

The Confessor's Tongue for August 2, 2009

8th Sunday after Pentecost; Protomartyr Stephen; Blessed Basil, Fool for Christ
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.

August 6: Holy Transfiguration

One of the Twelve Great Feasts, the Transfiguration of Our Lord primarily proclaims and glorifies Christ's Divinity. On the mountain with Peter, James, and John, Christ was transfigured before them, shining brighter than the sun and revealing His divinity so far as His disciples could bear it without being consumed. Because Christ's Divinity is made manifest, the feast has also been called "the second Theophany."

Traditionally, the Transfiguration is considered to have taken place forty days before the Crucifixion. The feast was originally appointed for February, falling during the Great Fast, but since the joyfulness of feast was not in keeping with the lenten spirit of penitence and fasting, it was transferred to August 6 to be observed forty days before the Feast of the Elevation of the Holy Cross.

Jesus Christ was fully God and fully man in one person, but He appeared to men who looked only on the external appearance to be only a man, for His Divinity was veiled except to the eye of faith. On Mt. Tabor, the veil was removed, and His Divine glory shone forth. It is the same at the weekly Eucharist at which Christ comes to us in the transformed bread and wine. We see bread and wine, just as the disciples and the people of Israel saw a man; but an infinitely greater reality is present to be perceived by the eyes of faith, the very Body and Blood of our Lord, which is our true food and our healing, and for us constitute "the sacrament of transfiguration." By this mystery, we ourselves are transformed to become partakers of the Divine Nature.

Thus this Feast not only reveals Christ's Divinity, wrapped in humanity, it also reveals divinized human nature. Christ took our full human nature to transform it, to make us by grace what He is by nature. The Transfiguration reveals what we shall be when we no longer fall short of the glory of God, or as St. John says, "When we see Him, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is."

The Kontakion of the Feast makes another point: by seeing Christ for who He truly was, the disciples would have no doubt when Jesus was crucified that He died voluntarily, not by compulsion. He chose to lay down His life; it was not taken from Him by force. Without this revelation, they and we might be tempted to think of Jesus as a weak man whose life was unjustly taken from Him by a corrupt state. Jesus Himself is emphatic on this point: "I lay My life down for the sheep . . . I lay down My life that I might take it again. No man taketh it from Me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again." (John 10: 15-18)

The Feast is celebrated for eight days through its Leavetaking August 13. We sing or say the Troparion

and Kontakion at meals and during our usual prayers during this time.

It is customary to bless summer fruits at the Feast of Transfiguration. You are encouraged to bring fresh fruits to be blessed after Liturgy, or, if you cannot attend Liturgy, after Vigil.

Troparion, Tone 7

Thou wast transfigured upon the mountain, O Christ God, / showing Thy glory to Thy disciples as far as they could bear it. / Through the prayers of the Theotokos, / make Thine everlasting light shine also upon us sinners. / O Giver of Light, glory to Thee!

Kontakion, tone 7

Upon the mountain wast Thou transfigured, O Christ God, / and Thy disciples beheld Thy glory as far as they could see it; / so that when they would behold Thee crucified, / they would understand that Thy suffering was voluntary, / and would proclaim to the world / that Thou art truly the Radiance of the Father.

St. Maximus on Transfiguration

The Lord does not always appear in glory to all who stand before Him. To beginners He appears in the form of a servant; to those able to follow Him as He climbs the mountain of His transfiguration He appears in the form of God, the form in which He existed before the world came to be. It is therefore possible for the same Lord not to appear in the same way to all who stand before Him, but to appear to some in one way and to others in another way, according to the measure of faith.

Who Is Contrary to Nature?

Elder Epiphanius of Greece (+1989)

"Father," someone told him, "you Christians with your sermons concerning abstinence go against nature. By what right do you do this? Nature knew something to place the sexual instinct in man. What are you that you try to subdue it?"

"My child, God placed this instinct in man, but He did not place it there by itself. He directly associated it with all the responsibilities which accompany the preservation of the race. Man, though, keeps only the one side of the coin: pleasure. The other side, which is called responsibility, he throws in the trash. So you tell me now, who is going against nature? We Christians, or you?"

The Dormition Fast: August 1-14

The Dormition Fast is observed in the Orthodox Church from the first through the fourteenth of August. This two-week Fast ends on the Great Feast of the Dormition of the Theotokos, August 15, on

which day we celebrate the Death, Resurrection, and Ascension of the Mary, the Mother of God.

Any Fast of the Church is supported by three pillars: fasting from food and evil deeds, prayer, and almsgiving. Each of the three in balance with the others is needed during the Fast.

