

The Confessor's Tongue for January 8, A. D. 2017

29th Sunday after Pentecost, Ven. Domnica, Sunday after Theophany

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.

Commentary on the All-Night Vigil I

The Church's celebration of Sunday, the Lord's Day, the day of Resurrection, begins each week on Saturday evening with the celebration of the All-night Vigil. Though in the Church's mind, this service is an essential part of our worship of God and of our preparation to partake of Christ's Body and Blood, in the mind of many in the Church, judging from typical attendance, it is optional, an unnecessary bother and imposition one's busy schedule. To correct this mistaken view and to impart a better understanding to all about the meaning and importance of the Resurrectional All-night Vigil, we shall spend the next couple months examining the Resurrectional Vigil in detail so that we may be better prepared and motivated to make it a regular part of our worship, as it should be.

The All-Night Vigil comprises the daily services of Great Vespers, Matins, and First Hour. It is appointed for the evening before each Great Feast and every Sunday (which is, in effect, a Little Pascha). The feasts of certain saints also call for a Vigil. It is called "all-night" because in ancient times in Palestine where it first developed, it began at sunset and continued through the night until dawn. Later, as the service spread through the Church, out of condescension to the weakness of the faithful, it was abbreviated to begin late in the evening (but before midnight) and to last until morning. Now in normal parish use, it is abbreviated still further, beginning earlier in the evening and lasting but two or three hours. In our parish, it typically lasts two to two and a quarter hours.

Sunday for Christians is the day of the Lord's Resurrection, the day of the Eucharist, and the day of the Lord's Kingdom (the 8th day). The Sunday services communicate these themes. Note we said the Sunday *services*. The Divine Liturgy is not the only Sunday service. Since the Liturgical day begins at sunset, each Sunday has its Vespers and Matins before the Divine Liturgy. These services are an essential part of the Church's celebration and commemoration of a day. In them are sung the majority of hymns that explain and celebrate the significance of the day. Thus, these services help prepare us for the fulfillment and completion of our celebration at the Divine Liturgy. Indeed, the Liturgy may not be served with Vespers or Matins having been served, or at least read privately by the clergy. Holding fast to the Orthodox idea of preparation and fulfillment, we see that the preparation of the Vigil is fulfilled in the Eucharist of the Liturgy.

Though we may be tempted to think of the "All-Night" Vigil in terms of the quantity of time spent in the service, the primary concept of time contained in the term "vigil" is qualitative. In ancient times, "vigil"

referred to time spent on guard duty, or 'keeping watch'. In the Church, it means time spent in attentive preparation and 'waiting on God'. Spiritual life needs time for development. No one can achieve results in one's spiritual life without time. Modern man's spiritual life is in a state of collapse because of his impatience to achieve results. Vigil is taking time seriously. It relates all time to history, specifically to the history of salvation. When God became man, the Kingdom of God appeared in the time of this world. Vigil becomes the time of the proclamation of that kingdom. Vigil takes us back to the beginning of time and prepares us for the end of time, when all things will be fulfilled in the fullness of Christ's kingdom.

Moreover, Christ instructed His disciples to "watch and pray" so that, though they did not know the hour of His return, they might be ready for it. To keep vigil in the historical and ascetic sense is to deprive oneself of a measure of usual sleep to keep watch, waiting in readiness for the coming of the Son of Man at midnight, training oneself to live life in expectation of Christ's coming: first, in the Holy Mysteries at every Liturgy, and second, in glory to judge the world and inaugurate His Kingdom. To this day in places like Mount Athos, the Vigil is served through the night (for up to eight hours), preserving the ascetical effort and eschatological anticipation of the service.

In parish practice, the two to three-hour service still represents a significant ascetical effort for us, as we stand in readiness, waiting on the Lord and contemplating in the hymns and psalms all that He has done for us, especially His Incarnation, Death on the Cross, and Resurrection. Having stood through the Vigil, our bodies tell us clearly that we have been in church keeping watch, focused on the 'one thing needful' for our lives. Inconvenient and demanding it may be, but it also offers indispensable training in waiting on the Lord and making Him our priority above all else in life.

The Vigil also gives us a much-needed time for spiritual renewal by purging all the cares, struggles, and sins of the week. It provides holy time in which our minds and hearts may be set afresh on God, to remember what He has done for us and to honor Him and return thanks. By it, we prepare ourselves for worthy participation in the Holy Mysteries. The Vigil gives us time to soften and warm our hearts before God if they have cooled or hardened during the week. Living in the world, we feel the pressure the world puts on us to conform to its mold. Each week, the Vigil helps us decompress from that pressure to conform to the world and to again offer ourselves to Christ. It allows us to free our minds from the cares and temptations of the week, to wash the "dust of sin" that has dirtied our soul in our sojourn in the world, so that we may present ourselves at the

morning Liturgy with cleansed hearts, eager and ready to receive the Lord.

