

# The Confessor's Tongue for October 11, 2009

18<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost; Fathers of the Seventh Ecumenical 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.

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## Annual Meeting 2009

Last Sunday, the parish held its annual meeting following the Divine Liturgy. The following business was transacted: a budget for 2009-2010 was passed; Reader Benjamin Tolleson was elected to be our parish delegate for the Diocesan Assembly and any other such official meetings; the date of the annual meeting was changed to the last Sunday in September; a motion was passed to require background checks for all church school teachers; the topic of a fence for the playground was discussed but was deferred to the Council.

The new budget is \$2600 more than last year's budget. This represents the inclusion in the budget for the first time of the building fund, a line-item for repayment of a loan from the building fund, a line-item for renovation and maintenance of our current building, and an increased amount for almsgiving (our goal for this is 10% of parish income; this year budget is roughly 2.5%). Thus the amount that we have to have each month in order to operate is little changed from last year.

What has changed is the philosophy of the budget. Instead of all sorts of offerings and appeals and a big push for raising funds to build, we simply ask that people tithe on their income (give 10%, the biblical amount) to their local church, or at least give regularly, consistently, and proportionately of their income, making our offering to God first rather than from our leftovers.

The median household income in Denton County is \$58,000; the median family income is \$69,000. Last year we had 28 households (either single people or families) who were members of the parish who gave. Taking that number, if 28 households tithed (gave 10%), the budget as passed at the annual meeting would be met if the average household income in the parish were only \$37,864--\$20,000 below the median in the county. This budget puts \$1000 a month into our building fund (much more than has been coming in in recent months) as well as makes \$200 a month available for almsgiving. Thus our budget is based on the tithe—a very conservative estimate. If average income in our parish is actually closer to the county median and our members tithe, we'll have ample funds to do what we need to do. If the average income of 28 households were \$50,000 (still under the county average) and those households tithed, the parish would receive \$14,000 a month, more than \$5000 a month than we have budgeted.

We are outgrowing our space. Our proposed church is estimated to cost \$800,000. The monthly payment on a loan of that amount (15 years, 6.5%) would be about \$6800 a month—far more than we can afford based on our present parish income. But the more we can raise now, the less we shall have to borrow, which will lower the monthly overhead; and

as more of us tithe, the more quickly and easily we'll be able to build a beautiful permanent place of worship. In our example above (28 tithing households with average income of \$50,000 a year) we would have sufficient funds to build.

Our 28 giving Orthodox households averaged \$2089 a year in giving this past year. If they are tithing, this represents an annual average household income of \$20,890. Moreover, we have some Orthodox members who are not giving who are not included in the 28 households; we also have catechumens, inquirers, and guests who give but are not included in the 28. In short, the resources are out there both to meet next year's budget, to build a church, to give 10% of our parish income as alms to both individuals in need (beginning with our own) and to worthy charities, and to help start other missions in our area. But it will depend on our faith and love for God expressed in tithes and offerings (as well as other ways).

In short, if we tithe, we can do all that we need to do to be the Church and do Christ's work here without resorting to special fundraising for building, appeals, and fundraisers.

Reader Benjamin will represent the parish as its lay representative at the 2010 Diocesan Assembly. This assembly will have the added responsibility of possibly voting on a new bishop for our diocese, which is presently search for a suitable candidate. The parish representative also attends the triennial OCA Sobor and any other special meetings of the Diocese at which parishes are represented. The post has a term of one year.

Next year's annual meeting will be Sunday, September 26. By making the annual meeting a week earlier, it allows the new council to meet immediately the following week to get to work, as our Mission Council meets the first Sunday of every month. These meetings are open to the parish at large.

To help protect our children and to protect the parish from possible liability, we shall begin running background checks on those who serve as teachers in our church school program once we have researched the best way for our parish to do this.

May Christ our God bless our parish and each of us and guide our labors in the year ahead.

## Questions & Answers on a Rule of Prayer

### How do we learn to pray with our lips, and then with our mind?

1. If our childhood habits have been forgotten (or never established), then it is possible to learn to pray aloud (that is, step onto the first level of prayer) by using a prayerbook and paying close attention to the standard Church prayers. "The Church wisely established hymns and various troparia on account of the weakness of our mind, so that we, although

foolish, might be attracted by the sweetness of the singing and thus praise God even against our will" (St. Peter of Damascus). The Church accepted hymns and troparia so that we would be humbled and rise to excellent thoughts as if upon a ladder.

