

The Confessor's Tongue for February 24, A. D. 2013

38th Week After Pentcost; Publican & Pharisee; 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.

Preparation for Great Lent

The Triodion, the liturgical book that contains the services pertaining to the fast, is opened for the first time for the Sunday of the Publican and Pharisee, which we observe today. This Sunday, along with the three that follow, are part of a period of preparation for the Great Fast. The next is the Sunday of the Prodigal Son, then the Sunday of the Last Judgment, also known as Meatfare, as it is the last day that meat is permitted to be eaten until Pascha. Finally, there is Forgiveness Sunday, also known as Cheesefare Sunday.

The Church does not ask us to change immediately from our normal routine to the intense ascetical effort of the fast; rather, She helps us make the transition gradually. The week after the Publican and Pharisee is a fast-free week. The week after the Prodigal Son has the usual Wednesday and Friday fasts, and the week after Meatfare (Last Judgment) is observed with a special fast from meat only. Moreover, the services for Wednesday and Friday of that week are Lenten: no Divine Liturgy is permitted, the lenten tones are used, and lenten forms observed—a warm-up for what is to come.

Publican & Pharisee

Jesus tells a parable of two different men who went to the temple to pray with two different outcomes. One was a virtuous Pharisee, the sect of Jew given to the strictest observance of the Law. The other was a sinful Publican, a Jew not known for observance of the Law and despised by his fellows for serving the occupying Romans by collecting taxes. Both went to the right place for the right reason. But the quality of their prayer was strikingly different.

The Pharisee contentedly recounted his virtues and thanked God that he was not like other sinful men including the Publican standing nearby. The Publican, unable to lift his eyes to heaven for shame, could pray only "God, be merciful to me a sinner." Jesus relates that it was the Publican who went home justified in God's eyes, not the Pharisee.

The parable teaches important lessons to help us in the fast, and the hymnology appointed for the day develops these. We learn that we can be ever so virtuous, but pride will undo it all and render it useless to us before God. We learn that we must approach God with the humility of the Publican, for "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble." Yet the contrast between the two is not black and white. Both men had a measure of virtue, and both had failings. The first troparion from Ode 5 of the Matins canon exhorts us:

Let us make haste to follow the Pharisee in his virtues and to emulate the Publican in his humility, and let us hate what is wrong in each of them: foolish pride and the defilement of transgressions.

Each of us should identify himself with each of these men, for each is to be found in us.

As the Triodion is now open, it is a good time to being our own preparations for the Fast. How shall we strengthen our prayer, increase our almsgiving, and observe the fast both physically and spiritually? Besides these things, we should have a plan for spiritual reading during the fast for the edification and nourishment of our souls.

O Lord, Thou hast condemned the Pharisee who justified himself by boasting of his works, and Thou hast justified the Publican who humbled himself and with cries of sorrow begged for mercy. For Thou dost reject proud-minded thoughts, but Thou dost not despise a contrite heart. Therefore in abasement we fall down before Thee who hast suffered for our sake: grant us forgiveness and great mercy. *Praises of Matins of Publican & Pharisee*

Open to Me the Doors of Repentance

From the Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee through the fifth Sunday of the Great Fast at the Saturday night Vigil, after the Matins Gospel reading, we sing this hymn of repentance, "Open to me, the doors of repentance." Accompanying us during the Fast, this hymn expresses what should be the cry of our souls to God during Great Lent. To hear this hymn sung, be at the Saturday evening Vigil by 6:00 p.m.

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. Open to me the doors of repentance of Life-Giver, for my spirit riseth early to pray towards Thy holy temple, bearing the temple of my body all defiled; but, in Thy compassion, purify me by the lovingkindness of Thy mercy.

Now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen. Lead me on the paths of salvation, O Mother of God, for I have profaned my soul with shameful sins and have wasted my life in laziness; but, by thine intercessions, deliver me from all impurity.

Have mercy on me, O God, according to Thy great mercy, and according to the multitude of Thy compassions blot out my transgressions. When I think of the many evil things I have done, wretch that I am, I tremble at the fearful day of judgment. But, trusting in Thy loving-kindness, like David I cry to Thee: Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me, O God, according to Thy great mercy.

