

# The Confessor's Tongue for December 15, A. D. 2013

Sunday of the Forefathers

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.

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## December 15: Sunday of the Holy Forefathers

The Sunday of the Holy Forefathers occurs between the 11th and the 17th of December. This Sunday commemorates all the ancestors of the people of God, the holy patriarchs living up to the law, given on Sinai, and under the law, - from Adam to Joseph the Betrothed; together with them are commemorated "those who preached Christ" the holy prophets - from Samuel to Zechariah and to John the Baptist, and all the Old Testament righteous men, who were righteous in the faith in the coming of the Messiah. Especially in the service for this day are praised "the pious youths" Ananias, Azarias, and Misael, who "in faith were thrown into the fiery furnace" and "who in the middle of the flames were cooled by the dew of the Spirit and who walked about rejoicing, are mystically a prototype of the Trinity and the incarnation of Christ" from the Virgin, who after giving birth remained a virgin. With these holy youths are commemorated also "the righteous Daniel and the wonderful prophets", who, clearly revealing the divine second coming, saw Christ, "coming to all nations as Judge", and who, "your mind illumined by divine radiance", "that clearly the Virgin would give birth represented in mystical images".

"Today as we celebrate the Forefathers' memory", the holy Church exclaims: "let us offer praise to the fathers, who shone forth before and during the law, with righteous minds they served the Lord and Master who shone forth from the Virgin, now they delight in the unending light." "Let us offer songs of praise to the prophets of God". "Let us honor the holy youths, for they quenched the flaming furnace, together with the prophet Daniel, and all the righteous ones who shone forth before the law, together with those who served the Master under the law." By accomplishing "now the honor of the memory of the forefathers", the holy Church edifies us, that we, in the expectation of the great and light-bearing day of the Nativity of Christ, is reflected by the faith and life of the holy Forefathers and, through them, has prepared ourselves, by their example, to the worthy meeting of the Lord Who came from Heaven, who has adorned their soul with virtues beforehand to be ready for the great and light-bearing day of the Nativity of our Savior worthily to meet Him with the lamp of faith and with the oil of charitable deeds, with the firm hope of life everlasting, with the light of both the joyful face of cleanliness and purity.

Together with them the holy Church on the present day, that its appeal be not in vain, places in the Gospel reading by the clergy about those called in Vespers, inspiring us, that we can be distracted from worthily meeting the Lord by the predominance of

flesh over spirit, the attachment to the terrestrial, the blinding by gleam of worldly goods, the predilection for vanity, the unwillingness to deny one's self-love and pride everyday, the enslavement to passions and covetousness, and in the Epistle reading directly commands us to destroy our earthly members: fornication, impurity, passion, evil lust and cupidity, to lay aside anger, evil, blaspheming, slander, lies, and in general to take off the old man and put on the new in the image of the Creator (Col. 3:4-11).

### From the Desert Fathers

A brother questioned Abba Poemen saying, "I have committed a great sin and I want to do penance for three years." The old man said to him, "That is a lot." The brother said, "For one year?" The old man said again, "That is a lot." Those who were present said, "For forty days?" He said again, "That is a lot." He added, "I myself say that if a man repents with his whole heart and does not intend to commit the sin any more, God will accept him after only three days."

### On the Divine Liturgy

After the Gospel reading and preaching, the "Litany [or 'Ectenia'] of Fervent Supplication", which is a persistent and warm supplication towards God on behalf of all the faithful, the living and the reposed, which has a total of six petitions, immediately follows. It starts off with the exhortation, "Let us all say with all our soul and with all our mind, let us say."

Like Jesus Christ during the night in the garden of Gethsemane, before He was arrested, "and being in an agony, he prayed more earnestly", and, in fact, in such a way that His sweat was falling on the earth and in the roots of the trees like drops of blood...., hence, we should also pray in the same way: with fervor and in faith, "with all our soul and with all our mind", according to the Evangelical divine word.

Are we attending the Divine Liturgy? We should only think of Christ, nothing else except Christ and that which He prescribes. Thus, we perform that which is vividly exhorted by the priest at the beginning of the Litany: "Let us all say with all our soul and with all our mind, let us say." However, how many of us who go to Church perform this exhortation of the Church? Unfortunately, we may be physically present but spiritually absent and with the nerves of the soul "at sleep", lethargic. An instance in the life of St. Nicholas Planas illustrates this.

