

The Confessor's Tongue for September 26, 2010

18th Sunday After Pentecost: St. John the Theologian

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.

For Consideration (St. Sergius, 25 Sept)

From the Prologue from Ochrid, St. Nicholas of Zicha

A saint is not remarkable on the surface; all his riches are internal, in his soul. A peasant came a long way to the monastery to see St. Sergius of Radonezh. When he asked for the abbot, he was told that he was working in the garden. The peasant went off to the garden and saw a man there in poor and dirty clothing, hoeing along with the other workers. The peasant returned to the monastery dissatisfied, thinking within himself that the monks were making fun of him, and repeated, that there might be no mistake, that he wanted to see the famous holy father, Sergius. Sergius arrived back at the monastery just then, and welcomed the peasant, serving him at table. The saint looked into the heart of his guest, and saw there the thoughts about himself. To quiet him, he told him that he would see St. Sergius if he waited a little. Just then, a prince arrived at the monastery with his nobles. Both the prince and the nobles bowed low to Sergius and asked his blessing. The monks then removed the peasant from the room to make room for the new guests, and this peasant looked with wonder from afar, and peered to see that which he had spurned the sight of from nearby. He chided himself for his ignorance and was deeply ashamed. When the prince had departed, the peasant quickly went up to the saint, fell at his feet, and asked his forgiveness. And the great saint was gentle with him, and said: "Don't grieve, my son; you thought a true thing of me, reckoning me as nothing, while others are deluded in thinking me something great."

The Sayings of St. Anthony the Great

Three Fathers used to go and visit blessed Anthony every year, and two of them used to discuss their thoughts and the salvation of their souls with him, but the third always remained silent and did not ask him anything. After a long time, Abba Anthony said to him, 'You often come here to see me, but you never ask me anything,' and the other replied, 'It is enough for me to see you, Father.'

Saying 27 Sayings of the Desert Fathers

Commentary: Certainly the third monk was edified by hearing the questions of the others and St. Anthony's answers. Very often our spiritual questions are those that others have but are afraid to ask, and our bringing up the topic ends up edifying others who are listening. It takes humility to ask a question, for asking a sincere question reveals our ignorance which pride shirks from revealing.

Yet this is not the primary sense of this saying. According to the words of the third monk, just to see Anthony was enough for him. How can this be? We all know the expression, "You are a sight for sore eyes!" We know the effect the mere sight of one we love but have not seen for a time has on us. Perhaps even more powerful is the effect seeing a truly holy

person can have on us. If you doubt the power of holiness, recall how Moses, after all his conversations with God, wanted to see His face, but God only permitted him to see a part of His glory and his 'hind parts', not His face, as that would have been too much for Moses to bear. Even that limited sight of the glory of the holy God transfigured Moses so that his face shone so much that the Hebrews were frightened and he had to veil his face for their sake.

We have little experience with human holiness and its effects on others. Just encountering a holy person, looking upon him, and sitting quietly in his presence watching and listening can affect us powerfully. Indeed the saints (the word 'saint' is the same word in Greek as 'holy'—it could be translated as 'holy one') manifest in themselves the life of God who dwells in them, and God's powerful presence in them affects those around them, so much so that this monk was content merely to see and hear the holy Anthony without speaking.

The effect of holiness in others is why Christians have venerated relics, the sanctified remains of holy men of God, which, although separated temporarily from the soul, still participate in the sanctifying uncreated energies of God. The number of healings and miracles attributed to this encounter in incalculable. It is also why Christians have frequently made pilgrimages to see holy elders.

Furthermore, when we look at the world around us, our fellow parishioners, and our families and wonder why things are so bad, the power of holiness and God's command to "Be holy, for I am holy" makes us aware of the positive effect we can have on others by pursuing holiness. As we grow in true holiness, we make it easier for those around us likewise so to do. This can be said another way in St. Seraphim's famous words: "Acquire the Holy Spirit, and thousands around you will be saved." One reason we don't see more people come to Christ, enter His Church, and remain, one reason we don't see the world becoming a better place, is our own want of holiness. You want the members of your family to become better, instead of lecturing them on virtue become more virtuous yourself. If you wish your fellow parishioners to be more Christ-like, instead of complaining about them and being offended, become more like Christ yourself. If we wish our city, our state, even our country to be better, instead of blaming our fellow citizens and the other party, let us blame rather ourselves and seek to improve ourselves by God's grace.

