

The Confessor's Tongue for April 3, A. D. 2016

Third Sunday of Lent: Veneration of the Holy Cross

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.

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.

On Self-Examination

St. Tikhon of Zadonks

Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith, prove your own selves. (2 Corinthians 13:5)

Glory to God! We are all called Christians; we all confess the one God in Three Persons, the living and immortal God; we were all baptized in the name of the Holy Trinity of One Essence, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; we all believe in Him who was crucified and rose from the dead, Jesus Christ the Son of God, and, as a sign of this, sign ourselves with the Cross; we all enter the holy Church, and we pray and we entreat, we sing and we praise the holy name of God; we all listen to the holy word of God; we all commune in Life and the Heavenly Kingdom, and we say in the holy Symbol of Faith: 'I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the age to come.'

Glory to God for all this and everything else! In truth, my readers, the mysteries of Christianity are most glorious and magnificent! It is great and glorious to be a Christian! But let us examine ourselves—are we truly Christians? As the Apostle exhorts us: *Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith.*

For without the Faith, a Christian cannot exist. We bear the signs of Christianity, as was said above, but do we have true Christianity within us? For all external things are nothing without that which is inside, and outward signs without the actual and true thing itself are a lie and hypocrisy. We all boast of the Faith, but do we do the works which correspond to faith, as the Apostle says to everyone: *Show me thy faith in thy works (James 2:18)?* We have the name "Christians" from Christ; but have we crucified the flesh with its passions and desires, as is proper for Christians who believe in the crucified Christ, as the

Apostle says: *Those that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the passions and desires (Galatians 5:24)?* Do we sense within ourselves the spiritual joy of the anointing of oil (John 2:27)?

We believe in the Gospel, but do we live in a way that is worthy of the Gospel? We confess and we call on the true God; but do we please Him with the faith and pure conscience that He requires of us? We listen to the holy Word of God; but do we heed it, and do we correct ourselves according to its rules? We commune of the holy and life-creating Mysteries of the Body and Blood of Christ; but are we renewed by Holy Communion and do we progress towards a new spiritual personality?

Let us examine these things and the rest, and let us look at how we live, how we conduct ourselves, how we think, how we talk, how we act, with what kind of heart we go about before the God who sees all things, how we treat one another.

And after examining ourselves in this way, let us be Christians not in name only but in truth. We became Christians by the grace of God; let us strive to have true Christianity within ourselves. We were baptized into the God-of-Three-Persons, and received the gift of sanctity and righteousness; let us strive to keep this heavenly treasure to the end.

We believe in Jesus Christ crucified; let us strive through faith to follow Him also, and to follow Him after each of us has taken up his cross.

We confess and we call upon the heavenly God; let us strive also to please Him with heavenly ways of life. We listen to the Word of God; let us strive also to *live* as it teaches us. We expect the resurrection of the dead and the life of the age to come. When we have turned away from this vain world, let us strive only for the eternal goods.

We approach the holy and heavenly Table of the Mysteries of Christ; let us strive that this heavenly and life-creating Bread might become for us life, sanctification, illumination, renewal, joy, and spiritual consolation. So, let us demonstrate our faith by our deeds; then we will be Christians not only in name but in reality. *O God!...Be gracious to us and bless us, and make Thy face to shine upon us, and have mercy on us: that we may know Thy way upon the earth, Thy salvation among all the peoples. (Psm 66:2-3) Amen.*

On Faults Often Considered Trifling

St. Symeon the New Theologian

There will be those who, like myself, have been insubordinate and disobedient toward God's commandments who vainly calculate and say, "But I have not committed fornication! Swearing is nothing. I have not committed adultery! But what sin is it to have stolen a penny or a piece of bread?" And again, "I should attain bliss, if I do not commit the foul and

sacrilegious vice of homosexuality. But what sin is there in being insulting or jealous, in being flippant or frivolous?" Then again there are those who in their folly think highly of themselves for being pure from the practice of sins of the flesh, and think that they are like angels of God, but take no account of the virtues and passions of the soul. They have nothing but contempt for all the rest of the Lord's commandments and do not force themselves to fulfill them. They refuse to do anything that is strenuous or to undergo any suffering for a commandment of God, and live carelessly.

What benefit, brethren, is there from abstaining from fornication and other impure acts of the body and yet seek after glory and strive for money? The one corrupts the body, and the other corrupts the soul. Moreover, glory from men and love for it makes us to be unbelievers, according to the word of the Lord when He says, "How can you believe, who receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?" What good is it to be innocent of homosexual acts, but to waste away with envy, hatred, and jealousy toward your neighbor? Hatred toward one's brother makes him who feels it into a murderer, for the apostle says, "anyone who hates his brother is a murderer." According to the sacred canons, a sodomite and a murderer are subject to the same penalty, and if they fail to repent they will be subject to eternal condemnation.

Five Paths of Repentance

St. John Chrysostom

Would you like me to list also the paths of repentance? They are numerous and quite varied, and all lead to heaven.

A first path of repentance is the condemnation of your own sins: "Be the first to admit your sins and you will be justified." For this reason, too, the prophet wrote: "I said, I will accuse myself of my sins to the Lord, and Thou forgavest the wickedness of my heart." Therefore, you too should condemn your own sins; that will be enough reason for the Lord to forgive you, for a man who condemns his own sins is slower to commit them again. Rouse your conscience to accuse yourself within your own house, lest it become your accuser before the judgment seat of the Lord.

That, then, is one very good path of repentance. Another and less valuable one is to put out of our minds the harm done us by our enemies, in order to master our anger, and to forgive our fellow servants' sins against us. Then our own sins against the Lord will be forgiven us. Thus you have another way to atone for sin: "For if you forgive your debtors, your heavenly Father will forgive you."

Do you want to know of a third path? It consists of prayer that is fervent and careful and comes from the heart.

If you want to hear of a fourth, I will mention almsgiving, whose power is great and far-reaching.

If, moreover, a man lives a modest, humble life, that, no less than the other things I have mentioned, takes sin away. Proof of this is the tax collector who had no good deeds to mention, but offered his humility instead and was relieved of a heavy burden of sins.

Thus I have shown you five paths of repentance: condemnation of your own sins, forgiveness of our neighbor's sins against us, prayer, almsgiving, and humility.

Do not be idle, then, but walk daily in all these paths; they are easy, and you cannot plead your poverty. For, though you live out your life amid great need, you can always set aside your wrath, be humble, pray diligently, and condemn your own sins; poverty is no hindrance. Poverty is not an obstacle to our carrying out the Lord's bidding, even when it comes to that path of repentance which involves giving money (almsgiving, I mean). The widow proved that when she put her two mites into the box!

Now that we have learned how to heal those wounds of ours, let us apply the cures. Then, when we have regained genuine health, we can approach the Holy Table with confidence, go gloriously to meet Christ, the King of Glory, and attain the eternal blessings through the grace, mercy, and kindness of Jesus Christ our Lord.

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

Upcoming Events 2015-16

17 April: Pan-Orthodox Vespers at St. Seraphim's
with Bishop Alexander
24-30 April: Holy Week
30 April 10:00 a.m. Baptism of Polycarp & Anna
Skelton
1 May Holy Pascha, Picnic, Egg Hunt
July fifteen-year anniversary

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!