

# The Confessor's Tongue for January 29, A. D. 2017

32<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost, Zacchaeus Sunday, New Martyrs of Russia

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.

## New Martyrs of Russia

This Sunday we remember the multitude of Martyrs, Confessors, and Passion Bearers who suffered for the Faith under Bolshevik Communist yoke.

### Notice: Triodion Opens Next Sunday

Next Sunday, we open the Triodion, the book of hymns for Great Lent, as we remember the Publican and the Pharisee and begin to prepare for the Great Fast.

I want creation to penetrate you with so much admiration that everywhere, wherever you may be, the least plant may bring to you the clear remembrance of the Creator. . . .

A single plant, a blade of grass, is sufficient to occupy all your intelligence in the contemplation of the skill which produced it. *St. Basil the Great*

### Commentary on the All-Night Vigil 4 The Great Litany

After the singing of the opening Psalm, the Royal Doors are closed and the lights dimmed, reflecting man's fall into sin and the closing of Paradise to man.

The Deacon (or Priest) comes before the closed Royal Doors to intone the Great Litany. He faces east, representing fallen Adam who cries out to God in his distress after being expelled from Paradise. All litanies are said facing east with the Deacon (or Priest) leading the people (but still as one of the people) in offering prayer to God. The Church gathered in worship is not a closed circle contemplating itself, but looks beyond herself to God. From earliest times, the Church has prayed to the east for at least three reasons: 1. that is the direction of the rising sun, and Christ is the Sun of righteousness who brings light to a dark world; 2. Paradise, or Eden, was situated in the east, and man looks to regain what he lost; 3. Christ's return in glory will be "as lightening flashes from the east to the west" and so to look east in prayer is to look for Christ's return.

The Great Litany is the beginning of the official prayer of the Church and begins all Her services. In this litany, the Church offers prayer on behalf of the whole world in a descending hierarchy of values, beginning with what is most important. When the Great Litany is taken in a service, the Augmented Litany must also be taken (with the thricefold "Lord, have mercy"). In the former, the Church prays universally for the world, but in the latter, She prays for the particular place in which She gathers and for the particular people of that place.

The following analysis of the petitions is primarily (but not exclusively) that of Fr. Alexander Schmemmann.

"In peace let us pray to the Lord." The prayer of the Church is a new prayer, made possible by the peace of Christ which passes all understanding. He is our peace (Ephesians 2:14) with God, with others, and with ourselves, and we pray therefore in Him, in the wonderful certitude that our prayer is being accepted by God because of Him.

"For the peace from above and for the salvation of our souls..." The world cannot give that peace; it is a gift from above (John 14:27). To receive it is our first and most important goal together with the salvation of our souls. Before we pray for anything else, we must pray for the 'number one object' of every Christian: eternal salvation.

"For the peace of the whole world, for the good estate of the holy Churches of God, and for the union of all men..." We pray that the peace of Christ might be granted everywhere, that the Church might fulfill Her mission of preaching Christ and making Him present throughout the world, and that all men might be united in Christ to His Body, the Church. Christ provides the only basis for human unity; He is the only power capable of overcoming the barriers that separate man from his fellow man (we should be deeply aware of this at present in our land).

"For this holy house, and for those who with faith, reverence and fear of God enter herein..." We pray for our particular parish, which must manifest Christ and His Kingdom to the surrounding community, that we may worship in the proper spirit of faith, reverence, and fear of God.

"For our [bishop], the honorable presbytery [priests], the diaconate in Christ, and for all the clergy and the people..." We pray for those to whom God has entrusted the care of His Church, to guide and edify Her, especially the diocesan bishop. They bear a heavy responsibility and need our frequent prayers. We also pray for all the people who are part of the Body and also bear responsibility for its welfare.

"For this God-protected land, its president, all civil authorities, and for those who serve in the armed forces..." Christians are both citizens of Heaven and responsible members of civil society on earth. We are loyal to the State and established authorities, but only so far as this loyalty is compatible with our ultimate loyalty to Christ. We must bear witness to Christ within our society and pray that it may receive guidance from the Lord. Whether we like or agree with those in power, they need our prayers simply because they do have power and must use it wisely.

"For this city, for every city and country, and for those who in faith dwell therein..." Christ teaches us that we "are the salt of the earth." We have a spiritual responsibility for the place we live, and we also join with all Christians everywhere in praying for their civil communities and for the faithful living in them.

"For favorable weather, for an abundance of the

fruits of the earth, and for peaceful times..." The prayer of the Church embraces the whole natural world. We ask God to provide for us what we require for life, and that we may live in peace rather than anarchy or unrest. We recognize our dependence on God for these good things, though modern man tends to take them for granted.

