

The Confessor's Tongue for July 26, 2009

Martyr Parasceva; St. Jacob Enlightener of Alaska

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.

Report on the Diocesan Assembly 2009

The annual Assembly of the Diocese of the South was held in Atlanta, Georgia, this past week at Holy Annunciation Greek Orthodox Cathedral and Hellenic center. The Assembly comprises a clergy and a lay delegate from each parish along with their bishop and make important decisions affecting the operation of the diocese in a conciliar way (i.e. working together in council rather than just taking orders from above).

According to the Orthodox understanding of the Church, the fullness of the Church is present when a bishop is present with his clergy and people gathered at the Divine Liturgy. Nothing more can be added to the essence of the Church. Thus the diocese is the essential fullness of the Church. Any sort of administrative structure beyond the diocese is just that, administrative structure that may be useful but is not of the essence of the Church.

The Search for a New Bishop

Since Archbishop Dmitri retired at the end of March, Metropolitan Jonah has been our bishop, formally the *Locem Tenens*, Latin for 'holding the place' of bishop of the Diocese of the South. In other words, he is functioning as our bishop until a new ruling bishop can be chosen and ordained.

The Assembly's first order of business was to consider how to choose a new bishop. A search committee was appointed, and it is expected that the search will last a year. Metropolitan Jonah has said repeatedly that it will be most difficult to find a bishop who will be able to follow the path blazed by Archbishop Dmitri in his thirty years of ruling the South. We would rather take our time to find the right candidate rather than quickly to choose an inadequate one. Moreover by waiting, we keep the Metropolitan directly responsible for us.

Changers to Uniform Parish Bylaws

Some changes were made to our diocese's uniform parish bylaws promulgated in 1981 to make clearer the hierarchical nature of our Church. These may be read on the DOS website. We are required as a parish to comply with these bylaws and will have some adjustments to make in order to achieve that.

Three Financial Resolutions

Three resolutions were passed regarding diocesan finances. Already, our diocese, although far from being the largest in terms of number of members, is the most successful and effective financially. Our diocesan finances depend on the tithe: our parishes pay ten percent of everything that comes in to the diocese. The diocese in turn pays its own overhead, its commitment to the Orthodox Church in America, and everything else it does out of these revenues. Last year a resolution was passed which committed the Diocese to putting at least 25% of its revenues back into its parishes to develop them: to help them

acquire property, build a church or hall, help them go to paying their priests full time, etc. No other diocese in the Orthodox Church does this, and our diocese is being held up as model throughout the OCA and potentially around the world. The diocese considers that the money it takes in through the tithe is held in trust for the parishes for the benefit.

Thus, St. Maximus has a mortgage of \$103,000 with the Diocese. Originally this was a commercial loan of some \$140,000 with Washington Mutual at 6.5% interest or so. First the cathedral and then the diocese bought out the loan which is now offered to us free of interest.

Our council has also decided to deposit the bulk of our building funds (\$45,000) with the diocese. This allows the diocese to make that capital available to another parish who needs it while paying us 4.5% interest on it until such a time as we may need it. When it comes time for us to build, the diocese may loan us money (at no interest) out of its cash reserve, will give us our money on deposit with them as we need it, and can either stand as a guarantor of a loan we solicit from banks or friendly private parties or may directly secure a loan for us from such sources.

The first of three resolutions passed at the Assembly authorizes the diocese to obtain a line or lines of credit not to exceed \$200,000 for the sole purpose of ensuring that funds deposited with the diocese may be made readily available when depositor parishes require them. Such draws on credit lines must be repaid by the diocese within 60 days.

The second resolution authorizes the dioceses to borrow funds for its parishes for the purposes of refinancing debt, acquiring property, and building churches. Thus one may see that our diocese in this area is taking on the function of a bank or credit union. This is particularly important in our time when banks are not readily loaning money to anyone. We do not want our essential work hampered for lack of funding, and would rather let the Church's money work within the Church rather than paying interest to bankers.

The third resolution eliminates the per capita assessment levied by the OCA on the members of the parishes. Until now, we have been paying \$105 a year for each adult member (18 years on up) who 1. is Orthodox, 2. confesses and receives Communion at least once a year, and 3. supports the parish financially. At our annual meeting last year, our parish refused to set a minimum financial requirement for membership at St. Maximus (used solely to determine who must be counted for the OCA 'head tax' and who may vote at the annual meeting and hold office in the parish). Your priest has counted very conservatively to reduce the financial impact on the parish, but we nonetheless have been paying \$175 a month over our tithe to pay the OCA. Starting in 2010, we shall pay only our tithe

to the diocese, which will pay the OCA out of our tithes.

