

The Confessor's Tongue for July 22, A. D. 2012

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost: St. Mary Magdalene, Equal-to-the-Apostles

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.

July 22: St. Mary Magdalene

Up to her conversion to Christ, Mary had the terrible illness of possession by demons (Lk. 8:2; Mk. 16:9). Gratitude for the Savior Who expelled seven demons from her and gave her new life ignited in her heart such faith and love for Him that could not be extinguished by anything in the world. She turned her soul and heart to Him alone; all her thoughts, desires and hopes were concentrated in Him; all the treasure of her heart, all the life of her soul was contained in Him. St. Mary did not leave the Savior even when His very disciples, "forsook Him, and all fled" (Mk. 14:50). St. Mary was the first to see the empty tomb where "two Angels in white robes were sitting" who announced to her the resurrection of Christ; she was deigned to be the first who was shown the risen Lord Himself and Who sent her to announce to His disciples the holy joy of the resurrection (Jn. 20:11-18; Mk. 16:9-10). Tradition says that St. Mary penetrated Rome to the court of Caesar and announced to the terribly-gloomy Emperor Tiberius "Christ is Risen!", and as a gift brought him a decorated egg (a symbol of death out of which life is born), and told him about the lawlessness of Pilate and the Judaic high priests, who condemned Jesus Christ.

Diocesan Assembly 2012

The Diocesan Assembly for 2012 has come and gone. While we were not afforded the opportunity to elect a new bishop, we nonetheless benefited from our coming together as a diocese.

Once a year, the diocese gathers: the bishop, his clergy, and lay representatives from each parish. They gather to worship together and partake of the Holy Mysteries. Here present is the fullness of the Church; all that the universal Church is contained in this gathering of bishop, clergy, and people. Nothing more can be added to its fullness.

While manifesting the fullness and oneness of the Church, the Diocesan Assembly also discharges some rather more utilitarian functions. An annual budget must be passed. Other issues discussed. The bishop addresses his clergy. In this case, proposed bylaws for the diocese were discussed and a method of electing a bishop was approved. The budget was explained, discussed and passed.

Archbishop Nikon discussed his eleventh-hour cancellation of the episcopal election. As it turns out, several members of the Holy Synod had indicated that they would vote against our preferred candidate, Fr. Gerasim, due to not knowing him well and to concerns recently raised. Realizing that, if we elected Fr. Gerasim and sent his name to the Holy Synod for canonical election, Fr. Gerasim would likely be rejected, Archbishop Nikon cancelled the election to allow Fr. Gerasim to appear before the Holy Synod

during their fall meeting in October to answer questions and concerns. Meanwhile, our search in the DOS for other candidates will go on. As soon as possible, likely at the February clergy conference now scheduled to be held in Atlanta, a Special Assembly will be called to elect a candidate for the Holy Synod to consider.

Theoretically, former Metropolitan Jonah could be our candidate for bishop. Archbishop Nikon indicated, however that there were some issues with him that would need to be resolved first, and he thought those issues would take some time to resolve, implying that it would be more time than we should be willing to wait.

By OCA Statute, when the office of Metropolitan becomes vacant, the Holy Synod is to call an All-American Council within ninety days, unless some great obstacle makes that impossible. The Synod currently is divided on whether to follow the statute and schedule within ninety days or to delay longer. Plans are being made for both scenarios.

Our diocese is stronger financially than ever before. Many documents relating to diocesan finances are available on the diocesan website. In short, our diocese is funded by the tithe. We tithe to our local parish, where we are nourished and receive the Holy Mysteries. Our parish tithes ten percent of its gross income to the diocese, which aims to spend it thus: no more than 50% on overhead, 25% to the OCA central administration (Syossett), and 33% to be re-invested in the parishes and missions of the diocese. That, obviously, adds up to more than 100%. A couple years ago, the diocese relieved the parishes of the responsibility of not only tithing, but also paying in addition the OCA Head Tax (Assessment) of \$105 a person. That has caused our diocese to run at a deficit. But as parishes and tithe income grows, we shall meet the target figures. Eventually, we aim to reach the point where only 10% of our diocesan income goes to the central administration, the rest remaining within the diocese to fund its ministry.

The cash flow deficit is offset by the deposit of extra funds held by parishes to the diocese, which pays them 4.5% interest on those deposits. Our parish was the first to offer its building fund money for this purpose, kicking off the deposit program in the diocese. This program allows parishes with excess funds which they do not need now to give them to the diocese, which uses them to help other parishes pay down debt, make mortgage payments, etc. The system is highly effective and has benefited parishes and missions including our own.

We were encouraged at the Assembly to keep working on our primary task: preaching Christ to the world while we work to abide in Him and bear fruit in our own lives. We have much to do, including building our own church and helping to found new

missions in our area. Can you imagine a day to come when we have two, three, or four parishes here in Denton, and still more in other towns in the county? By God's grace and our labors, this will come to be.

