

The Confessor's Tongue for March 15, A. D. 2015

3rd Sunday of Lent; Veneration of the Precious Cross; Martyr Agapius

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.

The Sayings of St. Anthony the Great 9

Abba Anthony said, "Our life and our death is with our neighbor. If we gain our brother, we have gained God, but if we scandalize our brother, we have sinned against Christ."

Saying 9 in *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*

Commentary: There is an old saying that "one Christian is no Christian." We are not saved alone in isolation from others; we cannot live as Christians if we ignore the bond to our brother, a bond we acquired at Baptism. We cannot be close to God if we scandalize and alienate the people around us, for this is a sin against love. As St. John puts it in his first epistle, 'How can a man love God whom he has not seen if He does not love his brother whom he has seen?' Loving God and loving our neighbor are connected; showing love for our neighbor, even to our enemy, reveals and proves our love for God, who loves all men equally.

Hence the authenticity of our faith and love for God is revealed in our relations to those around us. The Christian faith, life in the Church, is not some abstract intellectual affair, but the mundane, daily, and often dirty business of learning to love the people God has put in our lives, especially the members of our families and our parish.

How can we love our brother and not scandalize him, understanding that love in essence is not a feeling but a choice to do what is right towards him? Let us count the ways:

1. Come to church regularly. By doing this, we affirm to others that our relationship to Christ is our first priority, and that example encourages them. Neglecting to come sends the subtle message that Christian worship is not of first importance to us and tempts others to think and act likewise.

2. When in church, dress neatly and modestly and conduct yourself with great care so as not to distract others. Come on time. Don't go in and out during the Liturgy. Don't get caught in conversations outside of church during the Liturgy, thus showing disrespect for what is happening in the church and distracting others.

3. Come to Confession regularly. By dealing with your own sins, you make yourself more receptive to God's grace by which alone you can truly love others.

4. Prepare yourself for Communion regularly, thus showing your faith in the Mystery and setting a good example to others. No one who takes his faith seriously should commune less frequently than four times a year (the four fasts). Preferably we should commune at least once a month if not more frequently with the blessing of our spiritual father.

5. Parents: show your love for your brethren by taking the time to discipline and train your children to conduct themselves with reverence and self-

control in church. Letting them do as they will, going in and out repeatedly, talking, screaming, playing with noisy toys, running around, etc., not only reflects poorly on you, it sends the message to others that you don't respect your brethren enough to keep your children under control.

6. Others: show your love for parents by helping with children, by not encouraging children to misbehave by giving them attention, by praying for and encouraging them.

7. All: pray for one another, especially for the brethren who annoy you. If you don't know what else to say, use the Jesus prayer and insert the other person's name: "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on N." Do this throughout the day as the thought of a person comes to you, especially if the thought of the person comes with anger, annoyance, judgment, or bitterness.

8. Shoulder your part of the burden of caring for the parish by giving of your time and resources to develop and improve what God has given us. Don't expect others to do it all.

9. Before you come to church, offer yourself to God in prayer. Ask Him to use you to be a blessing to someone while at church. As we all have a ministry to fulfill towards one another, we come not only to receive from God but to give to Him and one another. Really listen to your brethren and get to know them. Be sensitive to their needs and be willing to let God use you to meet them. Be willing to be God's hand reaching out in love to someone with whom you'd rather not bother, if were up to your druthers.

10. Help clean up, and, in general, help keep the church clean. If you see something that needs doing, take initiative and get it done after checking with the priest or a council member.

11. Pray for the members of your family. Choose to love them rather than scandalizing or alienating them by harsh words, wrong actions, disrespect, and disobedience. Quickly and sincerely say you are sorry when you do wrong. Bear your part of the burden of maintaining the home economy: even children can and should be taught to clean, cook, and care for the home.

Furthermore, in winning our brother, we shall win also the lost. Jesus said, "By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples in that ye love one another." As Christ's peace is a peace the world cannot give, so is the love of Christ in our hearts for one another a love that has not its source in this world. This love in us is what the world needs, what it craves, and it is this love that bears witness to the truth of our faith in the God-man Jesus Christ. Developing this love in us for one another will attract those outside the Church who are searching for truth and love.

So brethren, let us love one another, look out for one another, seek one another's good, and be willing to limit our own freedom to avoid offending or scandalizing others, for "our life and death is with our neighbor."
Fr. Justin Frederick

Veneration of the Cross

The Third Sunday of Lent is given to us for the veneration of the Precious Cross. At Vigil on Saturday evening, the Gospel is not brought out for veneration. Instead, at the end of the Great Doxology, the Cross decorated with flowers, is brought out for veneration by the faithful. Special hymns are appointed to be sung at this time.

