

The Confessor's Tongue for April 10, A. D. 2016

Fourth Sunday of Lent: St. John of the Ladder; Martyr Terence

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.

Thursday of the Fifth Week

At Matins on this day [served Wednesday night] the Canon of St. Andrew of Crete is read in its entirety once a year, which was read in four parts on the first four days of the first week, and the Life of St. Mary of Egypt is read after the Sessional Hymn (Kathisma). According to this feature of the Thursday Matins it is called either the St. Andrew of Crete or the St. Mary of Egypt Thursday. In the Canon are collected and stated all the exhortations to fasting and repentance, and the Holy Church repeats it now in its fullness to inspire us new strength for the successful end to Lent. "Since", it is said in the Synaxarion, "the Holy Forty Day Lent is drawing near the end so that men should not become lazy, or more carelessly disposed to the spiritual efforts, or give up their abstinence altogether," that this Great Canon is offered. It is "so long, and so well-composed, as to be sufficient to soften even the hardest soul, and to rouse it to resumption of the good, if only it is sung with a contrite heart and proper attention". And the church Typikon (Ustav) orders the Great Canon to be read and chanted slowly and "with a contrite heart and voice, making three prostrations at each Troparion". For the same purpose of abstinence and strength, and attention to repentance is the reading of the Life of the Venerable Mary of Egypt. According to an explanation of the same Synaxarion, the Life of the Venerable Mary also "manifests infinite compunction and gives much encouragement to the fallen and sinners", representing itself to us as a paradigm of true repentance, and an example of the unutterable mercy of God. It serves as the continuation of the Canon of St. Andrew of Crete and a transition to the order of the following Sunday. Reading the Canon of St. Andrew and Mary of Egypt on the Thursday of the Fifth Week was established from the time of the Sixth Ecumenical Council. *Bulgakov Handbook*

Saturday of the Fifth Week

The service on this Saturday is called the Praise of the Most Holy Theotokos, because on this day "we sing the hymns of praise" to the Most Holy Theotokos in memory of the triple deliverance of the imperial city of Constantinople from the attack of enemies through Her intercession (see March 10). In the reign of Heraclius (in 626) the Persians from the East and the Scythians or Avars from the west blockaded Constantinople. Patriarch Sergius took the icon of the Most Holy Theotokos called the Hodigitria (refer to July 28), and her encased robe, in a cross procession to the walls of city and when he dipped the robe of the Mother of God into the water, the sea began to boil, and the ships sank, and the unwelcome enemies were exterminated. The people spent the whole night in prayer in the Blachernae

church, which is on the seacoast, singing the thanksgiving hymns to the Mother of God (Akathist). A similar deliverance of Constantinople from the Agarians occurred during the reign of Constantine Pogonatus (in 670), Leo the Isaurian (716-740), or, according to other reports, during the reign of Michael III (864) from the Agarian and the Scythians Ascond and Dir. The Holy Church entered into the universal use of the thanksgiving hymns to the Theotokos, performed on the 5th Sunday of Great Lent as the first deliverance of Constantinople was about this time.

With thanksgiving for former deliverance from enemies, the Holy Church connects the prayer to the Most Holy Theotokos with even freeing us from all misfortunes, looking to the Mother of God as the Helper in prayers and repentance. Reminding believers about the heavenly Mediatrix and Intercessor of the Christian race, the Holy Church thus confirms repenting in the hope of greater help in one's spiritual efforts, for She never abandoned the suffering and grieving needing Her help, even in the struggle against external enemies. *Bulgakov Handbook*

On the Akathist Hymn

The Typikon (Ustav) calls these "Hymns of Praise" to the Theotokos the "Akathist" (literally 'without sitting') because during the singing of this hymn one should not sit. The Deacon George Pisidijskim of the Great Church in Constantinople composed the Akathist on the occasion of the miraculous deliverance of the inhabitants of Constantinople from their enemies in 626. The Akathist consists of 12 Kontakia and 12 Eikoi (according to the number of letters in the Greek alphabet); the first Kontakion of the Akathist is "O Victorious Leader" is not included in the number 12 of the Kontakia but serves as a theme of the Akathist. Each Kontakion ends with the refrain: "Alleluia", and each Eikos ends with the angelic greeting to the Theotokos: "Rejoice, O unwedded Bride". The Akathist is divided into two parts. The first 12 odes (up to the 7th Eikos) comprise the first part of the Akathist, having historical content: in them are found the history of the incarnation and the first years of life of Jesus Christ. The remaining 12 odes comprising the second part of the Akathist, has dogmatic and moral content: in them the Kontakia describe the mystery of the incarnation of God the Word and the abundant grace bestowed on Him, but the Eikoi glorify the Mother of God for Her magnification, her majesty before God and the good deeds, pointing Her out to the faithful.

