

The Confessor's Tongue for September 16, A. D. 2012

15th Sunday after Pentecost: Afterfeast of Cross, Great Martyr Euphemia

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 16: Holy Great Martyr Euphemia

Born in Chalcedon, her father was the senator Philophronus and her mother's name was Theodorisia, both devout Christians. Euphemia was a girl beautiful in both body and soul. When the Proconsul, Priscus, celebrated a festival of sacrifice to Ares in Chalcedon, forty-nine Christians absented themselves from the festivities and hid themselves. But they were discovered and brought before Priscus, holy Euphemia being among them. When the furious Priscus asked them why they had not carried out the imperial command, they replied: 'Both the Emperor's commands and yours must be obeyed if they are not contrary to the God of heaven. If they are, they must not only not be obeyed; they must be resisted.' Then Priscus put them to various tortures for nineteen days, from day to day. On the twelfth day, he held Euphemia apart from the others and began to flatter her beauty, hoping to bring her thus to idolatry. When all his flattery proved fruitless, he ordered that she be tortured. First, she was put on a wheel, but an angel of God appeared and broke it. Then he had her thrown into a fiery furnace, but she was preserved by God's power. Seeing this, two soldiers, Victor and Sosthenes, came to faith in Christ, for which they were thrown to the wild beasts and thus finished their earthly course with glory. After that, Euphemia was thrown into a pit filled with water and all kinds of poisonous reptiles, but she made the sign of the Cross over the water as she went into the pit, and remained unharmed. She was finally thrown to the wild beasts and, with a prayer of thanksgiving, gave her soul into God's hands. Her parents buried her body. She suffered in the year 303, and entered into eternal joy. (St Euphemia is also commemorated on July 11th). *From The Prologue of Ochrid*

Orthodox Saturday Evenings

For the committed Orthodox Christian, Saturday evening is a time of preparation for partaking of the Eucharist on Sunday morning, and the central part of the preparation is attendance at the All-Night Vigil.

Committing oneself to regular Vigil attendance can be a challenge: Americans think of Sunday morning as time for church, and Saturday evening as time to party; Saturday is a day to rest after the work week, or a day to do work around the house; the Vigil is two hours, longer than we think we can spend; we have small children whom we think cannot make it through the service, and so on. The challenges are many.

Yet the requirement remains that we attend the Saturday evening service, at least in part, to prepare reverently for the Eucharist. What are we to do?

Many overcome the challenge by ignoring Saturday evening altogether. This is the easy solution, Like planting vegetables in soil deficient in nutrients, the plant grows but rarely bears fruit. So too, the willful neglect of Saturday evening Vigil will stunt spiritual growth and prevent us from receiving all that God would impart to us at the Liturgy. So what are we to do? Here are some suggestions:

1. Set aside Saturday evenings on your calendar and simply make the commitment to come to Vigil.
2. If the full Vigil is too much for you now, come for 45 minutes or an hour of it each week. Come for Vespers one week (5-5:45) and Matins another week (5:45-7:10). Come late, leave early, but come!
3. Come to Vigil the night you make your monthly confession. Then build to alternating weeks.
4. If you have small children, alternate weeks with your spouse, or bring everyone for a part of the service.
5. Keep Vigil at home, turning off media, praying for an extended period, reading the Scriptures, etc. One simple way would be to keep Vigil on the prayer rope with the Jesus Prayer: 600 knots for Vespers, 1500 knots for Matins.
6. There are other options, but let not omitting the Vigil entirely from our lives be one of them.

Keeping House in the Lord's House

Every so often, we need to be reminded as to how we should conduct ourselves in church. The overriding concern in all of these 'rules' is to avoid any sort of behavior that distracts others from worship or prayer, or that shows disrespect for the nature of the Liturgy itself, in which we gather at Christ's command to offer ourselves to Him as living sacrifices and receive in exchange His life in the Mysteries. With the blessing of more people in the same space in a growing parish, each of us has an increased responsibility to do all he can to facilitate the maintenance of an atmosphere conducive to worship for all. I ask all of us to read this carefully and with humility, discerning what each of us can do better and asking God to help.. If you have any questions, please address them to your priest.

The temple of God is a house of prayer. Everything in it must therefore be imbued with reverence, suffused with the spirit of heartfelt prayer. Whatever interferes with prayer must be kept away from the church.

There are, of course, countless things that interfere with and distract us from prayer, and there is no need to enumerate them, for our conscience should prompt us to know how to behave properly in church. Nevertheless, a reminder of some principal rules of church etiquette is sometimes needed, for we are not immune to the deteriorating standards of behavior in our society, and what was not so long ago

a matter of course and habit is now a matter for instruction.

