

# The Confessor's Tongue for August 1, 2010

10<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost: Procession of the Precious Cross

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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## August 1: Procession of the Cross

According to general opinion, this feast was established in Constantinople because of the frequent illnesses occurring there in August. Annually on August 1, part of the life-creating wood of the Cross of the Lord, kept in the house church of the Greek Emperors, was carried into the Temple of St. Sophia where water was blessed. Then, for 2 weeks this holy relic was carried about the city, and Litas "for the sanctification of places and for the healing of illnesses" were served. On August 14, the life-giving wood of the Cross was returned to the royal chambers. The origin of this feast goes back to the 9th century. Russia began to celebrate it at the beginning of the 15th century.

*From the Bulgakov Handbook, Fr. Eugen Tarris, translator.*

## The Sayings of St. Anthony the Great

*The brethren came to Abba Anthony and said to him, 'Speak a word; how are we to be saved?' The old man said to them, 'You have heard the Scriptures. That should teach you how.' But they said, 'We want to hear from you too, Father.' Then the old man said to them, 'The Gospel says, "If anyone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also." They said, 'We cannot do that.' The old man said, 'If you cannot offer the other cheek, at least allow one cheek to be struck.' 'We cannot do that either,' they said. So he said, 'If you are not able to do that, do not return evil for evil,' and they said, 'We cannot do that either.' Then the old man said to his disciple, 'Prepare a little brew of corn for these invalids. If you cannot do this, or that, what can I do for you? What you need is prayers.'*

Saying 19 in *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*

*Commentary:* The Gospel, God, our Christian life, is progressive revelation and development, a path that begins in the dark but shines brighter and brighter until the full day. God meets us where we are in our infirmities and gently leads us where we need to go.

Anthony gives one of Christ's commands from the Sermon on the Mount to the brethren who asked how to be saved. When they say they can't fulfill it, he reduces it twice, from turning the other cheek when unjustly struck, to allowing the one cheek to be struck, to simply not taking revenge on those who wrong them. He does this in hopes of finding a level on which they can begin to function; then, as they carry out the lesser degree of the command, they will grow into carrying out the higher degree. But they prove incapable even of that! At least they were honest about their inability to carry out Christ's commands. They knew themselves well enough and were honest enough that they did not try to make themselves look good in Anthony's eyes by accepting his words while knowing they couldn't do what he said. They came in humility wanting a word that would help them. They turned out to be very weak, 'invalids' as Anthony calls them. Then, unable to

minister to them on a spiritual level, he shows love to them by providing food for their bellies, thereby showing them he does not reject nor despise them. Only by "prayers"—their own prayers for themselves and for their enemies (those striking them), and probably the prayers of more experienced brothers, could they hope to advance from their elementary level of faith from prayer alone to pray joined to the action of keeping Christ's commands.

Christ's commands in the Gospel mark the path of salvation for all of us; they show us what it is to be a Christian; they set the faith we claim into action; they cleanse and purify our thoughts and actions. If we are not yet up to turning the other cheek to be slapped, allowing the one to be slapped, or not taking revenge on the slapper, at least we can pray for our enemy and ourselves, since Christ has commanded us to pray for our enemies. Christ's Sermon on the Mount, found in Matthew chapters 5-7 is the first place to look to begin learning Christ's commands.

*Fr. Justin Frederick*

## 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 Mary, the Theotokos.

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 and desire 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 and faith in 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 9<sup>th</sup>

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 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. During 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. Daily Matins and Vespers are offered in the church to assist us. We can increase the quality of our prayer by cutting out secular entertainments that cloud our thoughts, fasting, and devoting the first and best part of our day to prayer (not our leftover time!) so we can pray without rushing, with fuller attention, and with 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 week or two preceding the Fast). If we have not had Holy Communion in the past month, we should prepare ourselves for it as well.

Besides our usual tithes and offerings (this is a good time to increase them, too, if we are not giving as fully as we know we should), 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. We may also bring imperishable food to church for distribution as alms.

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 and inflame our hearts with zeal for God, especially when we abstain from secular entertainments such as music, novels, movies, television, and the like.

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 in purity, 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.

The Dormition Fast is a spiritual reality check for us, both a spiritual, ascetic work and a blessing. May the days of the Dormition Fast be of spiritual profit to us all!

For those interested, here are the full rules for fasting (which are probably beyond most of us at present) in Dormition Fast from the *Typicon*. *Concerning the Fast of the Most Holy Theotokos it should be known:*

*In the fast of the Dormition of Our Holy Lady Theotokos, 14 days except the Transfiguration of Christ, we fast until the ninth hour in the day [3 p.m. M-F, i.e., one meal on those days]:*

*Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, to eat “dry” [which means that we eat only vegetables cooked with water and salt, and also such things as fruit, nuts, bread, and honey. In practice, octopus and shellfish are also allowed on days of xerophagy; likewise vegetable margarine and corn or other vegetable oil not made from olives.].*

*On Tuesday and Thursday, cooked food without oil.*

*On Saturday and Sunday, cooked food with oil, and we drink wine: we don't eat fish, until the Dormition of the Most Holy Theotokos: but only on the Transfiguration of Christ, we eat fish, twice a day.*

### August 6: Holy Transfiguration

We celebrate the Transfiguration of our Lord through the Feast's Leavetaking on August 13<sup>th</sup>. We use the troparion and kontakion of the Feast in our daily prayers and at meals.

It is customary to bless summer fruits at the feast. You are encouraged to bring fresh fruits to be blessed either at Vigil or Liturgy.

#### Transfiguration, 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!

#### Transfiguration 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.

#### Upcoming Events 2010

- 1 August: Farewell reception for Mike Rodgers and Leif Pierson, 5:00 p.m. rectory
- 1-14 August: Dormition Fast
- 6 August: Holy Transfiguration
- 15 August: Dormition of the Theotokos
- 1 September: Church New Year
- 6 September: Labor Day Picnic, noon to five

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!