

The Confessor's Tongue for January 31, 2010

Sunday of the Prodigal Son

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.

January 31: Unmercenarys Cyrus & John et al.

St. Cyrus was born in Alexandria and studied the medicinal arts in his youth. Usually granting help to the sick gratis, so mainly by the power of faith and prayer, he converted many pagans to Christ. During the persecution of Diocletian, St. Cyrus left for Arabia, accepted monasticism there and continued to heal the sick through prayer. Having heard about his wonders, John, a warrior from Edessa [Urfa] who practiced asceticism in Jerusalem, came to St. Cyrus in Arabia and began to study under him and imitate his holy life. Together they helped the sick and spread Christian teaching among the pagans. Having learned that St. Athanasia and her three daughters were arrested by persecutors for torture, the holy healers, scorning dangers, decided to go into the city of Canopus in Lower Egypt, so that by their faith they would confirm the faith and patience of the holy martyrs. Having arrived in the city, they fulfilled their intention. They informed the governor of this, who sentenced Cyrus and John to heavy torture in front of the confessors. The saints remained unshakable in their faith. Having left them, the torturer began to torture the holy confessors and when he could not overcome their firmness, he ordered to decapitate them. After this they accepted the same crown of martyrdom as the Holy Unmercenarys Cyrus and John. It was in the year 311. *S. V. Bulgakov, Handbook for Church Servers, 2 ed., 1274 pp. (Kharkov, 1900) pp. 0046-0047. Translated by Archpriest Eugene D. Tarris © January 7, 2007. All rights reserved.*

Meeting of Christ in the Temple February 2

The Nativity cycle of feasts concludes with the Great Feast of the Meeting of Christ in the Temple on February 2nd, the fortieth day after the Nativity of our Lord. This feast is closely connected with the Nativity, for just as Christ's divinity was revealed at His Nativity and His Baptism, so it is also manifested at His meeting in the temple with Simeon and Anna.

According to the Law of Moses, all Hebrew parents were to bring their first-born son and a sacrifice in thanksgiving on the fortieth day after birth to the temple to be consecrated to God. The law was established in remembrance of the exodus of the Hebrews from Egypt—freedom from slavery, when the first-born Hebrews were spared from death.

In fulfillment of this law, the Theotokos with Joseph brought the infant Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem, and for their sacrifice brought two doves—the sacrifice of a poor family. At that time, the Elder Simeon by the Holy Spirit recognized the infant Jesus as the Christ, the anointed one of God, as did the Prophetess Anna. Thus these two joined

the company of shepherds and magi as being among the first to recognize Him for who He was.

The spirit of the festal service is the same as that of the Nativity and Theophany: to glorify the manifestation of God on earth, to extol Christ's divinity, and to give honor to the most pure Virgin Mary as the Mother of God. St. Cyril of Alexandria speaks beautifully of the profound content and significance of this feast in his sermon for the day:

The Eternal, is both a small Child and the 'Ancient of Days' (i.e. God). A child at the breast and, at the same time, the Creator of ages. I behold a Child and recognize God. The Child is nourished, and, at the same time, he gives life and joy to the world. The Child is in swaddling clothes, and, at the same time, he delivers me from the bonds of sin... This Child—the angels glorify him, the archangels bow before him. The Principalities tremble in his presence, the Powers praise him, the Cherubim minister to him, the Seraphim bless him, fountains and seas yield to him... This Child conquered death, over-came the devil, abolished Adam's curse, ...washed away all sins, condemned all heresy, adorned all creation, saved Adam, renewed Eve, summoned all the nations, and sanctified the universe... Therefore, let us brighten this day with candles, as befits the children of light, and let us bring to Christ the Light of spiritual illumination. (*Prologue 1*)

The hymns of the feast offer glory in honor of Christ's appearing in humility, celebrating the Incarnation of the Eternal Word of God, and extolling the Most Holy Mother of God.

Let the gate of heaven be opened today: for He who is without beginning, the Word of the Father, hath made a beginning in time without forsaking His divinity, and as a babe forty days old He is of His own will brought by the Virgin His mother as an offering in the temple of the Law. The Elder received Him in his arms, crying as a servant to the Master: "Let me depart: for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation." Glory to Thee, O Lord, who hast come into the world to save mankind.

The hymns revel in Christ the Lawgiver's submission to the Law for man's salvation. "He who once gave the Law to Moses on Sinai today submits Himself to the prescriptions of the Law; in His compassion, He hath become like unto us for our sakes... Today Simeon taketh into his arms the Lord of glory, whom Moses once saw in darkness, when God gave him the tablets on Sinai... The Creator of heaven and earth today is carried in the arms of old Simeon." A hymn of St. Andrew of Crete for the feast says,

He who rideth upon the cherubim and who is praised by the seraphim today is offered according to the Law in the divine Temple, lying in the arms of an old man as on the altar.