At the Liturgy on Sunday, the hymn "Before Thy Cross, we bow down in veneration..." is sung in place of "Holy God". Customarily, the Cross is venerated by all at the end of the Liturgy with prostrations, marking a rare exception to the rule of not doing prostrations on Sundays, or on a day when we have received Holy Communion.

The Cross is left out in the church through the Ninth Hour on Friday. When we enter the church, we normally venerate the Cross first making full prostrations instead of our usual bows.

From the Priest: Confession

Three weeks remain before Holy Week. If you have not been to Confession since the beginning of the Fast, or if your regular time for confession will fall due before Pascha, you should plan on coming to Confession before Holy Week.

If you have not been to Communion in months, you should make a concerted effort to prepare to make a good Confession that you might prepare to receive Communion at Pascha.

If you have been communing on an 'expired' Confession (six weeks or more since your last Confession, you should stop communing and prepare yourself for Confession.

For all: please try to make your confessions before Holy Week if at all possible. Your priest will hear your confession during Holy Week if necessary, but, unless it was unavoidable, he will be much happier if you plan ahead to do it before the last minute. Thank you!
Fr. Justin

On the Participation of the Faithful in the Eucharist, part 2

Document approved at the Hierarchal Consultation of the Russian Orthodox Church, February 2-3, 2015 in the Cathedral of Christ the Savior in Moscow

1. The practice of fasting in preparation for communion is regulated by the ascetical tradition of the Church. The fasting as abstinence from animal products and abstaining from distractions, accompanied by assiduous prayer and repentance, traditionally precedes the communion of the Holy Mysteries. The length and extent of fasting before holy communion can differ, depending on the Christian's inner state and objective life circumstances.

Particularly, in the case of an acute or chronic illness that requires special dietary rules, as well as during pregnancy and nursing a child for women, the time of fasting can be shortened, lightened, or set aside altogether. The same rule concerns Christians who temporarily or permanently live in secular institutions which presuppose living and taking meals in common (military units, hospitals, boarding schools, special schools, or prisons).

The practice that has taken shape in our time that every one who receives communion several times a year fasts for three days before communion fully corresponds to the tradition of the Church. At the same time, the practice when a person who receives communion on a weekly basis or several times a month, while observing lengthy and one-day fasts established by the Typicon, approaches the holy Chalice without any additional fasting or keeping a fast on the day or in the evening before communion, is acceptable as well. This matter has to be resolved with the blessing of the person's spiritual father. The requirements concerning preparation for holy communion, intended for the laypeople who receive communion frequently, are also applicable for members of the clergy.

Bright Week, the week following the feast of Christ's Pascha, creates a special case regarding the practice of preparation for holy communion. The ancient canonical norm regarding the obligatory participation of all faithful at the Sunday eucharist was in the seventh century expanded to include all of the Divine Liturgies during Bright Week:

From the holy day of the Resurrection of Christ our God until the New Sunday, for a whole week, in the holy churches the faithful ought to be free from labour, rejoicing in Christ with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs; and celebrating the feast, and applying their minds to the reading of the holy Scriptures, and delighting in the Holy Mysteries; for thus shall we be exalted with Christ and together with him be raised up (canon 66 of the Council in Trullo).

It follows from this canon that the laypeople are called to receive communion during the liturgies of Bright Week. Considering that the Typicon does not foresee any fasting during Bright Week and that Bright Week is preceded by seven weeks of struggle in the course of Lent and Holy Week, it ought to be acknowledged that the practice that has been established in many parishes of the Russian Orthodox Church that Christians who observed the Great Fast receive holy communion during Bright Week, while limiting their fasting to abstaining from food after midnight, is fully consistent with the canonical tradition of the Church. Similar practice can be expanded to the period between Nativity and Theophany. Those who prepare for communion during these days should take special care from excessive consumption of food and drink.

2. One should distinguish the preparatory fast from the eucharistic fast in a proper sense, i.e. the complete abstinence from food and drink from midnight until holy communion. This fast is mandated by the canons (see canon 41/50 of Carthage, cited above). At the same time, the requirement of eucharistic fast is not applied to infants, as well as to persons who suffer from grave acute or chronic illnesses which demand a regular intake of medicine or food (e.g. diabetes), and to those who are dying. Moreover, at the discretion of the spiritual father, this requirement may be facilitated for women who are pregnant or nursing a child. Canon law prescribes abstinence from marital relations during the period of preparation for holy communion. Canon 5 of Timothy of

Alexandria refers to such abstinence on the eve of communion. The Church encourages those Christians who suffer from the harmful habit of smoking tobacco to abandon this habit. Those, however, who do not yet have the strength to do so must abstain from smoking from midnight and, if possible, from the evening before communion. Since in accordance with the Typicon, the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts is combined with Vespers, its celebration during the evening hours constitutes a liturgical norm (even though in practice this liturgy usually is celebrated in the morning). In accordance with the decision of the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church of November 28, 1968, when the Divine Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts is celebrated in the evening, the abstention from food and drink for those who receive communion must be no less than six hours, however the abstention before communion from midnight of the day is quite praiseworthy and those who have physical strength may keep it. One should also apply the standard of no less than six hours of abstinence while preparing for communion at the Divine Liturgy that is celebrated during the night (e.g. on the feasts of Holy Pascha and the Nativity of Christ).

