

The Confessor's Tongue for March 19, A. D. 2017

Second Sunday of the Fast: Gregory Palamas, Gregory Dialogus, Theophanes, Symeon
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.

Sunday of the Veneration of the Cross

This Sunday the Holy Church glorifies the holy cross and the fruits of the death of the Savior on the cross. She will carry out the holy cross into the middle of the temple for veneration, and is why the Sunday is called the Veneration of the Cross.

The purpose of instituting the Holy Cross in the service on the third Sunday will be revealed as a beautiful comparison by the Holy Church to the tree of life in paradise, the tree which sweetened the bitter waters of Marah, the tree with the canopy of leaves under whose shade tired travelers seeking the eternal promised land may find coolness and rest. Thus, the Holy Church offers the Holy Cross for spiritual reinforcement to those going through the ascetic effort of the fast, just as food, drink and rest serve as bodily reinforcement. This spiritual reinforcement is given as the representation of the love of God to man for whom the Son of God turned Himself over to death on the cross. It is especially necessary in the middle of our effort because now our ascetic efforts already have lost much of the freshness of its power and however yet cannot hopefully enliven itself for the near and successful ending of our ascetical effort. Having concentrated all that is the most severe and sorrowful in the worship services of the previous weeks, especially during the first, that may both frighten the sinner and apparently touch the hardest of human hearts, now in the middle of the large and difficult arena of the Holy Forty Day Fast the Holy Church offers the Holy Cross for great comfort and encouragement as needed for raising the flagging strength of those fasting. Wherefore nothing can both console, encourage, and inspire the fatigued, or perhaps even the Christian weakened in spirit so much as the presentation of the eternal divine love of the Savior who turned Himself over to the struggle on the cross for the sake of our salvation. *Bulgakov Handbook*

Commentary on the All-Night Vigil II Matins: The Six Psalms

After the Vespereal portion of the All-night Vigil (about 40 minutes in parish practice), the second part begins: Matins. Matins is the Church's daily service of morning prayer. It combines two themes: the end of night, and the beginning of day. Night is the image of death. Night is when early Christians especially prayed in their eschatological anticipation of Christ's return and Eternal Kingdom. Night has been conquered and death overthrown. Night is the reality of the world without Christ; it gives man the feeling of chaos, fear, insecurity.

Only the Word of God takes us out of the night. Light comes only from God. Light always is from God, for there is no darkness in God. The light of the day is a resurrection every morning. Matins celebrates this victory over night—the resurrection of light—and God's goodness in not leaving us in perpetual darkness.

At the All-night Vigil, Matins begins with the Six Psalms, or "Hexapsalms," as they are sometimes called: the lights are extinguished, the bells rung, and

the reader stands in the midst of the temple with a lighted candle to read them. As the candles (except for the lampadi before the icons; in most places, however, only the electric lights are dimmed or turned out) are gradually extinguished, we experience in the descending darkness the dark night Christ entered at His coming.

The rubrics direct that the Six Psalms be read slowly, without haste. Both reader and faithful are to read and hear the words as though they were praying them directly to God as a prayer. This is a time for stillness and concentration, and everyone, if at all possible, should stand attentively throughout the reading of the psalms. The rubrics even note that bows are not to be made after the first three psalms during the Glory... Alleluia...Glory. All is quiet, dark, and as motionless as possible to facilitate concentration as we strive to enter into the psalms and make the prayer of the Psalmist our own.

The Six Psalms begin with thrice-fold repetition of the hymn of the angelic choir at Christ's Nativity: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace, good will toward men," followed by a repeated verse from Psalm 50: "O Lord, open Thou my lips, and my mouth shall declare Thy praise." Christ was born into our dark, fallen world to show us the way by which we might return to God on high and find peace with ourselves and with others

The Six Psalms (3, 37(38), 62 (63), 87 (88), 102 (103), 142 (143)) represent the history of the opposition of night to day. They express the whole range of experience and prayer in the Christian life. They alternate between confidence in and gratitude towards God for His salvation and deliverance, and desperate outcry to God from those in distress, darkness, bondage, and affliction. The themes thus alternate between actualized salvation and potential salvation, and the overarching mood is penitential.

The first psalm of the Six (3) expresses confidence in God as man cries out to the Lord for help against a multiplying number of enemies who say that God cannot save him. These enemies are first of all the sinful passions of our souls and the demons that work to stir them up (only secondarily are they humans that may oppose us). "God can't save you from us," they mock. But this is a lie, for man has cried out to the Lord, who heard him, and protected him so that he could sleep and wake again. With God on his side, he need not fear ten thousand foes. The man speaking in the Psalm is Christ first of all, the God-man, but it is also us in our own spiritual warfare. Praying this Psalm enables us to call on the Lord against seeming great odds without despair, knowing He will save us.

At the end of each psalm a verse or two from the psalm is repeated to conclude the psalm and to summarize its contents. For Psalm 3, the repeated verse is "I fell asleep and slept; I rose again, for the Lord

succoreth me." The verb "to succor" literally means "to run to" or "to run to support" and hence has the fuller meaning "to help or relieve when in difficulty, want or distress." Sleep itself is an image of death; when we sink into the sleep of spiritual death through sin, when our spiritual enemies have prevailed against us and are multiplying so that they are too many to defeat, it is the Lord who raises us up again to life and consciousness that we may continue the fight.