The Tithe and the Proclamation of the Gospel

Our diocese faces a monumental task. When it began in 1978, there were only about 10 parishes in the South. Now our diocese has 65 parishes in 14 states, but many more need to be planted and most need significant amounts of money to acquire property, build churches, and support clergy. We are a missionary diocese and have much work to do to spread the fullness of the Christian Faith, once and for all delivered by the apostles, both to those who do not know Christ and to those who have been turned off and even harmed by distorted and deficient versions of Christianity. This our work is funded by the tithe of the local parish to the diocese.

Locally, our labors are funded by our own tithes and offerings in our parishes. To be a Christian is to turn from serving sin and self and offer oneself to God as a living sacrifice, putting ourselves fully at His disposal for His service. We are not our own, but are bought with a price—Christ's blood. Our whole Christian life is tied up with giving up our rebellion against God and to submit ourselves fully to Him in every area of our lives. This includes our money, and part of our offering of ourselves to God is financial.

All of it belongs to God just as all that we are and all that is belongs to Him; He gives us ourselves and all we have to use for His service. Thus instead of being owners of money and goods with a sovereign right to dispose of ourselves and what we have according to our own whim and wish, we are servants who are to use our Master's goods to support ourselves and do His will.

When we come to worship, we come to offer ourselves, all that we are and all that we have, back to God who gave it to us in the first place. Part of our offering of ourselves comes in the form of money.

In the Old Testament, Abraham gave a tithe to Melchizedek. Jacob promised a tithe of his increase to God if God brought him safely home out of exile. Under the Law of Moses, the people gave two tithes each year. The Levites were supported by one tithe, while the poor were helped by the other, which also went in some years to allow people to go to Jerusalem to make offerings, share with the poor, and to eat and drink and make glad before the Lord. The priests, the descendants of Aaron, were supported by a tithe from the Levites (who received the first tithe) and by a portion of the sacrifices and offerings that the people made each day as part of their worship. The tabernacle, Israel's unique place of worship, was built by the freewill offerings of the people, who gave so much when they were asked to give that they had to be asked to stop giving!

In the Church, we are not under the Law of Moses but rather under the law of Christ, which calls us to go beyond the mere letter of the Law. Knowing that all that we have belongs to God and that what we have is not given to us to indulge ourselves in accordance with the lusts of Western consumerism

but to provide for our needs (needs, not every desire or fancy), the needs of the Church, and the needs of the poor, we understand that one tithe of ten percent is a small beginning—less than the Law of Moses required. Just as Joachim and Anna went beyond even the Law of Moses under which they lived, giving a third to the temple, a third to the poor, and kept a third on which to live, we should endeavor to live in such a way that we may give far more than a mere ten percent of what we bring in each month.

But let us consider what could happen if we merely followed the pattern of the Old Testament: if we brought a full ten percent of our monthly income into the parish each month, we would have little trouble funding our work here in Denton including the construction of a church. Our current monthly budget is \$6200, which we struggle to meet each month. Paying a full tithe, we would meet it easily with plenty to spare to go towards building a church. [We have roughly thirty households; in 2000, median household income in Denton County was \$58,000, estimated to have risen to \$68,000 by 2007; (median family income was more than \$10,000 more than that); per capita income in the county in 2000 was more than \$26,000. Using the lower figure for 2000 for household income, our monthly parish income would be \$14,500 if everyone tithed! Even if we used the low per capita income figure for 2000 (which includes children and students) for our households, our monthly income would be still \$6500, just over budget!]

I will be so bold as to say that if we all tithed, we should not have to ask people to give more to fund a church building, as the figures above demonstrate (assuming the median household income of the county represents the average parish household income, we should have more than enough to build the church we have planned and make the monthly payments: I estimate that monthly parish income in the range of just \$10,000 would make building feasible.) but the Biblical precedent certainly permits asking special offerings 'over and above' one's regular giving for the sake of constructing a place of worship, especially such a place as we endeavor to build which will proclaim the Gospel to Denton by its very architecture (one who understands the architecture will be able to preach the Gospel naturally to those who take a tour of the building simply by explaining its meaning, what the building's form represents. Now that is a power evangelistic tool

If we then lived more frugally, reigning in our excessive and careless spending, we might then be able to set aside another ten percent for helping those in need, be it our own brethren who fall on hard times, other parishes and ministries, and local and international charities. We prove the truth of our Faith to unbelievers around us by our love for one another, and that love is powerfully demonstrated in meeting the practical needs of those among us who cannot for whatever reason meet their own needs. To the degree that we have needs among us that we do

not care to meet, to that degree we undermine our proclamation of the Gospel.