Since the Vigil service comprises Matins and Vespers, the beginning and end of the daily services, Vigil becomes the service encompassing the whole of time. Vigil transforms all of time into a time of preparation. Not only is Saturday night the solemn preparation for the Sunday morning Eucharist, it also is the solemn preparation of our lives for the coming of the Kingdom of God at the end of time. Vigil gives us time to increase our attention span for prayerful meditation on these matters of greatest importance to us, and to put aside all the cares and worries of life that would crowd out the growth of the kingdom in us by his name. *Fr. Justin Frederick*

January 6: Holy Theophany of Our Lord

The feast of the Baptism of our Lord is also called the *Theophany* or *Epiphany* (*Manifestation of God, Manifestation from above*), because at the baptism of Jesus Christ, the Trinity was present and manifested: the Son of God received baptism in the Jordan River; God the Father testified to His Son by a voice from Heaven; and the Holy Spirit, appearing in the form of a dove, confirmed the words of God the Father. In ancient times, the catechumens used to receive the Sacrament of Baptism on the vigil of this day, whence it also received the name of "Feast of Illumination."

Theophany is indeed a great feast. Liturgically it renews the joy of Christmas, shows us the incarnate God in a new light, and deepens our appreciation of the Incarnation itself. It is, in fact, so much like another Christmas that even the services are similar. As Christmas is the manifestation of the boundless love of God for man, so Theophany is the great revelation of the divinity of our Lord. The two feasts thus supplement one another. Theophany proclaims that the little Child of Bethlehem is really God, pointing from earth to heaven. Christmas, on the other hand, tells us that God became for us a little Child, tracing His descent from heaven to earth. Where at Christmas only shepherds saw that the Word was made flesh, at Theophany the voice of God the Father summons the whole world to adore Jesus.

We celebrate Theophany through its leavetaking on January 14. We use the troparion and kontakion of the Feast in our daily prayers and at meals in place of the usual "Our Father" and "We give thanks..."

Theophany, Troparion, tone 1

When Thou, O Lord wast baptized in the Jordan / the worship of the Trinity was made manifest. / For the voice of the Father bare witness to Thee, / naming Thee His beloved Son. / And the Spirit, in the form of dove, / confirmed the certainty of that word. / O Christ our God, who hast manifested Thyself and enlightened the world // glory to Thee.

Theophany, Kontakion, tone 4

Today Thou hast appeared to the universe / and Thy Light, O Lord, hath shone on us, / who with

understanding praise Thee: / Thou hast come and revealed Thyself, // O Light unapproachable!

Blessing of Homes

Homes are customarily blessed after the Great Blessing of Waters at Theophany. This is a brief service in the home of prayer and sanctifying the house through the sprinkling of holy water. A longer order of blessing is often used for the first blessing and cleansing of a new home.

With the house cleaned and ready, we dress as we would for a church service. When the priest arrives, we turn off the television, radio, stereo, etc. Pets that may interfere are placed out of the way. A small table may be set up before the Icon Corner, upon which a wide-mouthed but small bowl full of newly blessed water is placed. A lit candle, censer (if you have one), and icon are placed on the table. These things should be arranged before the priest arrives.

Family members and any guests gather and stand before the small table. The first names of those residing in the home are printed on a piece of paper and placed on the table. Proper baptismal names should be used.

One family member may carry the lit candle, going before the priest and leading him through the house, turning on lights, opening doors, etc. The other family members may accompany the priest or may stay at the table (children, though, usually want to see their rooms blessed).

After the service, some of the faithful will make an offering to the church or give a gift to the priest. There is no obligation to do this, but if done, it is done following the service.

Take advantage of having the priest in your home for the house blessing to ask questions or to voice any concerns you may have. Some parishioners desire a more extended visit or to have a meal with the priest. This should be arranged beforehand.

Liturgical Housekeeping

Prostrations are part of our worship at the Divine Liturgy. They are not made 1. on Sundays or 2. on Great Feasts of the Lord. They are made on all other occasions.

We cross ourselves before kissing icons, the hand cross, and other holy things, and before partaking of antidoron, holy water, or Holy Communion. We do not cross ourselves before we get a priest's blessing.

Upcoming Events 2016

- 14 January Men's Meeting
- 21 January Parish Patronal Feast: Liturgy, Meal, Lecture
- 27-28 January Orthodox Christian Perspectives: The Church as Family, Friday at St. Barbara's, Saturday at St. Sarkis Armenian Church in Carrollton. See ntom.org for more.
- 26 February Forgiveness Vespers, 6:00 p.m.

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!