To become holy, we have to put ourselves in the presence of what is holy. We live such unholy lives because we spend so much time with what is base and impure. This means above all that we attend the Liturgy and regularly prepare ourselves for the Holy Mysteries. The holy things are for the Holy—and those on the road thereto! *Fr. Justin Frederick*

A Parish at a Tenth-Year Crossroads

As we pass through the tenth year of our parish (anniversary next July 27-28), we find ourselves standing at a crossroads in the growth and development of our parish. God keeps sending us new people, many of whom become serious inquirers, then catechumens, and then members. We need more space for worship, classes, and fellowship. How can we best use what has been given to us for the purpose proclaiming the fullness of the Gospel in Denton County and growing to the point where we can spin off a new mission parishes?

Since late 2005, our goal has been to build a proper, permanent church, following the word given to us by our bishop. After initial internal attempts at planning, we hired Andrew Gould in the middle of 2007 to design a church for us. By April 2008, the first stage of design was complete. Our efforts at raising funds had gone reasonably well up to then, and we had forward momentum (over \$100,000 total was raised for building a church projected to cost \$800,000). But then several people surprised us by falling away from the Church, which took the wind out of our sails and robbed us of our momentum.

Two years later, we still have not yet reached the place in spiritual maturity or cash flow to undertake the construction of the temple we have designed. The incoming flow of building funds has slowed to an almost negligible trickle. The temple we designed would help us proclaim the Gospel here in Denton by drawing attention to Orthodoxy, by putting before people's eyes an image of beauty and quality not commonly seen in contemporary church buildings, by enabling the proclamation of Christ simply by giving tours of the building and explaining its architecture. Such a temple would last far beyond our lifespan (until Christ returns!) and make a powerful statement in Denton, but it would need to be supported by a monthly income of at least \$12,000. We consistently bring in a little more than half of that figure.

So if it is God's will for us to build that church, He has not yet provided us with the means. Perhaps there are some intermediate steps we can take. Besides adding a left side apse (work is scheduled to begin October 4), should we plan on eventually incorporating the current narthex into the nave? What then would we do for a narthex? Wall in the front porch? Put a door in the front of the current coffee hour room and use that as a narthex? Do we revise our building plans to build a more modest temple and build it, or hold out for the one we have designed? Do we push ahead to build a hall along the west property line as we envisioned in our master site plan so that we can use more of our existing building for worship and classes? And what about a facelift for our home? We own a historical building that is now 100 years old. There is no building in Denton quite like it. To make it beautiful again would also send a positive message to our neighborhood, to the city, and to everyone who drives by. A new roof, a few

repairs, new paint—with a little work, we can present an attractive face to the world.

There also remains the possibility of the two-and-a-half acre lot three doors down. Our neighbor who purchased it doesn't need it any more for the purpose that led him to buy it. What would we do if we could acquire that?

Our ultimate goal is proclaim Christ, to fulfill his commands to make disciples, and to "do this in remembrance of Me." Perhaps we need to focus more on people for a time, to expand as much as we can within the confines of our existing building and property, and work pointedly towards the goal of being able to spin off a daughter parish before trying to build a permanent temple. Places like Frisco and Flower Mound/Lewisville cry out for parishes, and other places like Decatur and Gainesville and other towns further a field as yet have no Orthodox presence. And why can there not be more than one Orthodox parish in Denton proper? If we do our job, Denton could easily be home to half a dozen parish churches.

