christ in the same manner in which the head completes the body and the body is completed by the head." Christ is not alone. "He has prepared the whole race in common to follow Him, to cling to Him, to accompany His train." Chrysostom insists, "Observe how he (i.e. St. Paul) introduces Him as having need of all the members. This means that only then will the Head be filled up, when the Body is rendered perfect, when we are all together, co-united and knit together." In other words, the Church is the extension and the "fullness" of the Holy Incarnation, or rather of the Incarnate life of the Son, "with all that for our sakes was brought to pass, the Cross and tomb, the Resurrection the third day, the Ascension into Heaven, the sitting on the right hand" (Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, Prayer of Consecration).

The Incarnation is being completed in the Church. And, in a certain sense, the Church is Christ Himself, in His all-embracing plenitude (cf. 1 Cor. xii, 12). This identification has been suggested and vindicated by St. Augustine: "*Non solum nos Christianos factos esse, sed Christum.*" [Not only to make us Christians, but Christ.] For if He is the Head, we are the members: the whole man is He and *we*—"totus homo, ille et nos—Christus et Ecclesia." And again: "For Christ is not simply in the head and not in the body (only), but Christ is entire in the head and *body*"—"non enim Christus in capite et non in corpore, sed Christus totus in capite et in corpore." This term *totus Christus* occurs in St. Augustine again and again, this is his basic and favorite idea, suggested obviously by St. Paul. "When I speak of Christians in the plural, I understand one in the One Christ. Ye are therefore many, and ye are yet one: we are many and we are *one*"—"cum plures Christi-anos appelle, in uno Christo unum intelligo." "For our Lord Jesus is not only in Himself, but in us also"—"*Dominus enim Jesus non solum in se, sed et in nobis.*"¹³ "One Man up to the end of the *a. ges*"—"Unus homo usque ad finem saeculi extenditur."

To Be Continued...

Upcoming Events 2015

25 May Memorial Day Picnic

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!