

The Confessor's Tongue for May 19, A. D. 2013

Sunday of the Myrrhbearers: Christ is Risen!

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.

Sunday of the Myrrhbearers

Today we celebrate the memory of the Myrrhbearers' love and devotion for Christ manifested in their attempt to care properly for His body. At St. Maximus, we have a ministry team named in honor of them, a team that follows their example in caring for the bodies of the departed.

The Myrrhbearers will have a table set up today to make you better acquainted with their ministry. Some of you may wish to join. All of you should take time to examine the documents they have which we all would do well to consider and fill out. Death comes suddenly to many, finding them and their families unprepared. The documents offered by the Myrrhbearers provide a way for you to be prepared for your own death and funeral (which will come one day!) so that your family is not burdened with making many difficult decisions in the emotional time immediately after your death. Please come by their table, see what they have for you, ask questions. You'll be glad you did!

Prayer, Time, and More Prayer, Part 1

Fr. Theodore Heckman

Recently a gentleman stopped at the rectory one afternoon, the day before a major feast day, and asked, "Is there service tomorrow?" The priest said, "Of course, at 9:00 a.m., and there is Vigil this evening at 7:00 as well." the man responded, "The service tomorrow—is it one hour?" The priest: "It will be as long as it takes!" The man did not appear the next day.

America! America! So busy are you with business, so busy acquiring earthly treasures and erecting buildings to put them in, you have only one hour occasionally to spare for God. And what time is not devoted to business is given over with almost equal passion to entertainment.

In traditional Orthodox cultures in the past, and in places even today, it was not and is not so. Sunday is the Day of the Lord (in Greek), the Day of Resurrection (in Russian)—not one hour but the whole twenty-four. And the anticipation begins, as with the Jews, at sundown the evening before. And the Twelve Great Feasts are honored as Sundays. And other feast days: St. John the Baptist, SS Peter and Paul, St. Nicholas, the Protection of the Most Holy Virgin, patron saints, newly-glorified saints, and so on, all are great feasts calling for our devotion and time.

It surely does spiritual damage to our sacred worship to serve and sing in an overly-hurried manner, as it does damage also to make abridgments and reductions for the sake of "saving time." Think of that phrase, "saving time"! Time is given to us as a gift from God. "Saving time" then refers to what, and

for what purpose? For earthly "business" or for the cultivation of the knowledge and love of God? Where, when, and for how long do each of these take place? The Preacher, Ecclesiastes, reminds us that there is a time for every thought, every action, every emotion (Ecclesiastes 3:1-8). Then he says, "What profit does one who works get from his labor? I have seen the business that God has given men to keep them busy" (v. 9-10)... "Whatever God does lasts forever; to add to it or subtract from it is impossible. And He does it all in such a way that men must feel awe in His presence" (v. 14).

We humans are in need of times to "feel awe in His presence." God has "planted eternity into man's mind" (v.11). The expression and fulfillment of this innate eternity and feeling of awe at His presence may be done, it is widely believed, by watching the stars some night, or by communing with nature at a lake or in the woods. But these "religious" feelings are at best vague and undefined, they may be only subjective feelings of self-satisfaction, temporary elevations of the human spirit. At worst, they may be euphoric spiritual delusions. But in the center of the human being is the heart, the inner shrine, where God Himself wishes to dwell, the place of the mystical union of the divine and human. How and under what circumstances can one fulfill the deepest desires here?

The unanimous teaching of the Fathers of our Church is that the door to the heart is opened by self-denial and sacrifice, and the school of the art of self-denial and sacrifice is prayer—both corporate and personal. We believe, we strive to be good, we desire harmony, we hope for God's favor, but at the same time we reduce our prayers to a minimum and our worship in the Church to one hour. Do we not see the contradiction? The result is that our faith is weak, our goodness defective, our harmony discordant, and our hope in God uncertain. Beyond that, the door of our heart remains unopened.

