

The Confessor's Tongue for April 2, A. D. 2017

Fifth Sunday of the Fast: St. Mary of Egypt; St. Titus the Wonderworker

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.

Paschal Letter 2017

Dearly Beloved Brethren and Friends:

The time once again draws near to keep the Paschal Feast. We invite you to join us for Holy Week when we remember Christ's betrayal, suffering, and death, and for the week of Paschal services in which we joyously celebrate Christ's Resurrection from the dead by which we, too, are raised from death to life.

Holy Week and Pascha are the crown of the Church year. Now He who laid down His life for us calls us to lay aside our normal cares and activities to walk with Him through His Passion and death that we may enter into the joy of His Resurrection. We honor Christ who gave His all for us by giving of our time to stand before Him in His Church in prayer and worship during this most blessed time of the year.

If you have not been in church for some time, now is the time to return. We need nothing more in this world than God Himself, though the world has a thousand ways of trying to persuade us that we can get by without Him or that it is enough to believe and pray in our hearts without gathering as the Church to worship. Though only a week remains of the Fast before Holy Week, there is yet time to draw near to God and renew our relationship to Him through His Church by repentance and Confession.

Only Orthodox Christians who have made a Confession during this year's Fast to a priest (including baptized children seven years of age and older) may receive Holy Communion at Pascha (or beyond)—and all of us who are Orthodox should be prepared to partake. Confessions may be made in English or in Russian. Confession is available after most services, and you may call or text to make an appointment for a time other than those on the calendar.

Pascha falls this year on Sunday, April 16. The Paschal Vigil begins at 11:30 p.m. Saturday night, April 15. It will conclude about 3:30 a.m. to be followed by the blessing of Paschal baskets and a festal meal as we break the Fast together. Sunday afternoon at 3:00 p.m., we shall have the festive Paschal Vespers followed by a parish picnic and an egg hunt for the children. You will find all the scheduled services in the bulletin for the upcoming week, or see our website, www.stmaximus.org, for the month's schedule. Please join us! We look forward to seeing you.

Love in Christ, Fr. Justin Frederick

Commentary on the All-Night Vigil 13 Matins: Polyeleon & Magnification

The Polyeleon (meaning 'many mercies'), comprising Psalms 134 and 135, is the most festive part of Matins. It glorifies God for the greatness of His mercy shown to His people of old when He brought Israel out of Egypt and into the Promised Land. Every member of the new Israel, every Christian, identifies with Israel's Exodus from slavery in Egypt and the passage through the Red Sea as a sign of his own deliverance from bondage to sin through Baptism and Chrismation.

"Praise the name of the Lord: praise Him O ye servants of the Lord. Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia! Praise be to God in Zion, He that dwelleth at Jerusalem. Alleluia,

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alleluia, alleluia! O confess unto the Lord, for He is good, for His mercy endureth forever. Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia! O confess unto the God of heaven, for His mercy endureth forever. Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!"

Typically, only a selection of verses from the two Psalms is sung: probably most commonly four (first and last of each psalm), but each verse is followed by the joyful refrain of the thrice-fold "alleluia." Locally, we sing a longer version for feasts and a complete version when we do an All-night Vigil.

As these verses are sung, all the lamps and candles in the church are lit, the Royal Doors are opened, and if it be a Great Feast, the festal icon is brought out to the center of the church which the Priest deposits on an analogion and then censes. If it is not a Great Feast, the priest remains censing at the front of the altar. This censing is done with both Priest and Deacon bearing candles as at the beginning of the Vigil.

If the Vigil is a Resurrectional Vigil taking place in the three weeks preparatory to Great Lent (Prodigal Son through Cheesefare), Psalm 136 ("By the Waters of Babylon") is added.

The Polyeleos is not prescribed at every Vigil, though commonly it is always done. If it is not prescribed, Psalm 118—the longest psalm—is taken in its place. This Psalm, which extols the law of God, represents Christ Himself in total surrender to the will of His Father, even unto death. Chanting Psalm 118 constitutes the real life of man in God, that of obedience to His statutes which are life-giving. Christ's death in history is the greatest act of life. Life is, in fact, to say, "I love Thy statutes."

It is unfortunate that this Psalm extolling the glories and blessing of God's law is so often abbreviated or even omitted from our services, for it imparts to us an accurate assessment of God's law which can serve as an antidote to negative attitudes towards God's law that afflict some of us.

This Psalm forms an important part of the funeral service, too, though it is usually abbreviated. It is used at the funeral because it is a hymn of Resurrection, which is the chief theme of a Christian funeral.

One verse from Psalm 118, "Blessed art Thou, O Lord, teach me Thy statutes," comprises the familiar refrain in the next part of Matins: the Evlogitaria or 'Troparia of the Undeified.' They take their name from the first verse of Psalm 118: "Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord." A number of troparia on the theme of the Resurrection are sung, each preceded by the refrain, "Blessed art Thou..." For example, the third:

Very early in the morning the myrrhbearers ran with sorrow to Thy tomb. But an angel came to them and said: "The time for sorrow hath come to an end; do not weep but announce the resurrection to the apostles. Blessed art Thou, O Lord, teach me Thy statutes.