These questions and others will be need to be discussed and decided in the parish over the next few months. The Strategic Planning Committee, formerly known as the Building Committee, has been activated to address them. They will be the ongoing topic of discussion in the Mission Council. Those meetings are normally open to all who would attend, and the members of those committees are open to hearing everyone's input. Most of all of us need to pray for God's direction and be willing for Him to guide us in ways that we hitherto have not imagined.

A Brief Parish History: St. Maximus 2001-2010

At the Diocesan Assembly this summer in Atlanta, Metropolitan Jonah urged us to compile a history of our parish. While I have kept a chronology of parish events, this is the first attempt to write. It is long on dates, events, and attendance figures, short on matters of deeper import. Though it falls short of what a good, complete parish history should be, it at least should impart a sense of where we have been in the past nine years. All of you could participate in writing a complete parish history by submitting your anecdotes and accounts of parish life in the first nine years.

St. Maximus Parish in Denton, Texas, was formally begun on June 2, 2001, when Archbishop Dmitri, in response to requests from Kevin Menard of Denton, asked Fr. Justin Frederick, then attached to St. Seraphim's Cathedral, to start a mission somewhere in Lewisville/Flower Mound/Denton. After a month of developmental work, Archbishop Dmitri appointed the mission's first Divine Liturgy to take place on Sunday, July 29, 2001.

Our first service was held Saturday, July 28, 2001, in the chapel of St. David's Episcopal Church, a few blocks from our present location. Most memorable was having to sing Vespers in tone seven with a scratch choir from the cathedral and some 14 people present. Our first Liturgy saw 27 in attendance, half

from the Cathedral. Our second weekend, we had but 6 for Vespers and 8 for Liturgy.

Our founding members are: Fr. Justin & Matushka Michelle, Dax and Amy Stokes, Kevin & Connie Menard and their boys Noah and Ben, Daryl (now Fr. Basil) and Dea Biberdorf and Julia, Nina Johnston, and Jerry Bradshaw.

Kevin Menard, making a wrong turn on his way home from church, saw a former fraternity house on Oak Street for sale on September 16, 2001. We investigated immediately, but there were already two contracts on the house. But both fell through by the end of October, and by November 15, we had a contract to buy the property for \$177,500. Fr. Justin and Matushka obtained financing in their own name, and the parish raised \$30,000 for a down payment. We closed January 4, 2002 cleaned January 11, had a Thanksgiving Molieben and house blessing January 12, and our first Divine Liturgy January 13. Renovations by Fr. Michael Storozuk and Fr. Justin began January 14. The first baby born in the parish (Katherine Frederick) was born on our patronal feast, January 21.

The title deed was legally transferred from the Fredericks to the Diocese of the South on February 1, 2002. Our first Liturgy in our new altar, created by cutting through a wall and converting a bedroom and part of a bathroom, was February 3. We served our first Saturday Vigil February 23 for the Publican and Pharisee, and have been serving them ever since.

Amy Stokes was the first adult received into the Church at St. Maximus on May 4. Sophia Biberdorf was our first baby baptized on July 12. Other firsts include tax exempt status for the property in May, first Pascha with 55-60 present May 5, first parish meeting May 26, first Memorial Day picnic May 27 (it rained!), our first Labor Day picnic September 2, and our first Mission Council Meeting in January 2003. In 2002, our Sunday Liturgy attendance averaged 18 souls.

In 2003, we averaged 21 in attendance at Sunday Liturgy. On April 27, we celebrated our second Pascha with 60 present. May 23 brought us a new chalice set from Russia funded by a gift from St. John the Baptist Orthodox Church in Passaic, NJ. Five days later we received the icons of St. John the Baptist and St. Maximus (from St. Isaac's) which now grace our iconostasis. We acquired and used our present adult baptismal font to baptize 3 people and we received one more by Chrismation. Fr. Justin painted and trimmed the altar, which was now finished except for the floor, which remained plywood. In August, one of our founding families, the Biberdorfs, left to go to seminary. Our first hierarchical Divine Liturgy with Archbishop Dmitri was held October 12 with 53 in attendance. Dax Stokes was made a subdeacon.

