

The Confessor's Tongue for February 5, A. D. 2017

Sunday of the Publican & the Pharisee; Martyr Agatha, Ven, Theodosius of Chergnigov
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.

Notice: Triodion Opens Today

Today 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. The hymns contained in this work express the whole meaning, purpose, goal, and means of achieving it for our fasting. We do well to make time to hear it in the Lenten services.

February 5: Martyr Agatha

Born in Palermo, Sicily (according to others, in Catania), St. Agatha confessed the Christian faith from her young years. She was distinguished by beauty, virtuous life, and wealth bequeathed her after the death of her parents. During the persecution of Emperor Decius, by an order of the governor of the country Quintian, who heard much about the beauty and wealth of Agatha, she was arrested and led to the governor in the city of Catania. This governor at first tried with caresses and admonitions to convert St. Agatha from the Christian faith. When she remained immovable, she was subjected to various cruel tortures. They hanged her from a tree, beat her with iron rods, planed her chest with iron claws and, finally, cut off her breasts. Later while in prison the prisoner was wonderfully healed by the Apostle Peter who was shown to her and, adorned "in the glory of faith and piety, venerability, and virginity and diligence in suffering", in peace gave her soul to the Lord God in 251. Soon a church was constructed over her relics.

Commentary on the All-Night Vigil 5 The Kathisma

After the Great Litany, comes the first kathisma from the Psalter, Psalms 1-8. The Psalter is divided into twenty parts called kathismata. The name comes from the Greek verb "to sit," and one may sit during the reading of the kathisma Psalms. (Note that the word Akathist comes from the same Greek root, but means "without sitting.")

Usually one kathisma is read at each daily Vespers except on Sunday evening, and two kathismata are read at each Matins service. In this way, the whole Psalter is read in the Church each week.

Normally, the kathisma is chanted (read) by the reader, but on festive occasions, such as the Resurrectional Vigil each Saturday evening, the Vespers kathisma is sung. Though the full first kathisma is appointed, typically only selected verses are sung, commonly known as "Blessed is the man".

From the beginning, the Psalter has been the Church's principal hymnal. It was so important, that a canon was established specifying that no one who did not know the whole Psalter by heart could be appointed bishop. Though it is not enforced today,

the canon underlines the centrality of the Psalter to the worship of the early Church—and the importance of the bishop being a man well-seasoned in prayer. Many hymns have been composed since then to supplement the Psalms, but the Psalter remains the foundation for both the prayer and worship of the Church.

The characteristic opening words of the first kathisma, "Blessed is the man, that walketh not in the counsel of the impious..." refer preeminently to Christ but also set a standard for man to attain.

When the kathisma, whether chanted or sung, is concluded, it is followed by a Little Litany. The Little Litany occurs frequently in the services of the Church. It comprises the first and last petitions of the Great Litany. Some may find its frequency repetitious or redundant, but, in fact, it is not so. Man is called to pray "without ceasing," and by the frequent repetition of the Little Litany in church, he is trained "again and again" to call on the Lord. Moreover, in Church we often struggle to give our full attention to God, to worship, and to prayer. We come in to the service from the world with cold hearts, and it takes us time to thaw out and warm up. The recurrence of the Little Litany serves to call us back to prayer and to give us another opportunity to enter into the prayer of the Church if we missed it the first time. Even, and especially, in Church, we need God to "help us, save us, have mercy on us, and keep us" by His grace. Offering fitting prayer and worship to God is beyond us in our own strength, and we need His help to pray as we should and to be saved from the multitude of distracting thoughts that crowd into our minds in church. *Fr. Justin Frederick*

The Commandments of Christ

"If ye love Me, keep My commandments."

Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

Matthew 6:31-33

As the Great Fast approaches, it is fitting to consider this passage as it expresses the deep purpose of the Fast and the whole Christian life. Two commandments are combined here.

First, the negative command "take no thought" does not mean "don't think about food, drink, and clothes" but means "don't be anxious or concerned" about such things. As Jesus says earlier (v.25), "Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?" Our life does not consist in such things, though living in the fallen world, we are tempted to think that it does. Most of the world lives as though

life consists of food, drink, clothing, and other such possessions.