Fasting in the true sense is a spiritual and ascetical work undertaken out of love for God and obedience to His Church. The Church gives us guidelines for our fasting that are not exceptionally difficult or unrealistic. Nonetheless, they should not be seen as a legalism. God does not need our prayers, alms, or fasting—but we do need to offer these things to God for the health of our souls. Let each do so according to the measure of his strength with God's help. For some, the norm for fasting may be beyond their strength. In that case, we offer to God what we can and ask Him to increase our capacity to offer ourselves to Him.

Since one of the most basic things we do as human beings is to eat, and it was through lack of self-control in eating that man fell, we reconsider this necessary daily activity through abstaining from certain foods and eating less in general. For a short time, we abstain from meat, dairy, fish, alcohol, and olive oil. The Fast is modified on certain festal days to permit the use of fish, wine, and oil [see wall calendar]. If we have the strength, we do well to follow the traditional practice on fast days of not eating at all until later in the day, usually until the 9th hour (3:00 p.m.) or until after Vespers, especially on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, except when there is a feast. (If that exceeds our strength, but we still desire to attempt it in part, we could wait until noon to eat.) In any case, all fasting done in a spiritual way out of the desire for more of God will help us to cut off the passions in our lives and to recalibrate our priorities so that we do not live to eat but rather eat to live—to live for God. For in truly observing a Fast of the Church, we come to desire more strongly our true food, the "Living Bread" that comes down from Heaven. Jesus Christ Himself is our Food and Drink, the only Food that nourishes us unto eternal life.

Prayer goes hand in hand with fasting, and without prayer, fasting will benefit us little. In the Fast, we seek to increase our daily measure of prayer both in quantity and quality. The addition of one or more psalms, of prostrations, the canon of repentance, an akathist, doing an extra prayer rope of the Jesus Prayer, more intercessions for others, and attendance at weekday church services are a few ways by which we may increase the quantity of prayer. We can increase the quality by devoting better time (not our leftovers!) so we can pray without rushing, with fuller attention and heart-felt compunction.

Fasting and increased prayer and spiritual reading will make us more aware of our sins, leading us to Confession. We should make a Confession during the Fast if we have not confessed in the past month. If we have not had Holy Communion recently, we should prepare ourselves for it as well.

Besides our usual tithes and offerings, we increase our almsgiving—money and goods given to those in need. In principle, the money we save by eating less should be given as alms, either in our parish alms box (which goes only to those in need), or to a food bank or other worthy charity.

The Fast is also a time to spend more time reading the Scriptures, the lives of the Saints, and other Orthodox spiritual writings. Such reading will nourish our souls and illumine our minds, especially when we abstain from secular entertainments such as music, novels, movies, television, and the like, which most often represent the spiritual junk food of this world.

Finally, let us seek to understand the fast, as a spiritual preparation for the Feast of the Dormition, in honor of Mary, the Theotokos, who lived her whole life being fully faithful to God and doing all things in accordance with God's will. She was "blessed" because of this, and her Divine Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, glorified her in her falling-asleep (Dormition), and bestowed upon her the fullness of the age to come. That is, the Theotokos received the glorified and immortal body and ascended in the flesh into Heaven. This is indeed our own hope: to die peacefully and to be raised in glory into the Kingdom of God.

During the Dormition Fast we shall not only have daily services but we shall also celebrate the Great Feast of Transfiguration (Aug 6), the Feast of St. Herman of Alaska (Aug 9), the Feast of St. Maximus (Aug 12), and the Dormition of the Theotokos (Aug 15) will mark the end of the Fast. All these feasts will be observed with Liturgies. Thus we have two-week window for concentrated spiritual effort fully supported by parish, a time to seek God diligently in these trying times, get back on our spiritual track, and prepare ourselves for autumn. May each one of us make this Fast a time of great profit to his soul!

Upcoming Events 2009

- 1-14 August, Dormition Fast
- 6 August, Feast of the Holy Transfiguration, Liturgy with blessing of fruit 9:00 a.m.
- 9 August, Feast of St. Herman of Alaska
- 12 August, Summer Feast of St. Maximus, Liturgy 9:30 a.m.
- 15 August, Feast of the Holy Dormition
- 16-19 August, Men's Retreat at Monastery
- 23 August, 3 p.m. Women's Tea at Louise Newcomb's
- 7 September, Labor Day Picnic

August Namedays

- 1 Elesa (Amy) Stokes (Martyr Elesa of Kythera and the Peleponesos)
- 13 Tikhon (Alan) Prater (St. Tikhon of Zadonsk)

August Birthdays

- 5 Blaine (Michael) Rivas

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!