The Feast of the Meeting of Our Lord has a post-feast until February 9th. During the festal time, the

troparion and kontakion of the feast are said along with our daily prayers and at meals.

Troparion, tone 1

Rejoice, O Virgin Theotokos full of grace, / for from thee hath shone forth the Sun of Righteousness, Christ our God, / who doth illumine those in darkness. / Be glad also, thou righteous elder, / for thou hast received in thine arms the Deliverer of our souls, // who bestoweth upon us Resurrection.

Kontakion, tone 1

Thou who hast sanctified by Thy birth a virgin womb / and fittingly blessed the hands of Simeon, / Thou art come, O Christ our God, and on this day hast saved us. / Give peace to thy commonwealth in time of battle / and strengthen the Orthodox people whom Thou hast loved, // O Thou who alone lovest mankind.

The Sayings of St. Anthony the Great

Abba Anthony said to Abba Poemen, "This is the great work of a man: always to take the blame for his own sins before God and to expect temptation to his last breath."

Saying 4 in *The Sayings of Desert Fathers*

Commentary: Why is this a "great work"? First of all, because man often does not see his sins. He has become hardened, insensitive to them. Humility and God's grace are necessary for a man even to see his sins. This is one reason the Holy Spirit is given, to convict men of their sins. Most men see themselves as 'basically good and decent', but that is a delusion the Holy Spirit works to overcome.

Having seen his sins, a man then must struggle with the temptations of blaming others for them rather than himself or of making excuses for his sins. Parents, circumstances, spouse, friends, etc., may have made it easier for us to sin, but in the end we have to own our sins without blaming others. This goes against our penchant for self-justification, which goes back to Adam blaming the woman, and Eve blaming the serpent. Indeed, Abba Dorotheos of Gaza teaches that the first half of humility is blaming ourselves for our sins, i.e., taking responsibility for them before God. (The second half of humility is giving God the glory for all that is good in our life rather than taking the credit ourselves.)

Man often comes to Christ expecting blessing, comfort, and ease, even health and wealth. He wants payment here and now in terms of a comfortable, happy life for serving God. God makes everything better, right? But as both St. James and St. Peter tell us, we are to rejoice in tribulations and temptations. They will come. We should expect them, be ready for them, and embrace them, for through them God perfects us. St. Isaac the Syrian says, "When you find unchanging peace on your way, then fear; because you are far from the right path by which the righteous go with suffering feet." Again, he says, "Temptation is good for everyone....An undisciplined son will not enter into possession of the riches of his father's house because he will not be able to use his wealth

profitably. For this reason God first gives troubles and trials, and then gives grace. Glory to the Lord who by irksome treatment gives the pleasure of health! There is no one who does not suffer during his training, and there is no one who does not find the time difficult when he is given to drink the poison of temptations." Yet God always gives grace to endure when, giving thanks for the trials, we ask in humility. *Fr. Justin Frederick*

Prayer & Fasting

St. Justin of Chelive (+1979)

Prayer and fasting are a virtue which must become the way of life of our Orthodox people, becoming the soul of their souls, because prayer and fasting are the all-powerful, Christ-given means of purging not only the human personhood but also society, the people, and the human race at large, of every defilement. It is prayer and fasting which are able to cleanse our people's souls from our defilements and sinning. The souls of our people must fall in step with the Orthodox life of prayer. Prayer and fasting are not to be performed merely for the individual, or for one people, but for everyone and everything ("on behalf of all and for all"): for friends and for enemies, for those who persecute us and those who put us to death, because that is how Christians are to be distinguished from the Gentiles (Matthew 5:44-48).

Something to Read: Preparation for Lent

Prayer, Almsgiving, and Fasting are the three pillars of any fasting period in the Church, and we do well to plan before the Fast how we shall observe them during the Fast. In addition, the Fast is a time to increase our Spiritual Reading for the nourishment of our souls. Reading the Scriptures should be a daily part of our lives. If it is not, let us plan to read daily from the Scriptures during the Fast. "Man lives not by bread alone but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God." With the Scriptures a regular part of our reading, let us add something that will warm our hearts toward God of that will instruct us in the spiritual life. Many fine books are available in our Library for us to pick to read over the course of the Fast.

Upcoming Events 2010

- 4 February, Thursday: Class on Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago*. Followed by Russian Vespers.
- 6-7 February: Elder Zacharias of St. John's Monastery, Essex, England at St. Serapim's & Sava's.
- 14 February 2010, 6:00 p.m. Forgiveness Vespers, Great Lent Begins. If you attend this parish, you should consider this service to be mandatory.
- 26-27 February 2010 Metropolitan Jonah visits.
- 4 April 2010, Holy Pascha, the Feast of Feasts.

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!