Our diocese is able to do far more to help its parishes do their work of proclaiming the Gospel than any other diocese because of the tithe. Our own parish finances would be revolutionized if we all tithed. Other dioceses limp by financially because they do not have the tithe and do not give back to the parishes; our own parish struggles because not everyone tithes or even participates in the work of offering ourselves to God in this way, and we only budget one percent of our income as a parish for almsgiving rather than the ten percent of the Old Testament (a goal towards which we will work).

We may object that we cannot tithe. Let us be honest: the reason we 'cannot' tithe is that we have made bad financial decisions, have over-extended ourselves, and become enslaved to our desire for more stuff, we love money, we have lived as though all that we have belongs to us, or we simply refuse to do it. Many of us, however, including your priest, do tithe, so it can be done, even by those of modest means. To do so requires discipline, but if we make that offering to God as the first check we write each pay period, we shall discover that the rest is blessed and that we shall be able to live on it. If we do not have the discipline to live on ninety percent of our income, we probably do not have the self-control to live on our full income either, and the only way we shall be able to bring our finances under control will be to make our offering to God first as we should rather than give Him our leftovers if anything.

The choice is ours. We see the success of our diocese based on the tithe. We know God's promise to 'test Me' in this matter of giving to see if He will not bless us by our obedience. The good news is that we already have the means to accomplish the tasks of building a permanent church, helping those in need, and even helping found new missions in our area. The bad news is that the means are still in our pockets, or are being squandered in excessive spending, or are tied up by debt most likely incurred by excessive spending in the past. To correct this will take a change in priorities and a change to a more frugal, Christ-centered way of living, but this change is possible for all of us. *Fr. Justin Frederick*

The Virtue of Hatred

Abhor that which is evil, cleave to what is good. Romans 12:9

The Bible commands us to hate, and it is not found in the Old Testament, but the New! This hatred is both a virtue and a necessity for us if we are to live a Christian life.

We generally think of hatred as a sin, and, when directed against man made in God's image, it is. Yet hatred is not something that has to be completely rooted out of our souls; it merely needs to be directed against the proper object.

In last week's epistle from Romans chapter 12, St. Paul commands us to "abhor that which is evil." The Greek word *apostugeo* contains the root verb "to hate"

with a prefix which adds intensity to that hatred. This hatred, properly translated as 'abhor', is not a passive dislike; it is an active, violent hatred and detestation. The Latin word from which we get 'abhor' means 'to shudder' a violent, involuntary reaction to something with which we desire no close contact, for example, the sound of fingernails on a slate blackboard.

This violent reaction of intense hatred is to be directed against that which is evil. The Greek word for translated as 'evil', *poneros*, used 80 times in the NT, is translated as "evil or wicked" in all but five occurrences in the King James. Satan, the devil, is "the evil one" from whom we ask deliverance in the Lord's Prayer. Things that are evil harm and oppress us and others and corrupt our souls and faculties so that they do not work as they were created to work. God is good, *kalos*, and makes us such while our enemy is evil and seeks to make us like himself.

Thus we are to hate both the devil and his evil works; we are to hate the corruption that the devil works in human lives through sin and death. We are to hate sin, not merely hating it but abhorring it.

But all too often we do not abhor sin; rather we like it or even love it. Rather than shuddering before it in revulsion and fleeing from involvement with it, we toy with it, play with it, entertain ourselves with it, and as a result, we live lives far short of the potential God has given us—simply due to failure to abhor evil.

When I was on vacation, I had the misfortune of being exposed to two episodes of *The Bachelorette* on television. It was repulsive to see a young women set up with first four then three young men, to 'date' them in exotic, romantic locations far removed from the reality of day to day life, to kiss them, to sleep with them—all on national television, all in the name of finding 'true love' and the man she should pick to marry. She had no clue as to the real nature of love or on what basis she might make a wise, rational decision about what man would be good to marry, and so could offer no guidance in the matter to a viewer. Yet this most unworthy material is offered to us as 'entertainment' and consumed ravenously by millions on the edges of their seats!