One must not talk in church. Such is the precept enjoined by the saints. All extraneous conversation, even when services are not in progress, is an offense to the sanctity of the Temple, which is consecrated, or set aside, for the exclusive purpose of prayer and worship. [In our situation, we are forced to use the church for other purposes, and our chapel is not formally consecrated. Nonetheless, we do well to treat as though it were consecrated as much as we can under our circumstances.] For this reason, if it is necessary to talk during the service, and this cannot be postponed, it is better to leave the church. If one must give an instruction or ask a question, this should be done in a whisper and as briefly as possible.

Greeting one another, shaking hands, exchanging hellos—this also has no place in church during the service. It should be done after the service—or before. One should avoid making eye contact with others on entering; at most a silent inclination of the head is sufficient acknowledgment of others.

One should make every effort to arrive on time—in time to be in place to hear “Blessed is the Kingdom.” To come after that moment is to come late. We show great disrespect for our brethren and for Christ when we consistently permit ourselves to come late.

Once one has arrived and found one's place, one should not leave the Liturgy until the dismissal—unless one is a catechumen and has been dismissed or one has a ‘personal emergency’ or must take a child out for correction or quieting. To go in and out for other reasons is to show great disrespect to Christ and others and frequently distracts others from worship.

If one must leave the Liturgy for good reason, one should refrain from entering into conversation in the hall, on the front porch, etc. In this way one may maintain a prayerful spirit despite having to leave the Liturgy. Those who desire to listen to the service on the monitor should not be distracted by the conversations of others in the narthex or hall. Likewise, dismissed catechumens may remain prayerful as they read and prepare themselves for illumination.

One must likewise avoid disturbing those praying by walking from place to place, by coughing loudly, by jangling keys or coins in one's pocket, by failing to turn off cell phones, by bringing noisy children's toys into church, etc. All of this is not difficult to avoid if one is willing to make the effort.

Jesus said, “Let the little children come unto Me” and we do. Children of all ages are welcome to be present at the divine services. This demands something of the rest of us. We must all expect and tolerate a modest amount of noise to be generated by small children. We must do our part to help children behave properly by not meeting their gaze when they seek our attention or otherwise engaging them during services, let them thus learn that it is acceptable in

church to play and not to pay attention. Parents must make a serious effort to train their children to obedience and to conduct themselves quietly and reverently in church. They must be ready to take children out to correct them when they misbehave and to calm them when they lose control of themselves. The welcome of children in church never means that they have the right to misbehave and distract others, or that parents have the right to inflict the misbehavior of their children on others.

Parents are responsible for their children, who should stand with their parents throughout the service. On no circumstance should children be permitted to wander where they will, or go stand with other children, which usually leads to them distracting both themselves and others.

Perhaps the greatest challenge is for parents to know when a child needs to be removed. Some are quick to remove a child when any significant noise is made, others having a higher tolerance for their child's noise than others do may wait too long. When a child makes and sustains a significant volume of noise for more than five seconds, or if he makes repeated loud noises and does not obey the parent's effort to quiet him, he should be removed quickly so that he does not become the object of attention for others in place of Christ. Parents do well to instruct their children at home about proper behavior in church, even to the point of practicing it before the family altar.

A word about candles is necessary. Candles are a personal offering to God for the lighting of the temple and to support the prayer of the one offering them. They should not be moved or played with by anyone, but allowed to burn down, being blown out by responsible adults only when they have burned to within an inch of the holder. The table on the left side of the church, the pannikhida table, is the place to offer candles for the departed. It is not a children's candle table, and children should not be allowed to play with candles there or elsewhere.

One must also refrain from dressing immodestly or in a way that unnecessarily draws attention to oneself. [Detailed guideline are posted on the church doors.] This includes wearing perfume and some applications of makeup. After all, it is not in the name of God that these things are worn; it is not for the sake of prayer, but for the sake of what is even sinful to think about in the house of God.

We can readily distract ourselves by carelessly looking around at others. It is best to face forward, to avoid looking at others with curiosity about what they are wearing or doing. We focus on the movements of the Liturgy and the icons, not on others. In some cases we may need to shut our eyes or stand in front to avoid visual distractions. Intentionally offering our attention to God in this way will preserve us from most distractions.

Orthodox people have always cared for the beauty and adornment of their churches. In God's

eyes, however, the most precious adornment of a church is a reverent stillness and ardent prayer. This should be our chief concern, for to secure God's grace, one must enter the temple with faith, reverence, and the fear of God.