In 2004, we served our first wedding for an already civilly married couple. We attempted to have a progressive round of house blessings with food. On February 15, we conducted our first choir workshop

to teach the eight tones in Obikhod, or court chant. The same month, we broke the '30 barrier' on a non-hierarchical or Paschal Sunday Liturgy for the fourth time in February. Pascha saw only 32 attend this year, but all but one stayed the whole night. Two successive Sundays in August set new attendance records: 46, then 54. We also removed the partial dividers in the middle of the nave and put parquet flooring on the ambon and kliros. We held our third annual Memorial and Labor Day picnics. Over November 12-13 we celebrated our first literal All-Night Vigil ending with the Divine Liturgy for St. John Chrysostom: 20 souls were present. Sunday Liturgy attendance averaged 28 in 2004; Saturday Vigil averaged 7.

Major work of maintenance and upgrading was done in March and April of 2005. Foundation work was done. Our electrical service was upgraded to support central air for downstairs, which was installed. In the hall (coffee hour room) we tore out the second bathroom and closet and reconfigured the main bathroom to give us more room—barely in time for Pascha, our fourth, with 43 in attendance. Fifty people turned out for Paschal Vespers and our first Paschal picnic. From 10:30 p.m. to 6:00 a.m. we held our second literal All-Night Vigil for the Protection of the Theotokos (Sept 30 – Oct 1). Seven attended, four staying the whole night. In October, we worked to prepare for a visit from Archbishop Dmitri: we hauled off trash, installed cabinets and finished the hall, painted and upgraded the sacristy, and more. Our second hierarchical Liturgy was served October 9 with 80 people in attendance (56 of our own, the rest from other parishes). The choir was outstanding. Following that visit, His Eminence sent us a letter urging us to begin plans to build a proper church. Sunday attendance averaged 28 in 2005; Vigil attendance 12.

In Great Lent of 2006, we began serving Matins daily during the week for the first time. The parish purchased a new Gospel book, an artophorion, and a bell-less censer. In March, we acquired some new liturgical items from a defunct parish in Pittsburg through Fr. John Maxwell of Fort Smith, Arkansas: an altar table, a table of oblation, a set of blue vestments, servers' candles, a censer, a seven-branch candlestand, icons, and a Greek-style tomb. Broken eves in the back of the building were repaired. Fr. Justin mounted icons on the royal doors. We purchased liturgical fans, which were used for the first time on Lazarus Saturday (April 15). Our fifth Pascha, April 23, saw 63-70 present for the Paschal Vigil and 65-70 for the Vespers, with more coming for the picnic. Four Baptisms were celebrated on Holy Saturday. In 2006, we averaged 41 on Sundays, 12 at Vigil.

In 2007, attendance grew to 45 on Sundays, 14 at Vigil. We began a committee to plan the building of a church. Over the weekend of July 6-9, we had Orthodox architect Andrew Gould fly out from Charleston, SC, to look at our property and begin the

process of designing a traditional church to suit our property and region. It was this year, I believe, that our custom of going to Beth Marie's on the Square after forgiveness Vespers began.

In 2008, attendance grew to 47 on Sunday and 15 at Vigil, despite the setback of several people leaving the Faith. By April 9, we had completed first-stage plans from our architect. On April 27, our seventh Pascha, 74 people attended the Vigil. On September 13, we had the privilege of Sister Magdalen from St. John's Monastery, Essex, England speak to us on a Saturday morning after Hurricane Ike cancelled her scheduled talk in Houston. Abbot Jonah was present at Vespers on Friday, October 24 and afterwards gave a talk on the Jesus Prayer. On November 1, he was consecrated a bishop at St. Seraphim's Cathedral. He was to have served the following Sunday at our altar, but due to the press to get to the All-American Council, we decided to postpone until he could give us a more leisurely visit. Instead, he was made Metropolitan at the Council.

