

The Confessor's Tongue for October 12, 2008

17th Sunday After Pentecost: Fathers of the Seventh Council

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.

12 October Martyrs Probus, Tarachus, Andronicus

St. Tarachus, a Roman citizen and warrior, was born in Claudiopolis, Isauria. St. Probus, a Thracian, from Perga, Pamphylia, and St. Andronicus was the son of a famous citizen of Ephesus. For confessing Christ all severely suffered first in the city of Tarsus (in Cilicia), then in Mopsuestia and finally in the city of Anazarbus. They were all beheaded after undergoing terrible tortures in the year 304.

12 October St. Cosmas Author of Canons

He was the closest friend and co-worker of the Venerable John of Damascus. For his piety he was installed as the Bishop of Maium, and worked very hard in this position for his flock and died in peace at the end of the Eighth Century (after 776). Glorifying the hierarch as "nourisher of wisdom, "nurse of purity", "enlightener of the faithful" and "renowned theologian", the Holy Church witnesses that Bishop Cosmas was "meek and humble of mind, calm and blameless in speech, kind and guileless, chaste and righteous, most simple and wholesome". Brought up "in piety and faith" and "with the mind and soul adorned in wisdom", Bishop Cosmas adorned the Church "with systematic and didactic hymns", satisfying "reason", and "which clearly open to all" "the truly strange and most wonderful mysteries of Christ".

Sunday of the Fathers of the 7th Council

On the Sunday in October that falls between the 11th and 17th, we celebrate the 365 Fathers of the Seventh Ecumenical Council in Nicaea in the year 787 at which the use of icons in Christian worship was upheld. The council decreed:

"We define that the holy icons, whether in color, mosaic, or some other material, should be exhibited in the holy churches of God, on the sacred vessels and liturgical vestments, on the walls, furnishings, and in houses and along the roads, namely the icons of our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ, that of our Lady the Theotokos, those of the venerable angels and those of all saintly people. Whenever these representations are contemplated, they will cause those who look at them to commemorate and love their prototype. We define also that they should be kissed and that they are an object of veneration and honor (*timitiki proskynisis*), but not of real worship (*latreia*), which is reserved for Him Who is the subject of our faith and is proper for the divine nature, . . . which is in effect transmitted to the prototype; he who venerates the icon, venerated in it the reality for which it stands."

Annual Meeting 2008

At our annual meeting last Sunday, we decided unanimously not to define a minimum 'financial

obligation' to the parish for purposes of determining parish membership or to qualify those who may sit on the council or hold office. In lieu of a defined minimum obligation, the determination of who may serve on the council or hold office was left to the priest's discretion. This decision does not mean we do not have a financial obligation to God for our parish. We do. Bringing our tithes and offerings (as well as ourselves) into the Lord's house is an essential part of our worship. We cannot 'commend...all our life unto Christ our God' if we neglect it.

The budget was passed. The date for the annual meeting was set as the first Sunday in October. Subdeacon Anthony Stokes was elected parish representative to diocesan and national meetings. If anyone has any questions about any aspect of parish business, please see Fr. Justin or a member of the Mission Council. The new council members will be introduced and installed later this month.

Summary of Church Services Class

Subdeacon Anthony Stokes

Part I: Church Etiquette

1. Ideally, the only time anyone should leave the church during the Divine Liturgy is when the catechumens are dismissed. Mothers with young children, or those with a need may leave the church if necessary. During the following times there should be no leaving or entering the church: at the entrance with the Gospel; during the Epistle or Gospel readings; during the Cherubic Hymn, especially the Great Entrance; during the Anaphora (from the Creed until the Lord's Prayer); during Communion and the Hymns of Thanksgiving. There should never be an extended period when Orthodox Christians are present for a Divine Liturgy and not in the church.

2. A few general guidelines on when not to light candles or venerate the icons are: when the Royal Doors are open; if you can hear the censer; if someone (priest or reader) is in the middle of the church (Litya [when bread, oil and wine are blessed at Vigil], Six Psalms). This is for practical reasons, as there is usually a liturgical action taking place at these times that would be interrupted by the venerating of icons and the lighting of candles.

3. While it is the practice of the Church to have children present for services, a few guidelines should be followed. Children under the age of 4 (those not able to sit still by themselves) should be supervised by an adult and not left to play or wander during services. Toys that make noise should not be brought into the church. It is the responsibility of parents to ensure that their children are not distracting others during the service.