As the Troparia of the Undeiled are sung, the Priest, accompanied by the Deacon, censens the whole temple and the people.

There is life and blessing in keeping God's law, and the way of God's statutes leads us to our participation in the Resurrection. To ignore God's will expressed in His law is to court death.

If the Vigil is being served for a Great Feast, the Troparia of the Undeiled, which glorify the Resurrection, are not taken. Instead, a hymn glorifying the saint or feast known as the Magnification is taken, which begins with the words, "We magnify, we magnify Thee..." This practice is not found in the Greek usage, but only in the Slavic. The Priest chants this in front of the appropriate icon. He then carries out the great censening of the temple as above while the choir repeats the Magnification with its psalm verses several times. If the whole prescribed psalm were used, the Magnification could take nearly half an hour in itself! This part of the Matins is followed by a Little Litany with its exclamation.

The Eucharist

Then Jesus said to them, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you.' John 6:53

And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them and said, 'Take, eat; this is My body.'

Then He took the cup, and when He had given thanks He gave it to them, and they all drank from it. And He said to them, 'This is My blood...' Mark 14:23-24

Instituted by Christ for His Church, the Holy Eucharist is not a peripheral or optional part of our Faith. It is not an ancient rite maintained for sake of nostalgia. It is not a simple remembrance of what Christ has done for us, nor is it a mere symbol of Christian unity as we all partake of one loaf and one cup.

Christ's own words do not allow us to treat the Eucharist with such indifference or condescension. According to Christ, if we do not eat His flesh and drink His blood, we have no life in us. O, we may be physically alive, but at St. Justin of Chelye has expressed it, man without Christ is but a "walking corpse" who has an appearance of life but not the essence. Though there are other sources of grace, the Eucharist is the unique impartation of life to us by Christ's Body and Blood. The Early Church understood the uniqueness of the Eucharist by referring to it as the "medicine of immortality." Christ identifies His Body and Blood with the bread and wine He blessed and then offered to His disciples before His crucifixion, commanding them to "do this in remembrance of Me."

Our partaking of the Eucharist is the heart of our relationship with Christ. With it, we have life; without it, we lack His life. Excommunication is to be cut off from the life of Christ. We excommunicate ourselves when we neglect the Eucharist, cannot be bothered to come on time to church and do not prepare ourselves to partake, or simply don't bother

to come. According to the canons, if we absent ourselves from the Divine Liturgy for three consecutive weeks without a good cause, we have excommunicated ourselves. Serious sin also prevents us from receiving Holy Communion until we have effected a good repentance. To go to Confession and to hear that one may not partaker of the Mysteries is not the arbitrary action of the priest to punish you, but is a simple declaration of the reality you have already embraced by choosing sin. In declaring your condition to you and the consequences of your actions, the priest serves as God's messenger to call you to repentance, cleansing, and restoration to fellowship in the Mysteries. Being severed from the Eucharist by choice or by sin is to be cut off from life; it is to abide in spiritual death.

The Eucharist is communal in nature. We gather together to celebrate it, and it cannot be celebrated by the priest alone. It is not something we can do privately in our homes; it is not something we can have without direct connection to the Church. There is no substitute in Bible reading, prayer, or good works or anything else for the Eucharist. Hence we cannot be Christians without attending Church!

The Eucharist is festal in nature. It is a 'giving of thanks' as we remember all that God in Christ through the Spirit has done for us and continues to do. It is taking time away from the demands of life in this world to remember and honor the One who made us and restores us to life through the sacrifice of His Body and Blood. It is for this reason that it is not celebrated on weekdays of Great Lent.

Great is the good gift offered to us in the Eucharist, and great is our error and fault when we disdain it as something optional for spiritual life or when we are too lazy to attend the Liturgy regularly, or when do not make the effort to prepare ourselves regularly through Confession, Prayer, and Fasting to partake. Here is the medicine to what ails us, if we will come with faith and love to partake of our Master's good gifts. With this understanding of the Eucharist, how can we allow ourselves to be content with partaking infrequently? And how shall we answer Christ as to why we neglected the provision He made for us at great cost to Himself? *Fr. Justin Frederick*

Holy Week Needs

You may volunteer, or be recruited for these!

1. Decorate & clean church on Holy Friday.
2. Boil and dye eggs for Paschal Vigil (Melanie Betz is overseeing).
3. Prepare fire pit for lamb roast (Terry, Jeremy, and Ian are coordinating).
4. Prepare egg hunt for children.
5. Men to remove tomb during the Paschal procession.
6. Greeter(s) for Paschal Vigil to help guests.
7. Men and boys for processions on Holy Friday (to carry cross, winding sheet, etc.) and Pascha night.
8. Bring festal food for Pascha morning and the picnic Pascha afternoon.
9. Bake artos (Elisabeth Terry).
10. Make Cheese Pascha.

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!