

The Confessor's Tongue for June 9, A. D. 2013

Sunday of the Blind Man: 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.

June 9: St. Cyril of Alexandria

He was of noble birth and a close kinsman of Theophilus, Patriarch of Alexandria, after whose death he was chosen as Patriarch. He fought three fierce battles in the course of his life: against the Novatianist heretics, against Nestorius and against the Jews of Alexandria. The Novatianists began in Rome, and were so called after their leader, the heretic priest Novatian. They were filled with pride at their virtues, went about dressed in white, banned second marriages and declared that one must not pray for those who had committed mortal sin nor receive back into the Church those who had once fallen away, however deeply they might repent. Cyril overcame them and drove them out of Alexandria, together with their bishop. The battle with the Jews was harder and bloodier. The Jews had been in the ascendant in Alexandria right from the time that Alexander the Great founded the city. Their hatred towards the Christians was vicious and mindless. They killed Christians by treachery, by poison and by crucifixion. After a long and difficult struggle, Cyril succeeded in inducing the Emperor to drive the Jews out of Alexandria. His battle, however, against Nestorius, Patriarch of Constantinople, was resolved at the Third Ecumenical Council in Ephesus. Cyril himself presided at this Council, and also represented Pope Celestine of Rome at his request, he being prevented by old age from attending the Council. Nestorius was condemned, anathematised and exiled by the Emperor to the eastern borders of the Empire, where he died. After the end of these battles, Cyril lived in peace and guided Christ's flock with zeal. He went to the Lord in the year 444. It is said that he composed the hymn: 'Hail, Mother of God and Virgin.' *Prologue from Ochrid*

What is Discernment?

Generally speaking, discernment is, and is recognized as, a sure understanding of the divine will on all occasions, in every place and in all matters; and it is only found in those who are pure in heart, and in body, and in speech. *St. John of the Ladder, quoted into Brianchaninov, The Arena, p. 59*

On Giving Advice

We will observe that the Fathers forbid us to give advice to our neighbor of our own accord, without our neighbor's asking us to do so. The voluntary giving of advice is a sign that we regard ourselves as possessed of spiritual knowledge and worth, which is a clear sign of pride and self-deception. This does not refer to superiors and authorities [e.g. priests, bishops, parents, etc.] who are obliged at all times and whenever necessary, even without being asked, to

teach the brethren entrusted to their care. *St. Ignatius Brianchaninov, The Arena, p. 53.*

The Ascension of Our Lord Jesus Christ

The Great Feast of the Ascension is commemorated on the fortieth day after Pascha, which always falls on a Thursday. It has a post-feast of nine days, concluding on the Friday before Pentecost. This year the feast falls on June 13.

The Ascension marks the end of our Lord's earthly work and his triumphal return to Heaven.

On a deeper level, the Ascension marks the first entrance of human nature into God's Kingdom in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, matter of great rejoicing to the Church. Christ's glorification in the Ascension is also our glorification, for it is the elevation of human nature. Man's nature now shares Divine honor as Christ our brother enters Heaven in human form. The Feast leads us to consider seriously our true home in God's plan of salvation. Too often we think of the Kingdom of God as an afterlife, a postscript to our existence in this world. In reality, our true home is not on this fallen planet, but in the perfect and eternal Heavenly Kingdom. As St. Paul writes to the Colossians:

If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory. (*Colossians 3:1-4*)

Our life is hidden with Christ in God in heaven. It is there and there alone where God desires us to live in common union with Him to its fullest. If we indeed have the vocation to become saints, to share in the Divine nature, we must be prepared to inhabit the abode God has prepared for us, which was first experienced in the flesh by our Lord Jesus Christ after His Ascension. Our Lord has prepared the way for us to participate fully in God's Divine plan for our salvation. Let us glorify Him for establishing us as heirs to the Heavenly Kingdom and prepare ourselves in holiness to become worthy citizens of it.

St. John Chrysostom proclaims in his homily on the Feast, "Today, the human race is completely reconciled with God. The ancient battle and enmity have disappeared. We, who were unworthy to live even on earth, are now lifted up to Heaven. Today, we become heirs to the Kingdom of Heaven, we, who do not even deserve earth, we ascend to heaven and inherit the throne of the King and Lord. Human nature, against which the cherubim guarded paradise, is now raised up above all the cherubim."

Just before His Ascension, Jesus bade His Disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the descent of the Holy Spirit. Thus the time of the Feast of Ascension

is a time of anticipation and preparation for the outpouring of the Spirit on Pentecost. As a sign of this anticipation of Pentecost, we continue not to say the prayer "O Heavenly King..." until Pentecost.