The second Psalm of the Six (37) is a cry of repentance to God in the face of the distress, weariness, and suffering which our sins have brought upon us, even to the point of losing our usual sources of human aid from neighbors and friends. The repeated verse sums up our posture towards God: "Forsake me not, O Lord my God; turn not away from me. Attend to my help, O Lord of my salvation."

The third Psalm (62) returns to the theme of realized salvation and man's gratitude for it. Man rises early in the morning (for Matins) to seek the Lord in his great thirst for Him. What God has to offer him is far better than even life itself. The repeated verse declares: "In the mornings I have meditated upon Thee, for Thou hast become my Helper, and under the shelter of Thy wings will I rejoice. My soul hath cleaved unto Thee; Thy right hand hath upholden me."

Now, midway through the Six Psalms, the reader says, "Glory to the Father...now and ever... Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia, glory to Thee, O God [3], Lord have mercy [3], Glory...now and ever..." and the last three psalms. In the Russian tradition, one does not do full bows during this interlude; one only crosses oneself and inclines the head slightly. In the Greek tradition, one does not bow or cross at all.

During this interlude, the Priest exits from the south door and stands bareheaded before the Royal Doors, wearing only his riasa and epitachelion, to recite the 12 Matins prayers silently for those present, representing again fallen man standing outside of Paradise in the darkness of the fallen world, crying out to the only One who can deliver him.

The fourth psalm of the Six (87) is perhaps the darkest, showing man in his greatest desperation and need. Man cries out "for my soul is filled with evil and my life hath come nigh to hell." Man feels the weight of God's displeasure rejection for his sins, what Christ experienced when He cried out on the Cross, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" Yet in our greatest despair and weakness, even when it seems God has closed His ears to us and forsaken us, we still cry out to the Lord, as the repeated verse expresses: "O Lord God of my salvation, I have cried in the day and in the night before Thee. Let my prayer come in before Thee; bow down Thine ear to my supplication."

Once man has been in the depths of the pit, when salvation finally comes, his response is joyous, and this joy is expressed in the fifth Psalm (102). If the fourth Psalm is the darkest of the Six, then fifth is the most joyful; indeed, it is the first Psalm sung during most Divine Liturgies (the first antiphon). "Bless the Lord,

O my soul, and all that is within me bless His holy name." How can man not be joyful when the Lord has healed him, given him good things, and removed his transgressions from him "as far as the east is from the west." The repeated verse at the end of the Psalm declares what our response to God's goodness always should be: "In every place of His dominion, bless the Lord, O my soul!"

The last Psalm (142) returns to man's cry for help to God, but it is tinged with faith and hope. The enemy has persecuted me, brought me low, and made me sit in darkness. I am dejected. Don't judge me, for no one can stand worthily before the righteous Judge. "Hearken to me in Thy righteousness, O Lord, and enter not into judgment with Thy servant. Thy good Spirit shall guide me to the land of uprightness." As Jesus told His disciples, "In the world, ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). The Christian life alternates between times of trouble, tribulation, and distress, and times of joy, peace, and wellbeing. Each time we pass through the valley, it should be with a deeper faith in Christ than we had the previous time, and though we suffer, our suffering is eased by our previous experience of God's goodness and deliverance, for we know that suffering and tribulation is inevitable in this life, but God redeems it to work His good in our lives through it, that Christ may be formed in us. Thus the Six Psalms contain the full range of experience and prayer for the Christian, which is why we are called to attend carefully to them and enter into them at Matins. *Fr. Justin Frederick*

Paschal Greetings in Various Languages

A chance to ahead of time. Be ready for any of them.

Greek: Christos anesti! Alethos anesti!

Russian: Khristos voskresye! Vo istinu voskresye!

Arabic: El Messieh kahm! Hakken kahm!

Serbian: Cristos vaskres! Vaistinu vaskres!

German: Christus ist auferstanden! Wahrlich er ist erstanden!

Latin: Christus resurrexit! Vere resurrexit!

Japanese: Christos fukkatsu! Jitsu ni fukkatsu!

French: Le Christ est ressuscité! En vérité il est ressuscité!

Norwegian: Kristus er oppstanden! Han er sannelig oppstanden!

Italian: Cristo e' risorto! Veramente e' risorto!

Eritrean-Tigre: Christos tensiou! Bahake tensiou!

Swahili: Kristo amefufukka! Kweli Amefufukka!

Georgian: Kriste aghsda! Cheshdmaritad aghsda!

Finnish: Kristus nousi kuolleista! Totistesti nousi!

Zulu: Ukristu uvukile! Uvukile kuphela!

Welsh: Atgyfododd Crist! Atgyfododd in wir!

Gaelic: Taw creest eeren! Taw shay eeren guhdyne!

Anglo-Saxon: Crist aras! Crist sohdlice aras!

Chinese: Helisituosi fuhuole! Qeshi fuhuole!

Coptic: Pchristos aftooun! Alethos aftooun!

Aleut: Khristus agla-gikux! Agangu-lakan agla-gikux!

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!