3. The preparation for communion consists not only in abstinence from certain food, but also includes the more regular attendance of church services, and in the performance of a rule of prayer. The Order of preparation for Holy Communion, consisting of a special canon and prayers, is an inalienable part of this prayerful preparation. The prayer rule usually also includes the canons to the Saviour, the Theotokos, the Guardian Angel and other prayers (see "The Rule for those who are preparing to serve and wish to partake of the Holy Divine Mysteries of the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ" in the Liturgical Psalter. During Bright Week, the prayer rule consists of the Paschal canon, and also the canon and prayers before communion.

A personal rule of prayer should be recited outside of services, which always presuppose the joint prayer of the entire assembly. Special pastoral care should be given to the people whose spiritual path in the Church is just beginning, and who are not yet accustomed to lengthy prayer rules, as well as to children and those who are ill. The Liturgical Psalter presupposes a possibility to replace canons and akathists with the Jesus prayer and prostrations. In the spirit of this direction, with a blessing of the spiritual father, the above-mentioned rule of prayer may be substituted by other prayers.

Since the Liturgy is the summit of the whole liturgical cycle, the attendance at the services that precede the Liturgy – primarily, Vespers and Matins (or the Vigil) – is an important part of preparation for the partaking of the Holy Body and Blood of Christ.

If a person was absent at the evening services on the eve of communion or did not recite his prayer rule in its fullness, his spiritual father or a priest who hears his confession must urge him to a more thorough preparation for communion, but also must take into account the circumstances of his life and possible existence of excusable reasons.

Preparing themselves for the reception of the Holy Mysteries of Christ at the Divine Liturgy, the children of the Church must gather in the temple before the service begins. To come late for the Divine Liturgy, especially when the faithful arrive after the reading of the Epistle and the Gospel demonstrates neglect toward the Mystery of the Body and Blood of Christ. If such tardiness occurs, the

priest who hears confessions or distributes communion may decide not to admit such a person to the Holy Chalice. Exception can be made for people with limited physical capabilities, nursing mothers, small children, and the adults who accompany them.

After the end of the Divine Liturgy, a Christian must hear in church or himself read the thanksgiving prayers after holy communion. While prayerfully giving thanks to God for the gift he has received, a Christian must strive by all means to preserve this gift in peace, piety, and love for God and neighbor.

Considering the unbreakable bond between communion and the Divine Liturgy, the clergy must not permit the practice where in some churches the faithful are prohibited from receiving holy communion on the feasts of Holy Pascha, the Nativity of Christ, Theophany, on Memorial Saturdays, and on the Day of Rejoicing (Radonitsa).

III.

A person who is preparing for holy communion performs an examination of his conscience, which presupposes a sincere repentance for the sins he has committed and revealing of these sins before the priest in the Sacrament of Repentance. In the situation where many who come to our churches are not yet fully rooted in the church life, and consequently sometimes do not understand the meaning of the Sacrament of the Eucharist or are not aware of the moral and canonical consequences of their sinful deeds, confession allows the priest who hears confession to discern whether it is possible to allow the penitent to receive the Holy Mysteries of Christ.

In special cases, in accordance with the practice that has formed in many parishes, a spiritual father may allow a layperson to partake of the Body and Blood of Christ several times during the same week (e.g. during Holy or Bright Week) without coming to confession before every communion, excluding the situations when a person desiring to receive communion perceives a need for confession. While giving this blessing to the faithful, spiritual fathers should particularly remember their great responsibility for the souls of their flock, which was placed upon them in the sacrament of ordination.

In some parishes, it takes a long time to wait for the communion of the laity to begin. This occurs due to the length of communion of the clergy during liturgies with many concelebrants or due to the hearing of confessions after the communion verse. This state of affairs should be seen as undesirable. The sacrament of repentance must be, if possible, performed outside of Divine Liturgy, lest the penitent and the confessing priest both be deprived from full participation in the joint eucharistic prayer. It is unacceptable for a priest assisting at the liturgy to hear confessions during the reading of the Gospel or during the eucharistic canon. It is desirable to hear confessions in the evening before the Divine Liturgy or before the beginning of the liturgy. Moreover, it is important to establish in parishes the fixed days and hours when a priest would always be present to meet those who desire to talk with their pastor.