Prayers After Communion

The prayers before and after Holy Communion teach us much about the Mystery, how we should approach it, and what we should expect from it. We'll offer commentary on some of the prayers to help us be more aware of what we are doing when we partake.

"I thank Thee, O Lord my God, that Thou hast not rejected me a sinner, but that Thou hast vouchsafed me to become a communicant of Thy Holy Things. I thank Thee that Thou hast vouchsafed me, who am unworthy, to partake of Thine immaculate and heavenly Gifts. But, Master, Lover of man, who for us didst die and didst rise again, and grantest us these Thy dread and life-creating Mysteries, for the benefit and sanctification of our souls and bodies, grant that they may become for me unto healing of soul and body, unto the averting of every adversary, unto the enlightenment of the eyes of my heart, unto the peace of my spiritual powers, unto faith unashamed, unto love unfeigned, unto the fulfilling of wisdom, unto the observance of Thy commandments, unto the increase of Thy divine grace, and unto the attainment of Thy kingdom, that, kept by them in Thy holiness, I may every remember Thy grace and never live unto myself, but unto Thee, our Master and Benefactor. And thus, when this life shall have passed away in the hope of life eternal, I may attain unto everlasting rest, where the voice of them that keep festival is unceasing, and the bliss of them that behold the unutterable beauty of Thy face. For Thou art the true desire and in inexpressible gladness of them that love Thee, O Christ our God, and all creation hymneth Thee unto the ages. Amen." *First Prayer of Thanksgiving after Communion*

What we believe in the Church about the Eucharist is expressed quite thoroughly in the prayers appointed to be read by all before and after Communion. The first prayer after Holy Communion, given above, expresses appropriate gratitude for our partaking of the Holy Things of which we are not fully worthy. It is God who invites us to come, God who deigns to impart the Body and Blood of His Son to us. The Mystery is both "dread" and "life-creating", "dread" because It is holy and properly belongs only to the holy and will be a consuming fire to those who presume to partake unworthily, and "life-creating" because it imparts to mortals the antidote to death and mortality—the medicine of immortality.

Partaking, we expect the following blessings enumerated in the prayer: Benefit to soul and body, sanctification (being made holy) of soul and body.

We ask that God would make the Mystery effectual in us for healing whatever is amiss in our souls and bodies, for turning away from us our adversaries who war against us, for enlightening the eyes of our heart that we may see God and His Truth and be aware of His presence, for peace and internal integration, for faith that produces fruit in us so that we shall not be ashamed before God on the Day of Judgment of having believed without effect or fruit.

Realizing that to love Christ is to keep His commandments, we ask for power from the Eucharist to observe His commandments, we ask that divine grace may increase in us rather than decrease, and that we may attain the kingdom and not be shut out. We recognize our need for grace to abide in holiness. It is by grace we stand! We ask that we may remember God's grace, rather than forgetting, for forgetting God's grace which gives us life and power leads us to forget who we are in Christ, to take credit for our virtues rather than giving God the glory, to not give thanks for all things, and to live contrary to our true identity as adopted children of God. We expect by the Mystery to always remember God's grace and to live for Him rather than merely for ourselves and to maintain a confident expectation (hope) of eternal life in God's Kingdom.

From the Life of St. Anthony the Great

The life of St. Anthony the Great is one of the most influential biographies every written. It has inspired multitudes of Christians over the centuries since St. Athanasius of Alexandria wrote it. Here is some of Athnony's advice to his disciples.

16. One day when he had gone forth because all the monks had assembled to him and asked to hear words from him, he spoke to them in the Egyptian tongue as follows: "The Scriptures are enough for instruction, but it is a good thing to encourage one another in the faith, and to stir up with words. Wherefore you, as children, carry that which you know to your father; and I as the elder share my knowledge and what experience has taught me with you. Let this especially be the common aim of all, neither to give way having once begun, nor to faint in trouble, nor to say: We have lived in the discipline a long time: but rather as though making a beginning daily let us increase our earnestness. For the whole life of man is very short, measured by the ages to come, wherefore all our time is nothing compared with eternal life. And in the world everything is sold at its price, and a man exchanges one equivalent for another; but the promise of eternal life is bought for a trifle. For it is written, "The days of our life in them are threescore years and ten, but if they are in strength, fourscore years, and what is more than these is labor and sorrow." Whenever, therefore, we live full fourscore years, or even a hundred in the discipline, not for a hundred years only shall we reign, but instead of a hundred we shall reign for ever and ever. And though we fought on earth, we shall not receive our inheritance on earth, but we have the

promises in heaven; and having put off the body which is corrupt, we shall receive it incorrupt.

