

The Confessor's Tongue for September 5, 2010

15th Sunday After Pentecost: Zechariah & Elizabeth, Parents of St. John the Baptist
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.

September 8: The Nativity of the Theotokos

On the eighth day of the Church's new year, She celebrates the Great Feast of the Nativity of the Theotokos. The Feast has a pre-feast of one day and a post-feast of four days.

This feast marks the birth of Mary to her parents Joachim and Anna in their old age. The Church attributes great importance to the birth of Mary, the Mother of God, because it was through her and her acceptance of God's will that our Lord became man. This Feast occurs at the beginning of the Church year because Mary's birth marks the beginning of the process that led to our salvation. Without her cooperation and freely-given assent, the eternal Word of God would not have become man. The following hymn from Vespers of the Feast expresses much of the Feast's meaning:

Today is the beginning of joy for all the world; today the winds blow that bring tidings of salvation. The barrenness of our nature hath been loosed: for the barren woman is revealed as the mother of her, who, after bearing the Maker, still remained virgin. From her He who is God by nature taketh what is alien and maketh it His own; through her Christ worketh salvation for those gone astray in the flesh, He who loveth mankind and is the Deliverer of our souls. The Feast marks the "beginning of joy," for through the godly inheritance of many generations, the way had been prepared for the birth of the woman who would be fitting to give birth to God in the flesh. God's plan awaited the coming of the suitable vessel who could bring His Son into the world, giving Him human flesh.

Man's nature, rendered barren by the curse, unable to fulfill his potential for achieving God's likeness, enslaved to sin, death, and the devil, is ended; for Anna, long barren, gives birth to the perfect flowering and offering of the human race, her pure daughter Mary, and Mary, through her purity and willing submission to God, permits "He who is God by nature" to take "what is alien" (i.e. human nature) and to make that created human nature His own. Through her, Christ comes to work salvation for man whom He loves.

The Troparion of the Feast, which expresses the external meaning of the Feast, gives the reason for the claim that Mary's birth is "the beginning of joy for all the world" which "hath brought joy to all the inhabited earth." Through her, Christ is born who delivers us from the curse and from death and pours out upon us blessing and eternal life.

The Kontakion of the Feast, which expresses the internal, or hidden, meaning of the Feast, describes the cosmic effects of Mary's birth: Adam and Eve are set free from death and corruption, and God's people are delivered from sin. A barren woman, Anna, bears a woman, Mary, who sustains our lives, and she does this because of whom she bore: Christ our God.

As usual, we sing or say the troparion and kontakion of the feast at meals and as part of our daily prayers from the Vigil of the Feast through the Leavetaking on September 12th.

Nativity of the Theotokos, Troparion, tone 4

Thy Nativity, O Virgin, / hath proclaimed joy to the whole universe! / The Sun of Righteousness, Christ our God, / hath shone from thee, O Theotokos! / By annulling the curse, / He bestowed a blessing. / By destroying, death He hath granted us eternal life.

Nativity of the Theotokos, Kontakion, tone 4

By thy Nativity, O most pure Virgin, / Joachim and Anna are freed from barrenness; / Adam and Eve, from the corruption of death. / And we, thy poeple, freed from the guilt of sin, /celebrate and sing to thee: / the barren woman giveth birth to the Theotokos, / the Nourisher of our Life.

The Service Schedule at St. Maximus

One of the tasks of the parish priest is to schedule divine services for the parish community to gather in worship of the living God. This is not an easy task, and we have tried various approaches throughout the year here at St. Maximus. I should like to explain the thinking behind our current schedule of services.

The non-negotiable services in the schedule are the Sunday morning Divine Liturgy and the Saturday evening Vigil. From the our parishes first Great Lent until now, we have served Vigil on Saturday night in a form that lasts about two hours. I am heartened that more of us are coming to Vigil, as it really is essential preparation for the Liturgy and Holy Communion. Strictly speaking, we should not commune unless we have attended the Saturday evening service, or at least part of it. The Sunday Divine Liturgy is our weekly commemoration of all that God has done for us and an offering of ourselves back to Him as living sacrifices. We receive the life of God through the Holy Mysteries and are thereby prepared for life in His Kingdom. The weekly life and schedule of every Christian should revolve around these two services.

The Church appoints daily services morning and evening for every day of the year. Here, we are serving those on the fast days each week, Wednesday and Friday. These days have been chosen so that you may support your fasting by attending service and thereby entering into the common prayer of the Church. Classes are offered these days to nourish your faith as well. During the seasonal fasts, we try to offer at least one of the daily services every day for this same reason.

On Fridays at the end of Vespers, we are serving the Trisagion service (a short Pannikhida) to keep the Saturday commemoration of the departed and to fulfill our debt of love to those who have gone before us.