St. Paul advises the faithful in Thessalonica to "pray earnestly night and day," and to "pray without ceasing" (I Thess 3:10; 5:17). Clement of Alexandria describes the serious Christian as one whose "whole life is prayer and converse with God." All teachers in the Church through the ages echo the same. The conclusions from this as applied to public worship would include the conviction that our service must be conducted in their integral fullness, and that the intervening time between them must be filled with prayers and praise, and a prayerful approach to all our earthly requirements and duties. The transfiguration of the world, which most people cannot see at all, but which all humans deeply desire, beings in the tiny yet infinite center of each human heart. *To be continued*

Thoughts on Lying Too Along Abed

Marcus Aurelius, Emperor and Philosopher

Although not a Christian, the Emperor's Stoicism is close to Christian teaching in many ways. In his Meditations, Aurelius reflects on how human life should be lived in accordance with man's nature as a rational, social animal. Living for personal pleasure, which is what the masses do, is not to live in accordance with nature wherein man's good is found, which is the goal of every lover of wisdom. Marcus Aurelius believed in a deterministic universe where it was man's part to live uncomplainingly the life allotted to him by the universe for his short span of life between birth and death. He did not believe in the life to come. If we make allowances for the Emperor's views on the ultimate nature of the reality where they differ from with the Christian perspective, we may read the Emperor's musings and derive much profit from them.

In the morning when thou risest unwillingly, let this thought be present: "I am rising to the work of a human being." Why then am I dissatisfied if I am going to do the things for which I exist and for which I was brought into the world? Or have I been made for this, to lie in the bedclothes and keep myself warm?

"But this is more pleasant."

Dost thou exist then to take thy pleasure, and not at all for action or exertion? Dost thou not see the little plants, the little birds, the ants, the spiders, the bees working together to put in order their several parts of the universe? And art thou unwilling to do the work of a human being, and dost thou not make haste to do that which is according to thy nature?

"But it is necessary to take rest also."

It is necessary: however nature has fixed bounds to this too: she has fixed bounds both to eating and drinking, and yet thou goest beyond these bounds, beyond what is sufficient; yet in thy acts it is not so, but thou stoppest short of what thou canst do. So thou lovest not thyself, for if thou didst, thou wouldst love thy nature and her will. But those who love their several arts exhaust themselves in working at them unwashed and without food; but thou valuest thy own nature less than the turner values the turning art, or the dancer the dancing art, or the lover of money values his money, or the vainglorious man his little glory. And such men, when they have a violent affection to a thing, choose neither to eat nor to sleep rather than to perfect the things which they care for. But are the acts which concern society more vile in thine eyes and less worthy of thy labor?

From Elder Porphyrios of Greece (+1991)

About Eating Too Much

I was present once when a lady called him and was asking the Elder to pray for her so that she would not eat too much. She had become fat. I was surprised by his answer.

"You have not loved Christ enough. Give your heart to Christ. Say with fervent love, 'Lord Jesus

Christ,' and you will forget the food, and the gluttony will leave you."

I recorded this advice in my heart, and, when the opportunity was given, I used it. I was once overcome with hunger before the scheduled meal. I turned my thoughts to the prayer "Lord Jesus Christ, through the prayers of the Elder, have mercy on me." Without realizing it, my hunger went away until the scheduled time for the meal.

About Vigils

You should love vigils. Vigils are very important {He has in mind literal all-night vigils, but even our two-hour vigils are of benefit.}. Do you understand this? They are a very important thing. Heaven opens up. We speak with God.

During our vigils up there [on Mt. Athos], up until about midnight I would get a little drowsy. My eyes would get very heavy. Afterwards, my mind would open up, and I lived in prayer until the morning. When it finished, I was so motivated, that, if there was a way for it to begin again from the beginning, I would have welcomed it. In the skete, we read the canon clearly and with meaning. When the vigils took place in the Kyriakon [main church of a monastery], we chanted it.

We will serve an all-night vigil for the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul this year and for St. Basil at the New Year.

Elder, I Get Angry

One day, I told the Elder, "Elder, I get angry. Lately, I get angry very easily."

"Anger is a good thing," he said. I thought he was joking, and I interrupted him.

"A good thing?"

"Certainly. God put anger inside us. It is the nerve center of the soul. It is strength. He gives anger to us so that we can fend off our passions and the devil. This is the correct use of anger. We take this strength from the devil and give it to Christ. You give yourself to Christ with strength, with nervous energy."

We now have several books about Elder Porphyrios in our Library.

From St. Justin Popovich

Through sin, man becomes mortal and temporal; with the Resurrection of the God-Man, he becomes immortal and eternal. In this lies the strength, in this lies the power, in this lies the might of Christ's Resurrection. Without the Resurrection there is no Christianity. Among the miracles, this is the greatest one; all other miracles begin and end with it. From it sprouted the faith and the hope and the prayer and the love toward God.

Upcoming Events 2012-2013

May 27, Monday: Memorial Day Picnic, noon to five.
June 28-29: 10:00 p.m. All-Night Vigil and Liturgy for the Feast of SS Peter & Paul.

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!