

The Confessor's Tongue for April 19, 2009

Holy Pascha: The Feast of Feasts Christ is Risen! Indeed, He is risen!

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 Notes

During the 50 days of Pascha, ending with the Feast of Pentecost on June 7th, we do not kneel or make prostrations at home or in church in keeping with the joyful, festal character of the season. We begin to kneel and do prostrations again only with the Kneeling Prayers of Pentecost.

The prayer "O Heavenly King" is not said at home or in church during this season until Pentecost. Until the Leavetaking of Pascha, May 27, we sing or say "Christ is risen from the dead..." three times in its place. From Ascension, May 28 on, we can use the Troparion of the Feast of Ascension.

For 40 days until the Feast of Ascension (May 28), we greet each other by saying, "Christ is Risen!" and replying, "Indeed, He is Risen!"

Through the Leavetaking of Pascha, (May 27) we use the Paschal Troparion before and after meals and when setting out on a trip.

The Paschal Troparion

Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and upon those in the tombs bestowing life!

Paschal Kontakion, tone 8

Thou didst descend into the tomb, O Immortal, /
Thou didst destroy the power of death. / In victory
didst Thou arise, O Christ God, / proclaiming,
"Rejoice!" to the myrrhbearing women, / granting
peace to Thine Apostles, and bestowing resurrection
on the fallen.

The Week of Renewal

Bright Week, in Greek, has a particularly beautiful name: "The Week of Renewal," which suits the whole of the Paschal season. Jesus wished to die and to rise again at the threshold of spring. In the same way that Christ's Nativity (Christmas) coincides with the victory of light over darkness, when the days begin to lengthen, so Pascha coincides with the renewal of nature, when greenery and flowers appear.

The Universe itself is a symbol of spiritual realities. Springtime speaks to us—if we know how to interpret God's creation—of inner renewal. There is a springtime of the soul. Pascha, like springtime in nature, brings us a message of hope. Christ's Resurrection tells us that we can be changed. We need to feel the 'new green' of the Paschal season, to which some sayings in Holy Scripture well apply:

Purge out the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven...but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

...that like as Christ was raised up from the dead...even so we also should walk in newness of life...that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter.

As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby.

Bright Week has long been specially observed in the Church. The *Apostolic Constitutions* (dating no later than 380) mandate: "Let slaves rest from their work all the Great Week [Holy Week] and that which follows it [Bright Week]—for the one in memory of the Passion, and for the other of the Resurrection; and there is need they should be instructed who it is that suffered and rose again, and who it is that permitted Him to suffer, and raised him again" (viii, 33).

Emperor Theodosius the Great (+ 395) banned court proceedings during the entire Bright Week, while Emperor Theodosius the Younger (+450) barred all performances in the theatre and circus. In Jerusalem, the most solemn days were the first three days of Bright Week, which are observed to the present day.

Concerning Bright Week, the Sixth Ecumenical Council (691) decreed: "From the holy day of the Resurrection of Christ our God to the new Sunday (Thomas Sunday) the faithful are required to spend the time in a state of leisure, frequent the church, and participate in singing psalms and spiritual hymns, rejoicing in Christ, and listening attentively to the readings of the Holy Scriptures, for in this way we shall rise with Christ and with Him be glorified. Therefore, during these days no horse races or other public spectacles are to be held" (Tullo Canon 66).

Pascha

The word *Pascha* means "passover" or "deliverance" in Hebrew. The Jews, in celebrating the Old Testament Passover, commemorated the liberation of their forbears from Egyptian slavery. Christians, on the other hand, in celebrating the New Testament Pascha, celebrate the deliverance through Jesus Christ of the entire human race from slavery to the Devil and His granting to us life and eternal blessedness. Due to the blessings we have received through the Resurrection of Christ, Pascha is the Feast of Feasts and the triumph of triumphs, and therefore its divine services are distinguished by magnificence and an exceptional solemn rejoicing.

An hour before midnight, the Midnight Office is served during which the Canon of Great Saturday is read. At the end of this service, the Priests silently take the Burial Shroud (*epitaphion, plashchanitsa*) from the center of the church into the Altar through the Royal Doors and place it upon the Altar Table, where it remains until the Ascension of the Lord in

commemoration of the Lord's abiding on earth forty days after His Resurrection from the dead.

The faithful now reverently await the hour of midnight when the radiant, Paschal joy of the greatest feast, the Resurrection of the Lord our Savior Jesus Christ begins.