The service times during the week have been simplified and standardized. Morning services during the week are at 7:00 a.m.; evening services at 7:00 p.m. If an afternoon service is held, it will be at 3:00 p.m.

Currently Matins and Vespers are served on Wednesdays and Fridays. A weekday Liturgy will be scheduled each week, often on Thursday.

Great Feasts of the Lord, the Theotokos, and the Feasts of a few significant saints are also observed with a Vigil the night before at 7:00 and Liturgy in the morning at 7:00. We do well to make the effort to attend at least part of the cycle of services for the Great Feasts; to neglect them is to rob and impoverish ourselves.

We do well to nourish our life in Christ by frequent recourse to weekday services in addition to our faithful use of Saturday night and Sunday morning. We should never feel that we have to come every time the church doors are open, but if those doors aren't open, we couldn't come even if we so desired. Hence, we open the church doors frequently for services. Most of us would benefit from a midweek service—to remind us who we are in Christ, to be refreshed to get through the week.

During the week, Matins lasts one hour, Vespers about 45 minutes. You may feel free to come late to these services, or leave early, or both. Come in for 15 or 20 minutes on your way to work or on your way home after work or school, light a candle, quiet your soul, lift your heart to the Lord in prayer, and then go on your way. God will bless your offering of yourself to Him.

The Sayings of St. Anthony the Great

It was revealed to Abba Anthony in his desert that there was one who was his equal in the city. He was a doctor by profession, and whatever he had beyond his needs he gave to the poor, and every day he sang the Sanctus with the Angels.

Saying 24 Sayings of the Desert Fathers

Commentary: Sometimes people think that only monks or perhaps clergy have the chance to be close to God. 'How can we who live in the world fast, pray, give alms as the saints did?, they think, and they have little hope for ourselves. This saying of St. Anthony reveals that one need not be a monk to attain St. Anthony's level of spiritual life.

St. Anthony as a great ascetic who sold all his goods and gave them to the poor to flee to the desert to become a monk, a man of prayer and strict fasting, a spiritual warrior with much experience of warfare against the demons, a man who had seen God's uncreated light, seems nigh impossible to equal. Yet a man living in the city (probably Alexandria) was his equal before God. This man had not gone to the desert, and not given up all his possessions to give to the poor, had probably not seen the demons fighting him as Anthony had, yet he still pleased God greatly. He worked, he lived frugally on his income, spending just enough to meet the necessities of life and giving

away the rest in alms. He maintained daily prayer and worship of God in such a way that he was joining the angels in their singing the thrice-holy hymn, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord of Sabaoth [hosts], heaven and earth and full of Thy glory."

Brethren, wherever we live, whatever our circumstances, what we need for our salvation and knowing God intimately is at hand. Let us seek the Lord with all our hearts and do His will by following the path of Christ's commandments. Let us not live beyond our means, limiting our wants to what we truly need. Let us be generous in almsgiving, and let us be faithful to pray daily and diligent to come together for worship. Let us make ourselves available to God to do His will each day, and we, too, may find ourselves in Anthony's company with the anonymous doctor who was his equal before God.

Fr. Justin Frederick

The Annual Meeting: Parish Membership

At the annual meeting, various matters affecting parish life may be put to a vote of the gathered members. Who constitutes a voting member of the parish?

According to the Uniform Parish Bylaws in the Diocese of the South of the OCA, members of the parish are adults of at least 18 years of age who meet these criteria:

1. They have been baptized and chrismated in the Orthodox Church and consciously uphold and profess the Orthodox Faith.

2. They are regular communicants, that is, participate in the Holy Mysteries of Confession and Communion. The term 'regular communicants' means those who partake of the Holy Mysteries frequently, ideally weekly, and no one can be a member of the parish if he fails to comply with the obligation once a year.

3. They fulfill the financial obligations established by the parish. All members of the parish are urged to make a yearly commitment for financial support to the parish in the form of a pledge, the ideal of which is the tithe of his income.

4. They declare their intention to be members.

Our parish has refused to define a minimum level of financial commitment to the parish for the purpose of determining voting membership (3 above), leaving that determination to the priest's discretion.

If there are any of you who have questions about membership for purposes of voting at the annual meeting, please see Fr. Justin soon.

Upcoming Events 2010

5 September: Church School Begins, Mission Council
6 September: Labor Day Picnic, noon to five, Liturgy at 10:00 a.m.

8 September: Nativity of the Theotokos, Liturgy 7:00 a.m., Vigil September 7 at 7:00 p.m.

14 September: Elevation of the Cross

26 September: Annual Meeting, 11:30 a.m.

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!