

The Confessor's Tongue for May 15, A. D. 2016

4th Sunday of Pascha; Paralytic; Marty Basiliscus

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.

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 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 last, the eighth, day of the Old Testament feast of the Tabernacles, commemorating the forty year wandering of the Jews in the desert (that is why the people during this feast lived in tabernacles, i.e. tents made from wood branches), was accompanied by the following action: With a countless confluence of people, the high priest left the temple of Solomon to the spring of Siloam, at the foot of Zion; with a golden chalice scooped up light and clean water; at the sound of the trumpet they returned to the temple, he mixed the water with wine and poured it over the altar of oblation. The people during this action without stopping sang the great alleluia, i.e. the six psalms (112-117). By this action they commemorated the wonderful gift of drinking water for the Jews in the desert, by Moses striking a rock.

Having taken an instance from this sign, Jesus Christ also proclaims Himself as the source of the true living water (for whom both the water of the desert, and the water of the Siloam Spring, together with other springs in the Promised Land, were only prototypes), at the same time teaching that the believer in Him filled with the true living water, will himself become a beneficial vessel, from which flows out plenty of the multifarious abilities of the Spirit of God, and not only will he not thirst forever, but will receive the strength to act with the saving image even for others (John 7:37-39).

The Church has appointed John 7:14-30 to be read for the Midfeast, thereby linking Pascha and Pentecost.

The Troparion of the Midfeast ("In the middle of the Feast, O Savior, fill my thirsting soul with the waters of godliness, as Thou didst cry to all: If anyone thirst, let him come to Me and drink [John 7:37]. O Christ God, Fountain of our life, glory to Thee!") hints at the encounter of Christ and the Samaritan Woman in just a few days.

On this day we perform the Lesser Blessing of Water, and the Blessing of Fields. (*various sources*)

The Commandments of Christ

"If ye love Me, keep my commandments." John 14:15

Orthodoxy is not some abstract system of belief to which a man gives intellectual assent for salvation. Rather it is a whole way of life, man's response to

God's revelation of Himself in the God-man Jesus Christ, inseparably uniting right belief with right action. Right belief is expressed in the dogmas and teachings of the Church, while right action is most fully expressed by Christ's commandments in the Gospel.

While modern man increasingly resorts to legislation (the commands of the State) in an attempt to solve perceived problems, the notion of commandments is very much out of favor. Worshipping himself and his own will, man wants nothing to do with commandments from any source. The very word is repugnant to him. The prayers and hymns of the Church, which often mention the commandments, acknowledge this conflicted relationship man has with them. "I have made myself a stranger to every divine commandment..." (*Tone 8, Mon Vespers*) and "I have fled from Thy commandments, estranging myself from life, and draw nigh unto death..." (*Tone 8, Fri Matins, canon, ode 6*).

Our estrangement from the commandments darkens our spiritual sight, blinding us, and making us unfit to see the Light, hindering us from looking upon Christ, bringing us to death: "With what eyes shall I look upon Thee, O Christ, not having kept even one of Thy commandments?" (*Tone 8, Mon Matins, canon, ode 3*) The irmos of the fifth ode of the canon for Sunday and Wednesday Matins expresses this condition cries out for remedy: "Why hast Thou cast me away from Thy face, O never-setting Light? Why hath this dismal darkness covered me, the wretched one? But turn me and guide my path towards the light of Thy commandments I pray Thee."

Indeed, the Psalmist has said, "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (118/119:105). The word and the commandments bring us light to dispel the gloom of sin. Thus we pray, "...grant me to walk in the light of Thy commandments, O Word, that I may glorify Thee in the morning watches" (*Tone 8, Tue Matins, canon, ode 5 irmos*).

When we make a man a catechumen, the Church prays, "Enable him to walk in all Thy commandments and to fulfill those things which are well-pleasing unto Thee; for if a man do those things, he shall find life in them." By confessing Christ as King and Lord, a man voluntarily submits himself to Christ's commandments; and the struggle to conform his life to them is at the heart of the process of purification, which is preeminently the purpose of the catechumenate. The keeping of the commandments and cleansing are connected as a hymn shows: "Make me to fulfill the commandments of God and cleanse the movements of my heart that I may praise Thee" (*Tone 8, Monday Vespers*).

Having baptized the catechumen, the Church requests in the closing litany "that he may be kept in the faith of a pure confession, in all godliness, and the

fulfilling of the commandments of Christ, all the days of his life," for Christ did not simply command us to baptize, thereby making converts, but also to teach "them to do all things whatsoever I have commanded you" (*Matt. 28:20*).

