

# The Confessor's Tongue for September 25, A. D. 2016

14<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost, St. Sergius of Radonezh; St. Euphrosyne of Alexandria  
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 Importance of the Old Testament**

*Metropolitan Anthimos of Alexandroupolis*

*Your priest met Metropolitan Anthimos on his trip to Serbia and Mt. Athos in 2014. His spiritual father is Elder Macarios, the Abbot at the Marouda Kellia where I stayed, and he was there for a visit and for Confession. We left the Holy Mountain the same way; he paid for our boat ticket and provided refreshment for us in Ouranopolis. He made a good impression on me and my travelling companions.*

Many people nowadays question the relevance of the Old Testament and the contribution it can make – if any – to society as a whole. Some attack it and disapprove of it. They are making a grave mistake. The Old Testament is God's second gift to us after that of reason and self-determination. While other peoples were still fighting shadows in the dark, the Israelites were conversing with God. While other nations were speculating about God and attempting to locate Him in multi-faceted idols, Israel was coming to terms with Him. While other nations were sacrificing their children to appease God, Israel was singing psalms and hymns to God and was concerned about how to reduce the distance that separated them from Him.

In days gone by, the texts of the Old Testament guided the people away from times of barbarity through to a relatively enlightened society. In the realm in which the people of God functioned, with such "building materials" as they found, they laid the foundations of the enduring religious sense of the world.

The books of the Old Testament are read multifariously and exude an air of confidence in God and indicate how this trust can be restored when it has been shaken. In our relations with God, each of us is Jewish inside, to this day.

The Christian Church should never forget what it owes to the Old Testament and to the people of Israel, our "custodian until Christ came". There have been extreme times when it has forgotten, and has then acted in ways that were both unchristian and inhumane.

It is time to start discussing the Old Testament and to respect its contribution to society as a whole. To have an understanding of this requirement, try removing from world legislation, from morality, from art, from human decency, what the Old Testament has contributed and then you will realize how appallingly impoverished and pointless the world would be. If you tried to read the New Testament with no previous knowledge of the Old, you would not understand more than a few fragments.

Like it or not, "they are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race,

according to the flesh, is Christ (*Rom. 9, 4-5*). We need to remember that always. And to recognize it.

## **How to Act in Church**

*Even though I am not aware of egregious problems, every so often, we need to be reminded as to how we should conduct ourselves in church. The overriding concern in all of these 'rules' is to avoid any sort of behavior that distracts others from worship or prayer, or that shows disrespect for the nature of the Liturgy itself. I ask all of us to read this carefully and with humility, thinking about our own shortcomings in these matters and asking God for help to overcome them. If you have any questions, please address them to your priest. Fr. Justin*

The temple of God is a house of prayer. Everything in it must therefore be imbued with reverence, suffused with the spirit of heartfelt prayer. Whatever interferes with prayer must be kept away from the church.

There are, of course, countless things that interfere with and distract us from prayer, and there is no need to enumerate them, for our conscience should prompt us to know how to behave properly in church. Nevertheless, a reminder of some principal rules of church etiquette is sometimes needed, for we are not immune to the deteriorating standards of behavior in our society, and what was not so long ago a matter of course and habit is now a matter for instruction.

One must not talk in church. Such is the precept enjoined by the saints. All extraneous conversation, even when services are not in progress, is an offense to the sanctity of the Temple, which is consecrated, or set aside, for the exclusive purpose of prayer and worship. [In our situation, though our chapel is not formally consecrated, we do well to treat as though it were consecrated as much as we can under our circumstances.] For this reason, if it is necessary to talk during the service and this cannot be postponed, it is better to leave the church. If one must give an instruction or ask a question, this should be done in a whisper and as briefly as possible.

Greeting one another, shaking hands, exchanging hellos—this also has no place in church during the service. It should be done after the service—or before. One should avoid making eye contact with others on entering; at most a silent inclination of the head is sufficient acknowledgment of others.

One should make every effort to arrive on time—in time to be in place to hear "Blessed is the Kingdom." To come after that moment is to come late. We show great disrespect for our brethren and for Christ when we consistently permit ourselves to come late.