Such 'entertainment' is unworthy of a Christian. If there is anything of Christ's life in us, such things must cause our souls to shudder and turn away. To hate and despise such things is both virtuous and necessary for Christians to protect us from what will harm us. And if we find our hearts sinfully drawn to such things, let us ask God to strengthen us in the virtue of hatred of evil! *Fr. Justin Frederick*

Upcoming Events 2009

1-14 August, Dormition Fast
16-19 August, men's retreat at Monastery
23 August, 3 p.m. Women's Tea
7 September, Labor Day Picnic

The Dormition Fast

The Dormition Fast, in honor of the Theotokos, begins Saturday, August 1, and lasts through Friday, August 14. We fast from meat, dairy products, fish, wine, and oil, and practice abstinence in martial relations. See the wall calendar for modifications to the fast on a particular day. The logic of the fast calls us to put aside (fast from) all sin and worldly distraction so that we can attentively seek God and renewal in the Holy Spirit: to give ourselves more fully to prayer, study of the Scriptures, and almsgiving. It is also an appropriate time for Confession and Communion for those who are not regular communicants. May God grant all of us a profitable Fast!

Soul-Profiting Instructions of the Elder Vicent of Secu Monastery, Romania (+1945)

Two Kinds of Prayer: There are two kinds of prayer: one of glorification of God, with humbleness of mind, and the second of requesting from God needful things. When you pray, do not come right away to requests. Put aside yourself and your needs at the beginning of prayer. Leave the earth and rise up towards the heavens. When you pray, do not let your mind wander here and there, but admit your insignificance and weakness, and the narrowness of your understanding.

The Holy Bible: There does not exist under the sun a thing more grievous than a Christian who knows how to read but doesn't have a Bible in his house and doesn't read it daily in order to gain grace and strength.

Frequent Confession weakens the power of the devils.

Preparing for Confession: Before going to Confession, search your conscience for a long time and see if there are small sins, which are often able to become more harmful than big ones. Then write on paper everything in which you have sinned...If [the priest] gives you permission to have Holy Communion, still don't be in a hurry, since it is fire and burns. But search your conscience some more, and then, with great fear take Communion.

Talking in Church: Talking and laughter in church are sins against the Holy Spirit, that is to say, against the divine power, since through this the holiness of the Church is scorned and an occasion for the temptation of people arises.

About Putting Off Spiritual Things: This is the most sure snare of the devil. He says, "You'll have time later to pray and make prostrations, and to fast tonight or tomorrow!" And you put off everything spiritually profitable until death. Behold, in this way a man loses himself, by his own will, unrepentant. Whose fault is it?

Concerning Perseverance: Without good deeds and perseverance, you will not take the Kingdom of God. Since it is necessary first of all to desire those things that you want to receive and to ask with faith,

with patience, and with labors. For everything gained by labors you keep attentively, so as not to lose it, since you know how much you have labored for it. What would the Prophet Solomon have profited if he had received the gift of wisdom without labors?

The Third and Sixth Hours

The Third and Sixth Hours are read before the Divine Liturgy. The Third Hour commemorates the descent of the Holy Spirit at 9:00 a.m. upon the Apostles at Pentecost. The Sixth Hour holds in memory the Crucifixion of Christ on the Cross at noon. We do well not only to be on time for the Divine Liturgy but even prayerfully attend the reading of the Hours by being present when they begin about 20 minutes before the scheduled Liturgy. Our presence at the Hours enables us to "settle-in" and be prayerfully conditioned for the Divine Liturgy.

Hospital Admission: A Practical Tip

If you are going to be admitted to the hospital for major surgery, you should receive the Mysteries of Confession and Communion in advance. It is proper to let your priest know that you are going to the hospital. If you are admitted via the emergency room, your priest should also be notified as soon as possible. Keep your priest informed: call or have a member of your family call. Your priest cannot visit you and pray for you if you do not inform him!

Birthday or Nameday Prayer

All holy Lord, how can I worthily thank Thee for the life which Thou hast given me? Thou hast brought me up from the abyss of non-existence, and my life is a gift which came from Thy goodness. Thou hast kept me to this day, supporting me in times of trouble and need. Thou watchest over me, directing my steps along the right path and preserving me from temptation. When I stray, Thou leadest me back to the way of Thy commandments; when I slip, thou dost support me; when I fall, Thou liftest me up; when I wander, Thou turnest me back and openest Thy fatherly arms to me. My debt to Thee is immeasurable, for Thou hast given me life and daily showest me the proof of Thy fatherly goodness and care. In full acknowledgement of this, I offer Thee my entire life, and, especially, this particular day. I pray to Thee in humility, asking that Thou not take Thy good-ness from me, and that Thy wisdom may guide me throughout my entire life along the right path of blessedness; through the prayers and intercessions of Saint *[name of patron saint]* and of Thine all-pure Mother. Amen.

Abba Nilus said, "Do not be always wanting everything to turn out as you think it should, but rather as God pleases; then you will be undisturbed and thankful in your prayer."

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!