

The Confessor's Tongue for August 7, A. D. 2016

7th Sunday after Pentecost, Postfeast of Transfiguration, St. Dometius

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 Bishop's Ministry

During his visit, Bishop Alexander described the ministry of the bishop as threefold.

First, he shepherds the priests as the priests shepherd the flock. While the priest is on the frontline, the bishop is typically back behind the lines, supporting those under fire. The shepherds need support, instruction, direction, prayer, counsel, and correction—and this the bishop provides.

Second, the bishop serves as an icon of the glory of God when he serves the hierarchical liturgy. Some people react negatively to all the ritual and finery, objecting that such honor should not be paid to a man, especially in a (supposedly) democratic society. Yet they misunderstand the matter. The pomp and circumstance is not about the man who is bishop: it is honor paid ultimately to our one great High Priest, our Lord Jesus Christ. The bishop provides us with an image, albeit a pale one, of God's glory.

Third, the bishop connects the faithful and clergy of his diocese with the universal Church. Christ has but one body, not many, though the one body comprises many members. The parishes of a region under one bishop compose a diocese. The bishop of the diocese represents his diocese to the bishops of the other dioceses of a larger region (usually a nation-state). The bishops of that national church compose the Holy Synod headed by the primate (in our case, the Metropolitan) who chairs the Holy Synod and himself represents the national church to all the other national churches. All inter-church activity at this level requires his blessing. We may see this another way. The local parish priest commemorates the bishop of his diocese at services. The bishop commemorates the primate (Patriarch, Metropolitan, Archbishop), while the Primate commemorates the heads of all the autocephalous Orthodox Churches which compose the one Church.

Bishop Alexander also outlined his plan for the diocese. As it has grown too large, he will work to get approval to make Fr. Gerasim an auxiliary bishop as quickly as possible. After a time, he envisions consecrating a second auxiliary bishop and eventually making two dioceses out of one, splitting it at the Mississippi River.

St. Athanasius on the Psalter

Reader Maximus Greeson

Our focus in the past two reflections have been on the Psalms. We paid special attention to two particular psalms. Most recently we sat with Psalm 46 and had St. John Chrysostom lead our thoughts. We will now step back from particular psalms and heed the voice of the great Athanasius of Alexandria. A letter to Marcellinus penned by St. Athanasius gives us a great orientation to the Psalter. I highly

encourage you to read this letter, easily found online or within *A Psalter for Prayer* published by Holy Trinity Publications in Jordanville, New York. We will only briefly draw out St. Athanasius' points. However, it would be most beneficial for one to read this letter in order to attend to the specifics of Athanasius' insights and suggestions.

St. Athanasius affirms the basic truth that all Scripture is inspired by God [2 Tim 3:16] but believes that the Psalter bears special fruit. Each book of the Bible has its own particular message. We hear of creation in one, about the exodus of Israel in another, the Tabernacle and the priesthood, etc. In the Psalter we hear about all of God's economy of salvation from creation and his dealings with Israel to Jesus Christ's incarnation, suffering, death, ascension, sitting at the right of God, his destruction of the devil, and his place as judge of all. Here it should be noted that the reading of Athanasius' detailing of the teaching of each particular psalm is worth the reader's effort. While there are truths stated about the Savior in other books of Scripture, Athanasius stresses that there is one interpretation common to them all that resounds with the one voice of the Holy Spirit.

However, the Psalter has a peculiar and special grace. Athanasius states, "that within [the psalms there] are represented and portrayed in all their great variety the movements of the human soul. It is like a picture, in which you see yourself portrayed, and seeing, may understand and consequently form yourself upon the pattern given". To Athanasius it is within the reading of the Psalter that we come to learn about ourselves. He says further, "You find depicted in it all the movements of your soul, all its changes, its ups and downs, its failures and recoveries. Moreover, whatever your particular need or trouble, from this same book you can select a form of words to fit it, so that you do not merely hear and then pass on, but learn the way to remedy your ill.

Prohibitions of evil-doing are plentiful in Scripture, but only the Psalter tells you how to obey these orders and abstain from sin. Repentance, for example, is enjoined repeatedly; but to repent means to leave off sinning, and it is the Psalms that show you how to set about repenting and with what words your penitence may be expressed". It is one thing to know that one should repent. But the Psalter gives you the words and way in which repentance may be fulfilled.

