

# The Confessor's Tongue for June 12, A. D. 2016

7<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Pascha; Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council

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.

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## **The Commandments of Christ**

"If you love Me, you will keep my commandments."

*But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd. Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few; Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth laborers into his harvest.*  
*Matthew 9:36-38*

As Orthodox Christians and followers of Christ, we must always share Christ's concern for the multitudes outside of the Church who faint in their lack of spiritual nourishment and are scattered as sheep without a shepherd. Christ became man to reveal God and to die for every human being on the face of the earth. God loves each man alike, with no favoritism. Thus we cannot be indifferent to the fate of those around us who may die without Christ. We share in Christ's concern for the lost sheep by praying to the Lord of the harvest that He will send laborers into the harvest, for "the laborers are few." We need laborers here in Denton County, where many live entirely without Christ, and many others live with distorted and incomplete versions of the Christian faith. Christ commands us to pray for those laborers to be sent out. Perhaps they will be some of us; perhaps others whom God will send here.

Nonetheless, we must pray. Nearly 800,000 people live in Denton County, and there is but one Orthodox parish. Now that we have a bishop, we should pray and work towards the founding of new missions in our own county and in the neighboring counties (particularly Wise and Cooke counties). There is no good reason why there should not be five or ten parishes in Denton County alone. But whatever God gives, let us pray for laborers in Denton County: at UNT, at TWU, at NCTC, in every town, city, neighborhood, and place of employment. Our task here at very least is to be the Church and to pray for laborers. We may not be confident about how to start more missions. We may not see where the people and money will come from. But we can pray as Christ commanded, and we are remiss if we do not.

How may we pray for this? Here are three suggestions. First, we may offer a petition in our words words as part of our daily prayers. Second, as we head out of our homes each day for work, school, or errands, we may ask God to send out laborers. Third, we could read an Akathist to St. Innocent of Alaska, St. Nicholas of Japan, St. Nina of Georgia, or another missionary saint, asking his prayers for our area. We may soon begin offering a monthly molieben or akathist to this end. *Fr. Justin Frederick*

## **Concerning Spiritual Reading**

*St. Nicodemus the Hagiorite (+1809)*

If you *continually* read spiritual books with eagerness and diligence, know that this continuous eagerness and diligence will open your mind and make it receptive to spiritual meanings. And what you did not understand the first time you will easily understand when you read it two or three times. For God, seeing your continuous diligence, will illumine your mind to understand what is difficult.

## **On the Perfection Human Beings Can Achieve**

*St. Nicodemus of Athos (+1809)*

All the saved ones may be divided into six ranks and orders. And the first rank is when someone for the fear of God and hell, keeps some of the divine commandments like a slave; and the second rank is when someone keeps the Master's commandments for the reward of the Kingdom of Heaven, as a paid servant; the third rank is when someone keeps the Lord's commandments and only for the sake of God's love, as a friend; and the fourth and superior rank is when someone reaches the point of becoming a son or daughter of God according to grace to whom the inheritance of the Kingdom of God is given according to the apostolic saying, "If a son, than an heir of God" (Galatians 4:7). The fifth and higher rank is when someone becomes worthy to become a brother of Christ, and for this brotherhood, becomes with Christ an inheritor of the Kingdom of God in accordance with the Apostles' saying, "The heirs of God, but also co-heirs with Christ" (Romans 8:17). Most high of all the ranks is when someone becomes worthy to become mother of Christ in accordance with the word of Christ Himself, who said, "Here are my mothers and my brothers: whoever does the will of my heavenly Father is my brother, my sister, my mother" (Matthew 12:49-50).

## **On Holy Pentecost**

Next Sunday, the tenth day following the Feast of Ascension and the fiftieth day after Holy Pascha, the Church celebrates the Great Feast of Pentecost. Indeed, the name *Pentecost* means fiftieth day.

The Christian feast commemorates the descent of the Holy Spirit at the Jewish feast of Pentecost on Christ's mother and disciples gathered in the upper room in obedience to Christ's command to wait in Jerusalem for the coming of the Comforter. The Spirit came in power upon those gathered, empowering them to proclaim the Gospel to the world. The Church's beginning can be marked from this day.

The Jewish Pentecost was celebrated fifty days after Passover and commemorated both the spring harvest and the giving of the Law on Mt. Sinai to

Moses on the fiftieth day after their departure from Egypt. Just as Christ's death fulfilled the type that was the Jewish Passover and revealed its true meaning, so too, the descent of the Holy Spirit fulfilled the meaning of the feast of Pentecost established long before in the Law. The Mosaic Old Testament Church was established when the Law was given, but this was but a type and shadow of the fullness that Messiah was to bring with His coming and the establishment of His Church.