Jesus speaks about how God feeds the birds and clothes the flowers of the field and then challenges our faith: if He does this for birds and grass, will He not care much more for man made in His image out of love for whom He became man and died? Of course He will. It is our little faith that blinds us to His love and providential care for us. And Jesus adds: “your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.” Christians do not deny the legitimate needs of the body, contrary to the perception of some. God the Father knows those needs and promises to provide them. Salvation does not consist in escaping the body and its needs. Rather, it is connected with the deification of the whole man and the proper subjection of the body to the soul and spirit of man illumined by Christ so that the body becomes a faithful, reliable servant of the soul in doing the will of God.

Christ gives in addition to the command not to worry a positive command: “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.” Here is a classic case of saying no to something so that we can say yes to something much better. The good is often the enemy of the best, but here worrying about the material side of life cannot be said to be good. We banish worry about material needs so that we can seek first Christ and His Kingdom. He promises that if we put Him first, all the things our body needs will be given to us. Notice that what is given to us is all the things the Father knows we have *need* of. This does not mean we get everything we might *want*. The modern world excels and creating new wants in man and then transforming those wants into needs and rights. These leaves us so obsessed with the material world and its goods that we can scarcely glimpse the things of God. No, we are not to worry, but are to seek God first and be grateful for what He provides for us to meet our needs.

What does it mean to “seek the Kingdom of God”? The Kingdom is that over which God reigns. All of creation obeys God but man and the fallen angels. Man has to actively seek to submit himself to his true King. We do this in prayer and in directing our lives according to God’s will as revealed in Christ’s commandments. With the Kingdom we seek God’s righteousness to make it ours, for this is the way of being necessary to life in the Kingdom.

We are to seek the kingdom as our first priority in life. This search, this desire, this need lies at the center of our lives, for it is what God made us for, and without it, we cannot truly live in the full sense of the word. Given the nature of our need for the Kingdom, other pursuits can occupy only a subordinate place in our lives. But in seeking first the Kingdom, we may rest assured that God will provide for us the things we need to live—for as long as He wills us to live. So paradoxically, by giving up worry over material things to seek first the Kingdom of God, we assure ourselves

of God’s provision of the very material things those without God spend their whole worried lives seeking.

Commemorations at Proskomide

Many of you fill out the commemoration sheets with the names of those you wish to be remembered before the Lord at the Proskomide (the Liturgy of Preparation) of the Divine Liturgy. The particles taken for those names after Communion are immersed in the chalice with the prayer “Wash away, O Lord, the sins of all those commemorated here, by Thy precious blood.” This is a way in which we may pray for others and offer them to God.

Ideally, each person would have a commemoration book to put in the basket each week. Ideally, commemorations would be submitted at Vigil the night before the Liturgy. We offer the commemoration sheets for those who don’t have commemoration books (we have not found a good source for suitable books, but we need to try again).

To do this more efficiently, please observe the following guidelines.

1. Please use the baptismal name of each Orthodox Christian you wish to have commemorated: Anthony, not Collin or Tony; Katherine, not Kate, etc.
2. There is no need to include last names or additional details about a person (sick, pregnant, etc.) The Lord knows.
3. Monks and nuns should be recorded on the sheet as “Monk James” or “Nun Mary” or “Priestmonk Patrick”.
4. Priests, Deacons, and Bishops should be recorded as “Priest John” (or Archpriest, etc., if you know), “Deacon Thomas”, “Bishop Peter”, “Archbishop Paul”, “Metropolitan Tikhon”, etc.
5. Please do not use “Fr. X” or “Matushka Y”. Priest’s wives do not need a title, just their baptismal name. “Father” is ambiguous as it could equally refer to a priest or a simple monk.
6. Please do not write, “The Smith Family”; rather write all the baptismal names. The priest commemorates people individually.
7. Please write neatly and not too small. That facilitates the reading of many names by the priest in a timely manner.
8. Non-Orthodox are to be indicated by an “n.o.” in front of the name or placed in the non-Orthodox section. They are commemorated differently.

Thank you for your cooperation in this. It will help the priest to commemorate your list with greater joy.

Upcoming Events 2017

- 10 February Parish Open House at Rectory, 5:30
- 11 February Men’s Group at church, 8:00 a.m.
- 20 February Game Night at church
- 26 February Forgiveness Vespers, 6:00 p.m.
- 16 April: Pascha

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!