By the Waters of Babylon Psalm 136 (137)

At Matins for the Sunday of the Prodigal Son, and then also for the Sundays of Meatfare and Cheesefare, after singing the Polyeleon of the Psalms:

"Praise the name of the Lord, pray Him all ye servants of the Lord" and "O confess unto the Lord for He is good", we sing also Psalm 136: "By the waters of Babylon", with the beautiful alleluia, i.e. in the known chant with special tenderness, with sweet singing. This psalm arouses in the sinners to understand their unfortunate condition in their captivity in sin and by the devil, similarly to the Jews in captivity in Babylon, who understood their bitter situation and repented, and represents the sorrowful soul nostalgic for the heavenly fatherland. The last verse of this psalm: "Blessed shall he be who shall seize and dash thine infants against the rock", in translation means: the one is blessed who has the courage and power to break on the rock of faith sin in its infancy—those things which give birth to evil thoughts, the depraved stirrings of the heart, and the shameful impulses of the will—before they take possession of one's soul. *Bulgakov Handbook*

How To Live A Holy Life

From the book the men are reading on Wednesday night once a month, we are offered the following guidance for what to do in the morning.

1. Upon awakening, immediately direct your thoughts towards God.
2. Without delay, cross yourself and say "In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."
3. Get out of bed quickly.
4. Wash and dress properly.
5. Go to the icons and pray your morning rule.
6. Use your own words in prayer occasionally to keep your mind and heart from wandering from the prayers.
7. Think over the coming day and what temptations and occasions for sin you are likely to encounter, and arm yourself against them.
8. Pray for spiritual awareness during the day and zeal and grace to avoid sin.
9. Ask God to strengthen your will.
10. Consider how you will conduct yourself before God and the people you are likely to encounter during the day.

"One should pray like this especially in the morning, and one should make such a resolution and take such prudent measures in the morning. No other time is so appropriate for prayer and for all good undertakings as the morning, because at no other time is a person so capable of prayer, or of undertaking business, or of reflection as in the morning. In the morning, his thoughts are much less constricted, his heart is purer, and he can contain himself much more easily than at any other time. In the morning, the necessities of life are still sleeping, and the very nature surrounding us disposes us to a serious and reflective state. With the passing of morning, the passions awaken, everyday needs appear and stir up cares, a person begins to work and toils

like a slave who must always eat bread in the sweat of his face. My friend, spend the morning in prayer and in the holy guidance of your life. Put a high value on the morning every day. Be wise, for the Spirit of God portrays the behavior of a wise man thus: He will give his heart to resort early to the Lord that made him, and will pray before the most High (Ecclesiasticus 39:5)." *How To Live a Holy Life, Metropolitan Gregory of St. Petersburg, St. Job Printshop, Jordanville.*

The Optina Elders on Confession

Many people seek, as if essential, a spiritual father who leads an exalted life, and they become despondent when they do not find such a one, and therefore they rarely, almost reluctantly, come to confession. This is a great mistake. You need to believe in the very Mystery of Confession, in its power, not in the person who performs the Mystery. It is essential only that the spiritual father be Orthodox and authorized by the Church. You need not argue that the personal qualities of the spiritual father are important, but you should believe and know that the Lord, active in every Mystery through His Grace, acts according to His omnipotence, regardless of these qualities. *Elder Nikon*

Whoever confesses his sins with simplicity of heart, with feelings of compunction and humility and the desire to correct himself, will receive forgiveness of sins and peace of conscience through the power of the grace of God acting in the Mystery. *Elder Nikon*

To fear shame during confession is also from pride; they who reproach themselves before God in the presence of a witness receive peace and forgiveness. *Elder Macarius*

Sinful habits and passions do not give way to healing without confession. Without confession, every healing will be incomplete and insufficient, but with confession, the sins will be uprooted in due order. It is always necessary to pay special attention to confession, always to prepare for it carefully, and sincerely to confess all of your sins. *Elder Nikon*

St. Innocent, Enlightener of the Aleuts

"...strive to possess and stir up within yourself the desire to do what the Holy Scriptures teach. If you presently lack such desires, fall down in fervent prayer before our Savior Jesus Christ and ask Him to grant you this. And once grace calls you to the way of salvation, never resist it."

Upcoming Events 2012-2013

- 9 March: Love and Logic Class, 10 a.m. – 2 p.m.
- 17 March: Forgiveness Vespers, 6:00 p.m. We ask that all who consider St. Maximus their church home plan to attend this service. Great Lent begins at Midnight.
- 18—23 March: Clean Week & Great Canon
- 5 May: Great and Holy Pascha

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!