This Paschal joy is a sacred rejoicing of which there is no likeness or equal on earth. It is the endless joy and blessedness of eternal life. It is of this joy that the Lord spoke when He said, "Your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you (John 16:22).

Just before midnight, festive bells peal out the announcement of the coming of the great moment of the light-bearing Feast of the Resurrection of Christ. The entire clergy, with crosses, candles, and incense, come out of the Altar in the darkened church and together with the people, like the Myrrhbearers who went very early to the tomb, circle the church and chant, "Thy Resurrection, O Christ our Savior, the angels in heaven sing; enable us on earth, to glorify Thee with pure hearts." During the procession, the Paschal peal rings out from the heights of the bell tower as if from the heights of Heaven. All those who have come to pray walk with lit candles, thus expressing their joy of soul in the radiant feast.

The procession pauses at the closed western doors of the church, as if at the opening to the tomb of Christ. Here the senior priest, like the angel who proclaimed the Resurrection to the Myrrhbearers at the tomb, is the first to proclaim the joyous verse, "Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death..." three times repeated three times by the choir. He then proclaims the verses of the ancient prophecy of the holy King David, "Let God arise, and let His enemies be scattered..." and all respond in answer to each verse of the psalm with "Christ is risen from the dead..."

The church's doors are opened, and the faithful, as once did the Myrrhbearers and Apostles, enter into the church, which is resplendent with the light of candles and lambs, chanting joyously, "Christ is risen..."

The Matins of the Resurrection which follows consists primarily of the Paschal Canon of St. John of Damascus. Each ode concludes with the victorious hymn, "Christ is risen from the dead..." During the singing of the canon, each of the clergy in turn, holding the cross with candles and preceded by candlebearers, go around the entire church censuring the faithful and joyously greeting everyone with the Paschal greeting, "Christ is risen!" The faithful respond loudly, "Indeed, He is risen!" The repeated procession of the clergy from the Altar commemorates the appearances of the Lord to His disciples after the Resurrection.

The Homily of St. John Chrysostom is read, calling all to rejoice in the day. "Let no one weep for his transgressions, for forgiveness hath dawned from the tomb. Let no one fear death, for the death of the Savior hath set us free..."

Immediately following Matins, the Hours and Liturgy are celebrated with the doors to the Altar open. Opened at the beginning of Matins, they remain open for the duration of Bright Week as a sign that Jesus Christ has opened the gates to the Heavenly Kingdom forever.

At the Liturgy, the Gospel lesson that is read from John 1 does not tell of Christ's Resurrection, but of His pre-eternal birth from God the Father and of His Divinity, because Christ, by His Resurrection, manifests His Divinity. It is customary, on this day, to read the Gospel in several languages, so that each may hear the glad tidings in his own tongue.

After each liturgy of Bright Week, the cross is carried around the church in procession accompanied by bells.

The first Tuesday after Bright Week is known as the Day of Rejoicing (*Radonitsa*). On it, in order to share the joy of the Resurrection of Christ with the departed and in hope of the universal resurrection, the Church holds a special remembrance of the dead. After the Liturgy, a Panikhida is served and, following a custom of the early Church, the faithful visit the graves of their relatives.

A Paschal Note from the Priest

Beloved, we have reached the joy of the Feast of the Resurrection of the Lord after the labors of the Fast and Great and Holy Week. Let us feast with joy, not only physically, but spiritually; bountifully, but not to excess; with thanksgiving to God who gives us all good things for our use and enjoyment, lest we lose the benefit of our labors by gluttony or drunkenness. For the kingdom of God is not in food in drink, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. Often it is the Paschal season that offers a greater spiritual challenge and more temptations than the Fast. So be watchful, sober-minded, with hearts joyfully uplifted to Christ so that we are not taken unaware in the Enemy's nets. *Fr. Justin*

St. Nicholas of Zicha

"In Adam" does not only mean that we will die one day, rather it means that we are already dead—dead to the last one. "In Christ" does not only mean that we will revive one day, but rather that we are already alive—that the seed in the ground has already begun to germinate and to break through to the light of the sun. The complete expression of death is the grave, but the complete expression of eternal life is in the Kingdom of God.

Upcoming Events 2009

19 April, Paschal Picnic
22 April, OCF Talk with Rod Dreher, 7 p.m. at UNT, Wooten Hall Room 121. All welcome.
25 May, Memorial Day Picnic
16-19 August, Proposed men's retreat at Holy Archangels Monastery. Let Father know if interested.
7 September, Labor Day Picnic

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!