The Psalter also gives us access to the words we need to bear afflictions and how to voice our hope in God. They also exhort us to thankfulness and provide us with fitting words. Athanasius points out that in most books of Scripture we read about others and how they go about doing things. The Psalter becomes the book that, when read, it is as though the words were one's own words. We do not repeat Moses, Abraham, or Isaac's words or actions. Athanasius

comments "...but the marvel with the Psalter is that, barring those prophecies about the Saviour and some about the Gentiles, the reader takes all its words upon his lips as though they were his own, and each one sings the Psalms as though they had been written for his special benefit, and takes them and recites them, not as though someone else were speaking or another person's feelings being described, but as himself speaking of himself, offering the words to God as his own heart's utterance, just as though he himself had made them up. Not as the words of the patriarchs or of Moses and the other prophets will he reverence these: no, he is bold to take them as his own and written for his very self. Whether he has kept the Law or whether he has broken it, it is his own doings that the Psalms describe; everyone is bound to find his very self in them and, be he faithful soul or be he sinner, each reads in them descriptions of himself".

The Psalter provides us with a mirror and a guide to the righteous life. The mirror and guide though are ultimately for Athanasius configured around Jesus Christ. Jesus did not just die for us but also desired to display to us his own perfect way of life. "And therefore, before He came among us, He sketched the likeness of this perfect life for us in words, in this same book of Psalms; in order that, just as He revealed Himself in flesh to be the perfect, heavenly Man, so in the Psalms also men of good-will might see the pattern life portrayed, and find therein the healing and correction of their own". The reading and contemplation of the Psalms is a special and specific way in which we commune with and imitate Jesus Christ. His words literally become our words.

Because of Athanasius' view of the Psalter he then provides us with details about each psalm and the situations in which the reading of the psalm provides aid. In the reading and chanting of the psalms we find our souls integrated and rightly ordered to things divine. "For a soul rightly ordered by chanting the sacred words forgets its own afflictions and contemplates with joy the things of Christ alone". In the confusion of the world and in the flutter of temptation and suggestions abounding around us we should turn to the Psalter to focus our mind upon God.

In closing, Athanasius offers us these words: "So then, my son, let whoever reads this Book of Psalms take the things in it quite simply as God-inspired; and let each select from it, as from the fruits of a garden, those things of which he sees himself in need. For I think that in the words of this book all human life is covered, with all its states and thoughts, and that nothing further can be found in man. For no matter what you seek, whether it be repentance and confession, or help in trouble and temptation or under persecution, whether you have been set free from plots and snares or, on the contrary, are sad for any reason, or whether, seeing yourself progressing and your enemy cast down, you want to praise and thank and bless the Lord, each of these things the Divine Psalms show you how to do, and in every case

the words you want are written down for you, and you can say them as your own".

The Commandments of Christ

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

"Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men."

Matthew 4:19

Christ follows up His command to all to repent (July 3 CT, Matt. 4:17) with a call to follow Him. On the shore of the Sea of Galilee, Jesus put Peter and Andrew on the spot. They had met Him at Jordan when John had baptized Christ, and they had initially followed Him then, but had back to their father. Here Jesus calls them to the clear decision: to lay aside their nets, their boats, and their miraculous catch (Luke 5) to follow Jesus, to be with Him, to do what He did and to go where He went. Both Peter and Andrew followed Christ to the degree that both died by crucifixion.

Let us ask ourselves, Have we truly become followers of Christ? Are we present where He is present? Do we love to spend time with Him? Do we strive to follow His will and program for the life that He gave us rather than one we have devised or dreamed? Do we love His house and frequent it?

Following Christ has a result: He makes us fishers of men. Too often we think that we are the ones who have to make ourselves fishers of men. But becoming one who can catch souls for Christ is accomplished by following Christ, not primarily by soul-winning seminars and special techniques. As we spend time with Him, as we put off the old man and put on Christ, as we seek to do His will as we come to know it, and as we make ourselves available to Him to use for His purposes, He will make us winners of souls. As we get to know Him and grow to love him more deeply, as we experience His presence in our lives, we shall become more capable of drawing others to Him through the power and presence of His Holy Spirit in us. This is why St. Seraphim said, "Acquire a [truly] peaceful spirit, and a thousand others around you will be saved."

To follow Christ means to leave behind what we were before we met Him and to become a new creation in accordance with His purpose and will. It means to cease following the program of the world, which seeks to squeeze us into its mold. The simple fishermen became powerful Apostles and shakers of the world through following Christ. May we all become true followers of Christ. *Fr. Justin Frederick*

Upcoming Events 2016

1-14 August Dormition Fast
8 August 6:00 p.m. Vigil for St. Herman
9 August 9:00 a.m. Liturgy for St. Herman
12 August All-Night Vigil for St. Maximus
14 August 5:00 p.m. Vigil for Dormition
15 August 8:00 a.m. Liturgy for Dormition
15 August - 9 September Priest on vacation

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!