Ascension is preceded on Wednesday by the Leavetaking of Pascha, which marks the end of the forty-day Paschal season. With the leavetaking of Pascha, we cease saying the Paschal greeting and the Paschal troparion.

During the nine days of the Ascension, we say or sing the troparion and kontakion of the Feast at meals and during our usual morning and evening prayers. We may say (or sing) the troparion once in place of "O Heavenly King" as well.

Ascension, Troparion, tone 4

Thou hast ascended in glory, O Christ our God, / granting joy to Thy disciples by the promise of the Holy Spirit. / Through the blessing they were assured / that Thou art the Son of God, / the Redeemer of the world.

Ascension, Kontakion, tone 6

When Thou didst fulfill the dispensation for our sake / and unite earth to heaven; / Thou didst ascend in glory, O Christ our God, / not being parted from those who love Thee, / but remaining with them and crying: / I am with you and no one will be against you!

On Those Who Love Death

St. Nikolai Velimirovich

"All they that hate Me love death." Proverbs 8:36

Thus speaks the Lord, Creator of heaven and earth, through His prophet. He who hates the wisdom of God, hates God and he who hates God what else is there for him to love except death? Is not everything outside of the Lord death? The sun and stars, the seas and mountains, animals and plants what is all of this except dead dust formed and enlivened by the power of God, the word of God, the wisdom of God?

He who does not love God, not only does he not love God but does not love anything that is from God, i.e., neither the beauty of the stars nor the order of the seas and mountains nor the living power that is in animals and plant life. He who does not love God, removes and distances God from nature. What else then is left? Only dead, formless, dark dust—only death. But even that dust is created by God, and a man who hates God is constrained to give that dust back to God, and can only have that which is left over. And what is left over? Only that with which God is not concerned—death, sin, and the devil. He who does not love God in essence loves death, sin and the devil. Every man who hates God is the devil's plaything, the fruit of sin, and a tidbit for death.

If we hate Thee, O Loving Lord, we have no one and nothing to love, for all that we love on earth we love for Thy sake, and the capacity to love is Thy gift. He is a fool who loves the sun's rays and hates the sun; who loves a sip of water and hates the spring from which it comes. Inspire us with life-giving love

towards Thee, O all-loving Lord. To Thee be glory and praise forever. Amen. *From the Prologue*

Praying Services on the Prayer Rope

A custom exists in the Church particularly among Athonite monks of praying services on a prayer rope (*chotki/komboskini*) when one cannot attend services in the church. This custom can be of use to us. For example, if the church is too far for us to travel to more than once a week and we don't have the books needed to read the service at home, we can pray with the Church at Vigil in preparation for the Sunday Liturgy or for a Feast on the prayer rope (2100 or strictly, 2350 knots: Vespers, Matins, First Hour). If illness, or the care of children hinders our attendance, we may still pray with the Church before God.

We pray with attentive awareness that we stand in the presence of God and lift the prayer "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me" or, if we prefer, the longer version: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me the sinner."

Here is a schedule commonly used:

1 kathisma of the Psalter	300 knots
1 stasis of the Psalter	100 knots
Midnight Service (Nocturnes)	600 knots
Matins	1500 knots
Hours (per Hour)	250 knots
Vespers	600 knots
Small Compline	400 knots
Great Compline	700 knots

We can also use the prayer rope to pray for others. Simply say, "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on N." (*name of person*) as many times as desired. One can effectively lift others up to the Lord in intercession in this way.

On Renunciation of Will

The essence of the [Christian] life consists in healing our impaired will, uniting it to the will of God, and sanctifying it by this union. Our will, in its fallen state, is hostile to the will of God. On account of its blindness and its hostility to God it is constantly endeavoring to oppose the will of God. When its efforts are unsuccessful, it leads a person to irritability, discontent, confusion, sorrow, despondency, accidie, grumbling, blasphemy, and despair. In the renunciation of one's own will to follow the will of God consists the self-renunciation commanded by the Savior, which is an indispensable condition of salvation and Christian perfection. In fact, this is so indispensable that unless this condition is satisfied, salvation is impossible, and Christian perfection is even more impossible. 'In His will is life', said the Prophet [David, Pslam 29:6]. St. Ignatius Brianchaninov, *The Arena*, p. 54

Upcoming Events 2012-2013

June 13: Leavetaking of Pascha
 June 14: Feast of the Ascension of Our Lord
 June 23: Feast of Holy Pentecost
 June 28-29: 10:00 p.m. All-Night Vigil and Liturgy for the Feast of SS Peter & Paul.
 September 29: 12:00 p.m. Annual Meeting

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!