"For travellers by land, by sea, and by air, for the sick and the suffering; for captives, and for their salvation..." The Church remembers all who are in danger and difficulties, praying for their salvation and protection. We reach out in love to those suffering everywhere to fulfill Christ's commandment of love. "Captives" in former times referred especially to Christians who had been seized by Muslim raiders and sold into slavery.

"For our deliverance from all tribulation, wrath, danger, and necessity..." These things have the potential to overwhelm our faith and life, so we intercede that we be delivered from the harm they threaten. 'Necessity' is an extreme situation where the lack of basic necessities of life may lead us into sin in order to get them.

"Help us, save us, have mercy on us, and keep us, O God, by Thy grace." The final supplication hearkens to Christ's words, "Without Me, ye can do nothing." Faith reveals to us our total dependence on God's grace, mercy, and help in all things.

"Remembering our all-holy, immaculate, most blessed and glorious Lady Theotokos and ever-virgin Mary with all the Saints, let us commend ourselves, and each other, and all our life unto Christ our God." By remembering the Theotokos and all the Saints, we affirm our unity with the Church in Heaven as we entrust ourselves, each other, and all our life to God's loving care and providence rather than depending on our own wisdom and efforts.

In the Great Litany, we unite in offering the prayer of Christ's Church for the world. The priest or deacon bids us to pray for these things, and as each matter is set before us, we ask God to "have mercy". Our attentive participation is needed; we must unite our heart to these petitions and bring them to God that we may be truly praying and not merely mouthing words. *Fr. Justin Frederick*

## February 2: Meeting of Christ in the Temple

The Nativity cycle of feasts concludes with the Great Feast of the Meeting of Christ in the Temple on February 2<sup>nd</sup>, the fortieth day after the Nativity of our Lord. This feast is closely connected with the Nativity, for just as Christ's divinity was revealed at His Nativity and His Baptism, so it is also manifested at His meeting in the temple with Simeon and Anna.

According to the Law of Moses, all Hebrew parents were to bring their first-born son and a sacrifice in thanksgiving on the fortieth day after birth to the temple to be consecrated to God. The law was established in remembrance of the exodus of

the Hebrews from Egypt—freedom from slavery, when the first-born Hebrews were spared from death.

In fulfillment of this law, the Theotokos with Joseph brought the infant Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem, and for their sacrifice brought two doves—the sacrifice of a poor family. At that time, the Elder Simeon by the Holy Spirit recognized the infant Jesus as the Christ, the anointed one of God, as did the Prophetess Anna. Thus these two joined the company of shepherds and magi as being among the first to recognize Him for who He was.

The spirit of the festal service is the same as that of the Nativity and Theophany: to glorify the manifestation of God on earth, to extol Christ's divinity, and to give honor to the most pure Virgin Mary as the Mother of God. St. Cyril of Alexandria speaks beautifully of the profound content and significance of this feast in his sermon for the day:

The Eternal, is both a small Child and the 'Ancient of Days' (i.e. God). A child at the breast and, at the same time, the Creator of ages. I behold a Child and recognize God. The Child is nourished, and, at the same time, he gives life and joy to the world. The Child is in swaddling clothes, and, at the same time, he delivers me from the bonds of sin... This Child—the angels glorify him, the archangels bow before him. The Principalities tremble in his presence, the Powers praise him, the Cherubim minister to him, the Seraphim bless him, fountains and seas yield to him... This Child conquered death, overcame the devil, abolished Adam's curse, ...washed away all sins, condemned all heresy, adorned all creation, saved Adam, renewed Eve, summoned all the nations, and sanctified the universe... Therefore, let us brighten this day with candles, as befits the children of light, and let us bring to Christ the Light of spiritual illumination.  
(Prologue 1)

The Feast of the Meeting of Our Lord has a post-feast until February 9<sup>th</sup>. During the festal time, the troparion and kontakion of the feast are said along with our daily prayers and at meals.

### Troparion, tone 1

Rejoice, O Virgin Theotokos full of grace, / for from thee hath shone forth the Sun of Righteousness, Christ our God, / who doth illumine those in darkness. / Be glad also, thou righteous elder, / for thou hast received in thine arms the Deliverer of our souls, // who bestoweth upon us Resurrection.

### Kontakion, tone 1

Thou who hast sanctified by Thy birth a virgin womb / and fittingly blessed the hands of Simeon, / Thou art come, O Christ our God, and on this day hast saved us. / Give peace to thy commonwealth in time of battle / and strengthen the Orthodox people whom Thou hast loved, // O Thou who alone lovest mankind.

### Upcoming Events 2017

2 February Great Feast Meeting in the Temple  
10 February Parish Open House at Rectory  
20 February Game Night at Church  
26 February Forgiveness Vespers, 6:00 p.m.  
16 April: Pascha

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!