In 2009, April 16 (Holy Thursday) we used our new side apse for the first time, converted from an obsolete kitchen, giving us much more space for worship. On our eighth Pascha Sunday (April 19), about 70 attended the Vigil, but 102 came for Vespers and nearly 200 altogether attended the picnic following. In June, we took delivery on our permanent altar table build by Fr. Michael Storozuk. Kathrine Sacclarides was present for a presentation on missions after Liturgy. Fr. Justin bought a house down the street to give the parish more space for ministry and his family more room to grow. The St. Tikhon's Octet sang Vespers Monday, June 8, and brought the famous Sitka icon of the Theotokos for veneration. June 21 saw our first Liturgy with our new altar and new green vestments. On August 4, we were saddened by the first death of a parishioner, Nicholas Gluschenko. Attendance in 2009 increased to 56 on Sundays, but dropped to 13 at Vigil.

The year 2010 saw us purchase new purple and white altar vestments and chalice covers to fit our new altar. Metropolitan Jonah fulfilled his promise to visit us when he celebrated Liturgy on February 28 and held a great question and answer session afterwards. A special parish meeting approved expanding the nave on the left side of the church if the parish could raise at least \$2500; \$3000 was raised. Acquiring a relic of St. Herman we commissioned a large icon of St. Herman of Alaska to be painted by Austin Kachek of Manville, New Jersey, which we received in March. April 8 saw our ninth Pascha at St. Maximus: 72 attended the Vigil, 70 attended Vespers. At Pentecost, four adults and two children were baptized. Through August of this year, Sunday attendance has averaged 62 and Vigil attendance an all-time high of 19. Our all-time record Sunday attendance was 94 at the Metropolitan's visit; our record 'normal' Sunday attendance is 81. Our all-time high attendance at a service is 102 at the 2009 Paschal Vespers. The record attendance at Vigil is 36.

Uniform Parish Bylaws of the Diocese of the South

ARTICLE II Purpose of the Parish

Section 1 The purpose for which the Parish exists is to maintain a local Orthodox Christian community under the authority and protection of the Ruling Bishop of the Diocese of the South:

✠to worship God in accordance with the Tradition of the Holy Orthodox church, "in spirit and in truth;" (John 4: 24)

✠to preserve, protect, defend and propagate the Holy Orthodox Faith; The Apostle Jude exhorts us to "contend earnestly for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints." (v. 3) The Parish must be zealous in carrying out the Lord's commandment to make disciples of all peoples. (Matthew 28:19-20)

✠to provide charitable aid to the poor and Christian education for its members; "Give alms of such things as ye have." (Luke 11:41) "Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to the needy, in thy land." (Deuteronomy 15: 11) "Increase in the knowledge of God." (Colossians 1:10)

✠and to build and maintain churches, chapels, schools and such other religious, educational and benevolent institutions as may be expedient.

ARTICLE V The Rector or Priest-in-charge

The rector or priest-in-charge of the Parish holds his office by virtue of his appointment by the diocesan bishop. The rector or priest-in-charge cannot leave the Parish without permission of the diocesan bishop.

All matters concerning his salary, his housing, and his benefits are to be agreed upon between the district dean and the priest and the Parish Council prior to his appointment.

By virtue of the Apostolic Succession abiding in the Church, which the priest shares through his ordination, it is his primary responsibility to preach teach the doctrine of the Holy Orthodox Church, preside over the celebration of the Holy Mysteries (Sacraments) and divine services in accordance with the Tradition of the Church, and to ensure that the life of the Parish as a whole is guided and directed toward spiritual and not secular ends:

Since the priest must answer to God for the lives and the salvation of those who are entrusted to his pastoral care (Hebrews 13:17), nothing in the Parish can be initiated without his approval and blessing, neither must he do anything pertaining to the life of the Parish without the knowledge of the Parish council and the parishioners, so that always there may be unity, mutual trust, cooperation and love. In the event of a disagreement between the priest and the parishioners or the Parish Council, the matter shall be referred to the district dean.

Upcoming Events 2010

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

15 November: Pan-Orthodox Unction Service at SS. Constantine & Helen, 7:00 p.m.

22 December, Wednesday: Metropolitan Jonah visits at Vespers.

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!