Pentecost is also known as "Holy Trinity", because it is with the descent of the Spirit that the action of the Holy Spirit was revealed to the world, and man learned to venerate and glorify God in three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

On Pentecost, it is customary to decorate the church and its hall (and even homes) with greenery and to hold flowers during the Liturgy as an expression of our joy and thanksgiving to God for His Holy, Life-creating Spirit, who renews us and gives us birth through Baptism into new life. The decorations are also a consecration to God of the first fruits of spring.

A special feature of the services of Pentecost is the Sunday Vespers service, often served right after Liturgy on Sunday. Also known as the Service of Kneeling, it is marked by the three great "Kneeling Prayers." All the faithful solemnly kneel for the first time since Pascha to ask forgiveness and God's visitation, protection, and renewal through fresh outpourings of the Spirit.

The Monday after Pentecost is called "The Day of the Holy Spirit" and is dedicated to the glorification of the Holy Spirit.

At Pentecost, each Christian is given the opportunity to renew his spiritual life by seeking a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit in his life. Among the Church Fathers, St. Symeon the New Theologian, who lived in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, was a zealous herald of new birth by the grace of the Spirit. According to St. Symeon, each Christian receives the Spirit like a divine fire at baptism but often covers up this inner spiritual treasure with the darkness of many sins by the time he is an adult. A Christian must turn to Christ, indeed must run to Him, for a new sealing of the Spirit through repentance, forgiveness, and faithful observance of God's commandments. A Christian can again experience consciously the new life of the Apostles. Such a Christian is "born from above," being granted the Holy Spirit anew and being baptized again by the Spirit as a child of God. St. Symeon writes, "Just as it is impossible for one to be saved who has not been baptized by water and the Spirit, neither is it for him who has sinned after baptism, unless he be baptized from on high and be born again. This the Savior confirmed when He said to Nicodemus, "Unless one is born from on high, he cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven" (*Catechetical Discourse 32.3*). Indeed, we need frequent renewals of the presence of the Spirit in our lives.

The importance of Pentecost can also be seen in the Church's practice of counting time from

Pentecost. All the Sundays of the year from Pentecost to the beginning of Great Lent are numbered from Pentecost—up to 37. This is the time of the Church's mission in the world, empowered by the Holy Spirit. If the season of Great Lent is a season of personal repentance and the Paschal season is one of joyous celebration, Pentecost is the empowering of every believer for mission in the world, and the time after Pentecost marks the time of that mission.

The week following Pentecost is a fast-free week. We resume kneeling and doing prostrations and saying the prayer "O Heavenly King." Pentecost is celebrated for seven days through its Leavetaking on Saturday. During the feast, we say or sing the troparion before meals and during our daily prayers.

Every one of the faithful is urged to participate fully in the feast by attentively attending the Festal Vigil Saturday evening, the Divine Liturgy Sunday morning, and the Sunday Vespers with the Kneeling Prayers and by preparing this week by cultivating a renewed hunger for the presence and manifestation of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

### Fathers of the First Council

The heresy of Arius was one of the most destructive heresies. It concerned the teaching about the divinity of the Son of God, i.e. that main doctrine of Christianity, on which all our faith and the whole Church of Christ is founded, which makes it the unique basis for all hope of our salvation. If the Arian heresy, rejecting the divinity of the Son of God, Jesus Christ, then exasperated the whole Church and carried away with itself a great many pastors and shepherds—if this heresy had overcome the true teaching of the Church and was made dominant, then for a long time Christianity itself would no longer exist and the whole world would be plunged into its former darkness of unbelief and superstitions. The Holy Fathers at the First Ecumenical Council laid down the Orthodox teaching, having established it universally. And the Holy Church still glorifies these same Holy Fathers of Nicaea on the Sunday after the Ascension because the most glorious Ascension of the Lord serves as clear proof of the inseparable connection of the two natures in Jesus Christ, the divine and the human.

### Intern Coming

We will be blessed to have a seminarian intern serving at St. Maximus this summer July 1 — August 15. He is currently attending the Council in Crete. More to come.

### Upcoming Events 2016

18 June Colias Baptism  
19 June Pentecost  
30-31 July, 15-Year Anniversary

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!