Once the venerable Father Nicholas Planas was censuring during the ninth ode [during the Magnificat of the canon at Matins], when the chanters were chanting "more honorable than the Cherubim and more glorious without compare than the Seraphim." He walked by a lady who as standing in the adjoining

pews and did not cense her. He did not cense her at all, h just walked by her. There was pew in a row of pews that was empty. He stood there, censed it five or six times and left. When the Divine Liturgy [which followed Matins] was over, this woman went to him and told him: "Father Nicholas, during the ninth ode, you did not cense me, but you went an censed an empty pew." "That figures, Mrs. Georgia, he told her, you were not there! Nevertheless, the empty pew belongs to Mrs. Maria who is ill. She was ill at home; however, she was present in heart and spirit. You, on the other hand, were here in body, but in spirit you were with the goats!" *From Experiences During the Divine Liturgy, p. 164.*

### Orthodox Prayers on Our Website

For your benefit, the parish website has be modified, updated, and expanded in recent weeks.

Of particular interest is a page entitled "Orthodox Prayers", immediately accessible from the side bar menu on the home page and no longer protected by password. Here you will find a growing abundance of resources for prayer at home

From an old edition of a standard prayerbook published by St. Tikhon's Press thirty years ago and now out of print, you will find complete prayers for Morning and Evening as well as prayers of preparation for Holy Communion, and the Three Canons. Prayers of Thanksgiving after Holy Communion have yet to be uploaded. These prayers have been slightly edited to bring the use of pronouns into consistency with our local usage and liturgical English, and the translation of the 'basic beginning' prayers is the one we use in services. All this is found in the section of the page entitled "Private Prayers". Also included there is a short order of the Third, Sixth, and Ninth Hours for personal use, which can readily be memorized and used at the appointed times during the day wherever you may be. To stop what you are doing a couple times to pray "O Heavenly King" through "Our Father", to say the troparion of the particular hour thrice, and to say the general Prayer of the Hours and then close will be of spiritual assistance to anyone who undertakes it. The priest highly recommends using these brief prayers during the day.

To support the development of the Jesus Prayer in us, the famous Optina 500 is detailed in a newly-added document under the heading "Jesus Prayer." Besides using the Jesus Prayer throughout the day to combat thoughts and temptations and to help us remember God at all times, we can and should use it formally to attempt to develop prayer of the heart and deepen our intimacy with Christ. The Optina 500 provides a structured way in which to do that. It is well worthy trying.

In addition to the Compline service which has been on the website, we have added the full texts of the Third Hour, Sixth Hour, and Ninth Hour. These only take ten to twelve minutes to read; taken during

the day at the appropriate time, they help bridge the gap between morning and evening prayer; and if we happened to have missed morning prayer and it is now afternoon, they provide a more natural way to pray at that time than tardily picking up the morning prayers.

The Typica Service is also there. This is used in the Church during Great Lent on weekdays when the Divine Liturgy is not served. It is also used on Sundays and Feast Days in parishes and in the home when there is no priest to serve the Liturgy or when someone is not able to attend the Liturgy in the church for whatever reason. One can gather the family, read the Third and Sixth Hours and the Typica at home while the Liturgy is being served at church and thus keep the day. The needed troparia and kontakia for Sundays and Feasts have also been provided. So, if you have to miss Sunday Liturgy, here is something to pray at home that will take no more than thirty minutes.

Newly uploaded are reader's versions of the main daily services, Vespers and Matins. These reader services are used in the church when no priest is available to serve. They may also be used by the pious faithful at home at the appropriate times when they are unable to attend or simply want to pray the service at home. Links to hymns to insert in the services to complete them for a given day have been provided.

Thus, if the city gets iced down and you cannot come to church Saturday night and Sunday morning, there is no need to despair. Vespers, Compline, Matins, the Hours, and the Typica are all available for use—as much or little as you are able or desire. Or suppose a family function will keep you from attending Vigil on Saturday night, but you plan to attend Liturgy on Sunday and want to commune. You can now read Vespers and/or Matins with the appointed hymns (or some of them at least) at a convenient time before or after your function to help in your preparation to receive the Eucharist.

Lastly, the texts of some miscellaneous prayers for various occasions, most of which have been previously published in the *Confessor's Tongue*, are provided.

Please freely make use of these materials! If you have questions about how to use them, please see your priest or Subdeacon Anthony.

### Upcoming Events 2012-2013

- 17 December, Tuesday, Holy Unction, 7:00 p.m.
- 30 December – 3 January Winter Service Retreat at St. George's in Pharr, Texas.
- 31 December – 1 January All-Night Vigil for St. Basil
- 20 January 6:00 p.m. Vigil for St. Maximus
- 17-20 February Diocese of the South Pastoral Conference at St. Maximus

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!