4. When the priest or bishop blesses the people with either the Cross, Gospel, Chalice, or an icon, one should make the sign of the cross with a bow. If

the priest or bishop blesses with their hand or a candle, or with the censer, then only a bow is made.

Part II: Service Books (next week)

How to Act in Church

All matters of church etiquette derive from the Scripture "let all things in the church be done decently and in an orderly manner" as well as the command to love one another. As Elder Zacharias puts it, we don't want to impinge on the spiritual space of others. The whole point is to give everyone freedom to focus on Christ in worship without unnecessary distractions offered by our carelessness or ignorance. Every so often, we need to be reminded as to how we should conduct ourselves in church. The overriding concern in all of these 'rules' is to avoid any sort of behavior that distracts others from worship or prayer, or that shows disrespect for the nature of the Liturgy itself. I ask all of us to read this carefully and with humility, thinking about our own shortcomings in these matters and asking God for help to overcome them. If you have any questions, please address them to your priest. Fr. Justin

The temple of God is a house of prayer. Everything in it must therefore be imbued with reverence, suffused with the spirit of heartfelt prayer. Whatever interferes with prayer must be kept away from the church.

One must not talk in church. Such is the precept enjoined by the saints. All extraneous conversation, even when services are not in progress, is an offense to the sanctity of the Temple, which is consecrated, or set aside, for the exclusive purpose of prayer and worship. [In our situation, we are forced to use the church for other purposes, and our chapel is not formally consecrated. Nonetheless, we do well to treat as though it were consecrated as much as we can under our circumstances.] For this reason, if it is necessary to talk during the service, and this cannot be postponed, it is better to leave the church. If one must give an instruction or ask a question, this should be done in a whisper and as briefly as possible.

Greeting one another, shaking hands, exchanging hellos—this also has no place in church during the service. It should be done after the service—or before. One should avoid making eye contact with others on entering; at most a silent inclination of the head is sufficient acknowledgment of others.

One should make every effort to arrive on time—in time to be in place to hear "Blessed is the Kingdom." To come after that moment is to come late. We show great disrespect for our brethren and for Christ when we consistently permit ourselves to come late.

Once one has arrived and found one's place, one should not leave the Liturgy until the dismissal—unless one is a catechumen and has been dismissed or one has a 'personal emergency' or must take a child out for correction or quieting. To go in and out for other reasons is to show great disrespect to Christ and to distract others from worship.

If one must leave the service for good reason, one should refrain from entering into conversation in the

hall, on the front porch, etc. In this way one may maintain a prayerful spirit despite having to leave the Liturgy. Those who desire to listen to the service on the monitor should not be distracted by the conversations of others in the 'social room'. Likewise, dismissed catechumens may remain prayerful as they read and prepare themselves for illumination.

One must likewise avoid disturbing those praying by walking from place to place, by coughing loudly, by jangling keys or coins in one's pocket, by failing to turn off cell phones, by bringing noisy children's toys into church, etc. All of this is not difficult to avoid if one is willing to make a modicum of effort.

Jesus said, "Let the little children come unto Me" and we do. Children of all ages are welcome and expected to be present at the divine services. This requires different things of the rest of us. We must all expect a modest amount of noise to be generated by small children, and we must be patient and tolerant thereof. We must do our part to help children behave properly by not meeting their gaze when they seek our attention or otherwise engaging them during services. Adults and older children often do younger children a great disservice by playing with them and engaging them during church, thus teaching them that it is acceptable not to pay attention. Parents must make a serious effort to train their children to obedience and to conduct themselves quietly and reverently in church. (Some of this training has to take place at home, such as in times of family prayer.) They must be ready to take children out to correct them when they misbehave and to calm them when they lose control of themselves. Under no circumstances does the welcome of children in church mean that they have the right to misbehave and distract others.

Parents are responsible for their children, who should stand with their parents throughout the service. On no circumstance should children be permitted to wander where they will, or go stand with other children, which usually lead to them distracting both themselves and others.

One must also refrain from dressing immodestly or in a way that draws attention to oneself. [Detailed guideline are posted on the church doors.]

We can readily distract ourselves by carelessly looking around at others. It is best to face forward, to avoid looking at others with curiosity about what they are wearing or doing. We focus on the movements of the Liturgy and the icons, not on others. In some cases we may need to shut our eyes or stand in front to avoid visual distractions.

Orthodox people have always cared for the beauty and adornment of their churches. In God's eyes, however, the most precious adornment of a church is a reverent stillness and ardent prayer. This should be our chief concern, for the Holy Church prays only for those who enter the temple with faith, reverence, and fear of God.

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!