2. Christ's teaching demands that our faith and our way of living be inseparable. For this reason, every Christian, or order to live in constant prayer, must have a daily order of prayer; that is, to establish under the guidance of a spiritual father a prayer rule. As St. Augustine said, "Once we were cleansed by Baptism; but every day by prayer."

#### **What is the practical significance of a prayer rule?**

"A prayer rule is an arrangement of several prayers written by the holy and God-inspired Fathers, which are adapted to a specific time and circumstances" (St. Ignatius Brianchaninov).

"The purpose of a rule is to increase the number of prayerful thoughts and feelings...and so that they be correct, holy, and perfectly pleasing to God" (*Ibid.*).

"The soul, left to her own devices, would not be able to follow the correct path of prayer. She would become distorted: either through daydreaming, or through illusions of lofty visions, inspired by vainglory" (*Ibid.*).

"The soul, filled and nurtured by prayerful thoughts and feelings selected from a ready-made prayerbook, begins of its own accord to live these thoughts and feelings" (St. Theophan the Recluse).

#### **How long should a prayer rule be?**

The rule is for the person, not the person for the rule. When determining a rule, it is necessary to adapt it to, and not exceed, the individual's strength. A rule is meant to further spiritual advancement, and not to serve as an excuse for self-opinion. "It is better to alter parts of a rule, or even invent an entirely new one, lest prayer become a mere ritual" (St. Theophan).

"I prefer a brief rule that is continually performed to a long rule that is quickly abandoned" (St. Matoes).

"In the day of judgement, God will not condemn us for leaving off psalms or abandoning prayers, but for allowing the demons to enter us because we ceased our rule" (St. Isaac the Syrian).

#### **From Elder Barsanuphius of Optina**

In its aspiration for the New Jerusalem, the city of the Lord, the soul at times finds consolation in music. In the world, I loved serious music, like Beethoven and Schubert. I once went to a concert. A friend of mine met me and asked: "Where are you coming from, and why are you so happy and exultant?"

"I've been to a concert. What marvellous music! What delight it leads to soul to!"

"Well, there are even higher delights, different ones. If you would only go off in that direction, it would lead you into another realm, to the realm of the delight of prayer."

And he was not lying to me. I loved to attend church, especially the All-night Vigil in our Resurrection Cathedral. I loved the semi-darkness, the gentle twinkling light of the lampadas. It was exceptionally nice to pray there.

And here you are, going to the Vigil now; pray there. Try to pray properly; try to enter into and be immersed within yourselves. You know, in each person there exists a world of unspeakable beauty, in which are hidden many pure delights and ineffable joys. Go within yourself and they will be revealed to you. However, don't expect only delights from prayer; don't despair when you don't feel any joys. In fact, it even happens that you stand and stand in church and its as if you don't have a heart inside you, but a chunk of wood, and an unplaneable one at that. Well, what of it? Thank the Lord for the chunk of wood. It means that this was what was needed. You see, another soul, having experienced lofty delights, might get a swelled head. A condition like "stony insensibility" humbles him down. We can't demand prayerful bliss from God. From us is demanded prayerful labor, but joys are sent by God when it's pleasing to God and to our benefit. And so, let us pray to Him and rely in everything on His holy will!

"Holy days" – what wondrous words! And how are they spent in the world? At masquerades, balls, the theatre—a man is spun around to the point where he never remembers anything spiritual, and after all this there remains in his soul only emptiness. He recalls passionate conversations, free manners, passion for men and women. Such emptiness remains not only from the most base pleasures, but even from those that are less sinful. And what if, in the midst of such pleasures, the Lord calls such a soul to Himself? Can it count on paradisaic bliss? According to the words of the Savior, "In whatever state I find you, I will judge you." It's frightening to think of where such a soul will go....

Even perfect people have passions—there are no totally passionless people. Passionlessness exists in full measure only beyond the grave. But with the perfect, the passions have come to a standstill, since they are not given a chance. Each man, no matter how exalted a life he has led, no matter how many grace-filled gifts he has been vouchsafed, must remember and never forget that he, too, is a passionate man.

#### **Upcoming Events 2009**

18 October, Blessing of Automobiles after Liturgy  
15 November Nativity Fast begins  
13 February 2010 Forgiveness Sunday, Vespers, Great Lent begins  
26-27 February 2010 Metropolitan Jonah visits.

**GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!**