Once one has arrived and found one's place, one should not leave the Liturgy until the dismissal—

unless one is a catechumen and has been dismissed or one has a 'personal emergency' or must take a child out for correction or quieting. To go in and out for other reasons is to show great disrespect to Christ and others and frequently distracts others from worship.

If one must leave the service for good reason, one should refrain from entering into conversation in the hall, on the front porch, etc., and recite the Jesus Prayer until you are able to return. In this way one may maintain a prayerful spirit despite having to leave the Liturgy. Likewise, dismissed catechumens may remain prayerful as they read and prepare themselves for illumination.

One must likewise avoid disturbing those praying by walking from place to place, by coughing loudly, by jangling keys or coins in one's pocket, by failing to turn off cell phones, by bringing noisy children's toys into church, etc. All of this is not difficult to avoid if one is willing to make the effort.

Jesus said, "Let the little children come unto Me" and we do. Children of all ages are welcome and expected to be present at the divine services. This requires different things of the rest of us. We must all expect a modest amount of noise to be generated by small children, and we must be patient and tolerant thereof. We must do our part to help children behave properly by not meeting their gaze when they seek our attention or otherwise engaging them during services. Adults and older children often do younger children a great disservice by playing with them and engaging them during church, thus teaching them that it is acceptable not to pay attention. Parents must make a serious effort to train their children to obedience and to conduct themselves quietly and reverently in church. They must be ready to take children out to correct them when they misbehave and to calm them when they lose control of themselves. Under no circumstances does the welcome of children in church mean that they have the right to misbehave and distract others.

Parents are responsible for their children, who should stand with their parents throughout the service. On no circumstance should children be permitted to wander where they will, or go stand with other children, which usually leads to them distracting both themselves and others.

One must also refrain from dressing immodestly or in a way that draws attention to oneself. [Detailed guideline are posted on the church doors.] This includes wearing perfume and some applications of makeup. After all, it is not in the name of God that these things are worn; it is not for the sake of prayer, but for the sake of what is even sinful to think about in the house of God.

We can readily distract ourselves by carelessly looking around at others. It is best to face forward, to avoid looking at others with curiosity about what they are wearing or doing. We focus on the movements of the Liturgy and the icons, not on others. In some

cases we may need to shut our eyes or stand in front to avoid visual distractions.

Orthodox people have always cared for the beauty and adornment of their churches. In God's eyes, however, the most precious adornment of a church is a reverent stillness and ardent prayer. This should be our chief concern, for the Holy Church prays only for those who enter the temple with faith, reverence, and fear of God.

Many ask when one may walk about the church and when one may not. Here are the moments and parts of the services when it is categorically forbidden to walk about the church during the Divine Liturgy and to extinguish or light candles:

1. During the Little Entrance with the Gospel.
2. During the reading of the Epistle and Gospel.
3. During the singing of the Cherubic Hymn and the Great Entrance (from the words: "Let us, who mystically represent the Cherubim" until the final three-fold singing of "Alleluia.")
4. During the Eucharistic Canon (from the exclamation: "The doors! The doors! In wisdom, let us attend!" throughout the singing of the Symbol of Faith: "I believe in One God," throughout the whole Canon, when "A mercy of peace" is sung until the conclusion of the hymn to the Theotokos, "It is truly meet," and if it is a feast, then the hymn that replaces it. This is the most reverential moment of the Liturgy - throughout this whole time there cannot be any walking about the church, going in or out, or extinguishing of candles.
5. During the singing of "Our Father."
6. During the prayer before Communion ("I believe, O Lord, and I confess...").

We should also be standing if we are physically able during all the above as well as the dismissal and any blessings (when he blesses with his hand) uttered by the priest.

Observing these things will help us and those around us to cultivate proper reverence for our Holy God and His holy things.

### **From Elder Ephraim**

Sleep is an icon of death, because when we sleep we are unaware of where we are for so many hours. When we wake up, we become living people with a conscience once more. After we thank God with all our heart for allowing us to see the light of day again, we should beseech Him to forgive us our sins.

Upcoming Events 2016  
30 Sept – 1 October: All-Night Vigil & Liturgy for  
Pokrov (Protection of the Theotokos)  
2 October Annual Meeting  
2 October Life Chain

**GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!**