Thereafter, after every Communion in the Holy Mysteries, in giving thanks the faithful say, "Grant that they [these Mysteries] may become for me unto the observance of Thy commandments," and "grant that the communion of thy Holy Body and Blood of Thy Christ may be for us...unto the accomplishment of Thy commandments..." Christ's commandments remain our compass for life, and we seek through the Eucharist the grace to keep them. At Compline, the after-supper daily prayer of the Church, the Church asks the Theotokos to "show me forth a proven doer of His commandments". And even at Marriage, the Church prays for the newly united couple, "Mercifully grant that they may life together in purity; and enable them to attain to a ripe old age, walking in Thy commandments with a pure heart."

Ultimately, the path of the commandments brings enlightenment, illumination, and holiness, and prepares us for theosis (divinization, union with God). The seventh prayer of light at Vespers, speaks of us being "enlightened by the exercise of Thy commandments." In the prayer at Vespers "Vouchsafe, O Lord, to keep us this evening without sin..." we pray, "Blessed art Thou O Lord, teach me Thy statutes. Blessed art Thou, O Master, make me to understand Thy statutes. Blessed art Thou, O Holy One, enlighten me with Thy statutes." A man must first learn God's statutes or commands if he is to do them. But he must also learn to understand them, why he needs them, what they imply for his life, and that they are not merely arbitrary do's and don'ts, but express God's will for man and work to render him human and holy and fit for divine habitation and service. Knowing and understanding the commandments, a man will endeavor to do them rather than resist them, and the doing of them brings enlightenment and the deep experiential knowledge of God in which is abundance of life.

One of the twelve prayers prayed by the priest at Matins during the Six Psalms expresses similar ideas: "Teach us, O God, Thy righteousness, Thy commandments, and Thy statutes; enlighten the eyes of our intelligence that we may never fall asleep unto death in sin." One of the reasons we struggle so much with sin is that we have not had "the eyes of our intelligence" sufficiently enlightened to see God's light clearly, and it is that light which allows us to see sin for what it is and be properly repulsed by it. Having the commandments and a fear of them is a great help in the battle against sin. As the priest prays in the ninth prayer of Matins and before the Gospel reading at the Liturgy, "Instill in us also the fear of Thy blessed commandments that, trampling down all carnal desires, we may pursue a spiritual way of life, both considering and doing all things well-pleasing unto Thee."

Understanding the centrality of Christ's commandments to the Christian life, that it is by keeping them a Christian demonstrates his love for Christ and actually loves his neighbor should move the seeker of Truth to study the commandments, to treasure them as the path to his object, and to pray and sing fervently at every Vespers and Vigil, "Blessed art Thou, O Lord; teach me Thy statutes." *Fr. Justin Frederick*

Christ's Commandments in John

To assist our reading of St. John's Gospel this Paschal Season, here are Christ's commandments from John to ponder and apply.

Make not My Father's house of house of merchandise (2:16).

Marvel not that ye must be born again (3:7).

Lift up your eyes and look on the fields, for they are white for harvest (4:35).

Sin no more lest a worse thing befall thee (5:14).

Search the Scriptures, for they testify of Me (5:39).

Labor not for the food that perishes but for that which endures to everlasting life which the Son gives you (6:27).

Murmur not among yourselves (6:43).

Judge not according to appearance, but judge righteous judgment (7:24).

Walk while ye have the light (12:35).

Believe in the light while ye have the light that ye may be children of light (12:36).

Wash one another's feet (13:14).

A new commandment: love one another as I have loved you (13:34).

Let not your heart be troubled, believe in God and in Me (14:1).

Believe Me that I am in the Father and He in Me (14:11).

If ye love Me, keep My commandments (14:15).

Let not your heart be troubled or afraid (14:27).

Abide in Me and I in you (15:4).

Abide in My love (15:9).

Love one another as I have loved you (15:12).

Love one another (15:17).

Ask and ye shall receive that your joy may be full (16:24).

Be of good cheer: I have overcome the world (16:33).

Receive ye the Holy Spirit (20:22).

Upcoming Events 2015-16

28 May Baptism of Estefania Dean 3:00 p.m.

30 May Memorial Day Picnic

11 June, Saturday, Installation of Bishop Alexander

30-31 July, 15-Year Anniversary with Bishop Alexander

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!