IV.

It is unacceptable to receive communion in a state of resentment or anger, or with grave, unconfessed sins or unforgiven offenses. Those who dare to approach the eucharistic gifts in such a state of soul place themselves under divine judgment, in accordance with the words of

the Apostle: "For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body, eats and drinks judgment upon himself. That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died" (1 Cor 11:29-30).

When grave sins have been committed, the application of the canons regarding excommunication of a person for an extended period of time (for longer than one year) may be performed only with the blessing of the diocesan bishop. When a priest abuses his right to impose penances, his case may be brought for review by the ecclesiastical court.

The canons prohibit receiving communion in the state of female impurity (canon 2 of St Dionysius of Alexandria, canon 7 of Timothy of Alexandria). An exception may be made in case of a danger of death, and whenever the issue of blood continues for a long time due to chronic or acute illness.

V.

As it was stated in the Bases for Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church (10.2) and in the definition of the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church of December 28, 1998, the Church, while insisting upon the necessity for ecclesiastical marriage, still does not deprive from communion of the Holy Mysteries the spouses who constitute a marital union contracted with the acceptance of all legal rights and duties and recognized as a legally valid marriage, but which was not for some reasons sanctified by the rite of crowning. This measure of ecclesial economy is grounded in the words of St Paul (1 Cor 7:14) and canon 72 of the Council in Trullo, and intends to make it more possible to live the life of the Church for those Orthodox Christians who entered their marriage before the beginning of their conscious participation in the Church's sacraments. In contrast with adulterous cohabitation, which is a canonical impediment for communion, the former union constitutes a legal marriage in the eyes of the Church (excepting the cases when legally permissible "marriages," e.g. between close relatives or same-sex cohabitations, recognized in a number of countries, are from the Church's point of view unacceptable in principle). The duty of pastors, however, is to remind the faithful of the necessity not only to contract a legally valid marriage, but also to sanctify such marriage through the liturgical rite of the Church.

Special attention is given to cases when persons have lived together for a long time, often having children together, but are not united either through ecclesiastical or a state-recognized marriage – moreover, one of the persons in this cohabitation does not desire either to register their relationship or to marry in Church. Such cohabitations are sinful and their wide dissemination in the world demonstrates the rebellion against the divine purpose concerning man, endangers the institution of marriage and cannot receive any recognition from the Church. At the same time, the spiritual father who knows the life situation of a specific person and condescends to human weakness, may in exceptional cases admit to communion the person in this relationship who is aware of the sinfulness of such cohabitation and seeks to enter a lawful marriage. The person in this cohabitation, guilty of preventing this marriage from taking place, cannot be admitted to communion. If, however, at least one of the cohabiting persons is married to another person, both sides cannot be admitted to communion without canonical rectification of their condition and offering an appropriate penance.

VI.

The preparation of children for holy communion has its own special characteristics. The length of this preparation is determined by the parents with the advice of their spiritual father and must take into consideration the child's age, state of health, and the extent of his integration into the life of the Church.

Parents who regularly bring their children to the Holy Chalice, which is a good thing, must seek to receive communion together with them (if it is not possible for both parents to receive, then one parent at a time). The practice where parents bring children to communion, but themselves seldom receive communion, prevents the development in a child's mind of a sense of need to partake of the eucharistic meal.

The first confession before communion, in accordance with canon 18 of Timothy of Alexandria, is performed after the child has reached ten years of age, but in the tradition of the Russian Orthodox Church the first confession usually occurs at seven years of age. At the same time, the age of the first confession, as well as the frequency of confession for a child between seven and ten years of age, if he receives communion every Sunday, must be determined by the spiritual father and the parents together, considering the individual characteristics in the child's development and his understanding of the life of the Church.

The eucharistic fast is not mandatory for children until three years of age. According to tradition, beginning with the age of three years, Orthodox families gradually teach the child to abstain from food and drink before the communion of the Holy Mysteries. By the age of seven years, a child must be firmly accustomed to receive on an empty stomach. From this time, the child should be instructed to read the prayers before holy communion, the content and length of which is determined by the parents in accordance with the child's age, as well as his spiritual and intellectual development.

The sponsors of the child must fully participate in rearing the children in piety, which includes urging the children toward regular partaking of the Holy Mysteries of Christ and helping the parents to bring the children to the Holy Chalice.

****The Eucharist is the central Sacrament of the Church. Regular communion is necessary for a human being for salvation, in accordance with the words of our Lord Jesus Christ:*

Truly, truly I say unto you: unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day (John 6:53-54).

Upcoming Events 2015

5 April: Palm Sunday
12 April: Holy Pascha, Feast of Feasts, Picnic
25 May: Memorial Day Picnic
7 September: Labor Day Picnic

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!