17. 'Wherefore, children, let us not faint nor deem that the time is long, or that we are doing something great, "for the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed to us-ward." Nor let us think, as we look at the world, that we have renounced anything of much consequence, for the whole earth is very small compared with all the heaven. Wherefore if it even chanced that we were lords of all the earth and gave it all up, it would be nought worthy of comparison with the kingdom of heaven. For as if a man should despise a copper drachma to gain a hundred drachmas of gold; so if a man were lord of all the earth and were to renounce it, that which he gives up is little, and he receives a hundredfold. But if not even the whole earth is equal in value to the heavens, then he who has given up a few acres leaves as it were nothing; and even if he have given up a house or much gold he ought not to boast nor be low-spirited. Further, we should consider that even if we do not relinquish them for virtue's sake, still afterwards when we die we shall leave them behind—very often, as the Preacher saith, to those to whom we do not wish. Why then should we not give them up for virtue's sake, that we may inherit even a kingdom? Therefore let the desire of possession take hold of no one, for what gain is it to acquire these things which we cannot take with us? Why not rather get those things which we can take away with us—to wit, prudence, justice, temperance, courage, understanding, love, kindness to the poor, faith in Christ, freedom from wrath, hospitality? If we possess these, we shall find them of themselves preparing for us a welcome there in the land of the meek-hearted....

19. 'Wherefore, children, let us hold fast our discipline, and let us not be careless. For in it the Lord is our fellow-worker, as it is written, "to all that choose the good, God worketh with them for good." But to avoid being heedless, it is good to consider the word of the Apostle, "I die daily." For if we too live as though dying daily, we shall not sin. And the meaning of that saying is, that as we rise day by day we should think that we shall not abide till evening; and again, when about to lie down to sleep, we should think that we shall not rise up. For our life is naturally uncertain, and Providence allots it to us daily. But thus ordering our daily life, we shall neither fall into sin, nor have a lust for anything, nor cherish wrath against any, nor shall we heap up treasure upon earth. But, as though under the daily expectation of death, we shall be without wealth, and shall forgive all things to all men, nor shall we retain at all the desire of women or of any other foul pleasure. But we shall turn from it as past and gone, ever striving and looking forward to the day of Judgment. For the greater dread and danger of torment ever destroys the ease of pleasure, and sets up the soul if it is like to fall.

20. 'Wherefore having already begun and set out in the way of virtue, let us strive the more that we may attain those things that are before. And let no one turn to the things behind, like Lot's wife, all the more so that the Lord hath said, "No man, having put his hand to the plough, and turning back, is fit for the kingdom of heavens." And this turning back is nought else but to feel regret, and to be once more worldly-minded. But fear not to hear of virtue, nor be astonished at the name. For it is not far from us, nor is it without ourselves, but it is within us, and is easy if only we are willing. That they may get knowledge, the Greeks live abroad and cross the sea, but we have no need to depart from home for the sake of the kingdom of heaven, nor to cross the sea for the sake of virtue. For the Lord aforesaid hath said, "The kingdom of heaven is within you." Wherefore virtue hath need at our hands of willingness alone, since it is in us and is formed from us. For when the soul hath its spiritual faculty in a natural state virtue is formed. And it is in a natural state when it remains as it came into existence. And when it came into existence it was fair and exceeding honest. For this cause Joshua, the son of Nun, in his exhortation said to the people, "Make straight your heart unto the Lord God of Israel," and John, "Make your paths straight ." For rectitude of soul consists in its having its spiritual part in its natural state as created. But on the other hand, when it swerves and turns away from its natural state, that is called vice of the soul. Thus the matter is not difficult. If we abide as we have been made, we are in a state of virtue, but if we think of ignoble things we shall be accounted evil. If, therefore, this thing had to be acquired from without, it would be difficult in reality; but if it is in us, let us keep ourselves from foul thoughts. And as we have received the soul as a deposit, let us preserve it for the Lord, that He may recognise His work as being the same as He made it.

21. 'And let us strive that wrath rule us not nor lust overcome us, for it is written, "The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God. And lust, when it hath conceived, beareth sin, and the sin when it is full grown bringeth forth death." Thus living, let us keep guard carefully, and as it is written, "keep our hearts with all watchfulness." For we have terrible and crafty foes—the evil spirits—and against them we wrestle.... But at this time it is pressing and necessary for us only to know their wiles against ourselves.

Upcoming Events 2012

30 September: St. Maximus Annual Meeting
13 November: 17th All-American Council, Parma, OH
15 November: Nativity Fast begins.
21 January 2013: Feast of St. Maximus and the First Annual St. Maximus Memorial Lecture

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!