Next Sunday, your parish representatives Fr. Justin and Michael Rehmet will be available upstairs during coffee hour to give their reports on the Assembly and to answer your questions. Gina and Ian Rehmet were also present for portions of the Assembly and may have good insights and experiences to share as well.

'Ho on'--'He Who Is'

At the end of most services, the priest exclaims: "Wisdom...He Who Is is blessed, even Christ our God, always, now and ever, and unto ages of ages." This is Archbishop Dmitri's translation of the Greek *Ho On eulogetos Kbristos ho Theos*. The 'standard' OCA translation has "Christ our God the existing One is blessed..." Apart from the ungainliness and gracelessness of the translation, speaking of God as 'the existing one', the 'standard' OCA translation is theologically inferior to the Archbishop's, for it obscures a most important connection.

At the top of all icons of Christ, we find the Greek words in the halo: "*Ho On*." These words help identify the figure in the icon as Christ. "*Ho*" is the definite article *the*, while '*on*' is the present masculine participle of the verb 'to be', which may be translated as 'the one being', 'the one who is' or 'He who is.' This identification of Christ as 'He Who Is' is identical to the name God gave for himself to Moses at the Burning Bush, *ego eimi, ho on*: 'I am He Who Is'; 'I am *Ho On*.'

Thus the Septuagint gives the name of God as God revealed it to Moses. That name is found on every icon of Christ. The name of God is found also in the services of the Church, at the end, as indicated above. There the priest proclaims, "Wisdom!" and the people respond, "Father, bless!" Wisdom is one of the ancient titles for Christ, the Word and Wisdom of God, as we find in the next words of the priest: 'He Who Is is blessed, even Christ our God, always, now and ever, and unto ages of ages.' Thus Christ our Savior is identified as the same God and the same person of the Godhead who revealed Himself to Moses in the burning bush, to Israel on Sinai.

Besides the great theological accuracy, how much more elegant and beautiful it is to call Him "He who Is" than it is to name Him "the existing One!"

Love Your Wife As Christ Loves the Church

St. Timothy of Esphigmenou (feast October 29), gives us a nearly contemporary example of a husband loving his wife like Christ loves the Church, one we do well to contemplate and emulate.

From Thrace in Greece, the peasant Timothy was married and had two daughters. At this time, in the early 1800s, shortly before the Greek Revolution, Thrace was ruled by Muslim Turks. A Muslim

neighbor conceived a lust for Timothy's wife, and, unable to contain his passion, he took her away by force. Somehow he persuaded her to become a Muslim and to be added to his harem.

Timothy, whose given name was Triantaphylos, was deeply grieved by his wife's double tragedy of losing both her marriage and her faith. As Christians under the Turkish yoke had no legal rights in such cases against Muslims, he had no hope of getting her back by legal means. But his love for her did not die, and he turned to God in fervent prayer for his wife's return to Christ. Continuing his prayers, he eventually began sending secret messages to her urging her to abandon Islam and come back to Christ.

In time, his prayers were answered. By God's grace, she came to her senses and her heart was kindled with desire to return to her former faith and way of life and husband, while her new faith and husband seemed to be repugnant to her. She wept bitterly in repentance over her sins. She knew her captor would not easily let her go, so she suggested to Timothy that he pretend to accept Islam, thereby gaining legal rights and a basis for getting her back. His wife's repentance delighted Timothy. Thinking of St. Paul's willingness to be "accursed from Christ" for the sake of his Jewish brethren (Romans 9:3), he accepted his wife's suggestion.

Timothy went to the Turkish magistrates, declared his intention to be Muslim, was accepted, and received circumcision according to the Muslim practice. He was then given his wife back. For a time they lived together secretly practicing their Christian faith, but had to flee to another region when the Muslims became suspicious. Timothy's wife entered a women's monastery while he went to the Great Lavra on Mt. Athos. There he took up the monastic life and cultivated repentance for his unavoidable sin committed out of love for his wife and the desire for her salvation.

After seven years, the monk Timothy heard of an Athonite monk named Agathangelos from the monastery of Esphigmenou who, like Timothy, had once denied his faith but had now confessed it and his renunciation of Islam publicly and had been martyred. Timothy began to long to make his confession of Christ in the same way. He moved to Esphigmenou Monastery to receive guidance from the elder who had prepared Agathangelos. After a period of preparation, the abbot blessed Timothy to declare his Christian faith and renunciation of Islam before the Turkish authorities in Adrianopol. He set off joyously to receive martyrdom from the Turks on 29 October 1820. May God grant us all such love and care for one another as St. Timothy demonstrated for his wife. Holy Martyr Timothy of Esphigmenou, pray unto God for us!

Upcoming Events 2012

1-14 August: Dormition Fast

3 September: Labor Day Picnic

30 September: St. Maximus Annual Meeting

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!