The entire Akathist is read in four parts [at Matins of Saturday of the fifth week, served late Friday evening], after the Little Ektenia the first and

second of the appointed Kathismas, also after the third and sixth Odes of the Canon. Each section begins and ends in the singing of the Kontakion "O Victorious Leader". In last section, besides this, before this Kontakion one repeats the first Eikos: "The First of Angels". At the singing "O Victorious Leader" one censes the entire temple, beginning at the altar. The Typikon (Ustav) says to read the Akathist in the sanctuary; but some find it more convenient to read it in the middle of the church before the analogion with an icon of the Praises of the Theotokos and with one or two candle stands before the analogion. Thus for the reading each article of the Akathist the priest leaves the sanctuary through the Royal Doors. After the reading he returns to the sanctuary, and the Royal Doors are closed. At the reading of the Akathist the deacon accompanies the priest and censes before the analogion. At Matins we sing the Great Doxology. "At the meal we eat cooked food with oil and we drink wine, thankful for our Most Holy Lady Theotokos for her past miracles".
Bulgakov Handbook

From the Triodion

With God's help we have rounded the turning-post of the Fast. Let us run the remainder of the course with all our strength and win a victor's crown.
Monday Matins Canon of the Fifth Week

The holy Fast feeds our hearts, ripening within us thoughts acceptable to God, and causing the deep abyss of our passions to dry up; and with the rain of compunction, it cleanses those who in faith offer praise to the Almighty. *Monday Matins Canon*

Fleeing from the icy cold of self-indulgence, let us all warm ourselves with the light of abstinence and the Holy Spirit. *Tuesday Matins Canon of the Fifth Week*

Cleansed through fasting, let us draw near to the mountain of the virtues, and let us clearly hear what God will say within us; for He will speak to us of peace and illumination and the healing of our broken souls. *Tuesday Matins Canon of the Fifth Week*

From St. John of the Ladder

He who is proud of his natural advantages, I mean cleverness, ability to learn, skill in reading, a clear pronunciation, quick understanding, and all such gifts received by us without labor, will never obtain the supernatural blessings, because he who is unfaithful in a little is also unfaithful and vainglorious in much. *Step 22.31*

It is a sign of the beginning of health when our thought no longer prides itself on its natural gifts. But as long as it has that stench in its nose, it cannot detect the fragrance of myrrh. *Step 25.22*

Contrition is one thing, self-knowledge is another, humility is another.

Contrition is the result of a fall. He who falls is crushed, and he stands in prayer without boldness but with praiseworthy audacity, as one who is shattered, steadying himself with the staff of hope and using it

to drive off the hound of despair.

Humility is Christ's spiritual doctrine, noetically introduced into the inner chamber of the soul by those who are accounted worthy of it. It cannot be defined by perceptible words. *Step 25.38-41*

The Master, knowing that the virtue of the soul is modelled on outward behavior, took a towel and showed us how to walk the way of humility. For the soul becomes like its bodily occupations. It conforms itself to its activities and takes its shape from them. Authority served as a ground for arrogance for one of the angels, although that was not why it was conferred on him. *Step 25.58*

When our soul leaves this world we shall not be blamed for not having worked miracles, or for not having been theologians, or for not having been rapt in divine visions. But we shall certainly have to give an account to God of why we have not unceasingly mourned. *Step 7.80*

Listen to me, listen, all you malicious reckoners of other men's accounts! If it is true (as it really is true) that 'with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged,' then whatever sins we blame our neighbor for, whether bodily or spiritual, we shall fall into them ourselves. That is certain. *Step 10.9*

Do not regard the feelings of the a person who speaks to you about his neighbor disparagingly, but rather say to him: 'Stop, brother! I fall into graver sins every day, so how can I criticize him?' In this way you will achieve two things: you will heal yourself and your neighbor with one plaster. This is one of the shortest ways to the forgiveness of sins; I mean, not to judge. 'Judge not, and ye shall not be judged. *Step 10.7*

An angry person is a willing epileptic, who due to an involuntary tendency keeps convulsing and falling down. *Step 8.11*

If the Holy Spirit is peace of soul, as He is said to be and He is in reality, and if anger is disturbance of heart, as it actually is and as it is said to be, then nothing so prevents His presence in us as anger. *Step 8.14*

He whose will and desire in conversation is to establish his own opinion, even though what he says is true, should recognize that he is sick with the devil's disease. And if he behaves like this only in conversation with his equals, then perhaps the rebuke of his superiors may heal him. But if he acts in this way even with those who are greater and wiser than he, then his malady is humanly incurable. *Step 4.48*

He who has tasted the things on high easily despises what is below. But he who has not tasted things above finds joy in possessions. *Step 17.6*

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. Skelton Baptism
- 1 May Holy Pascha, Picnic, Egg Hunt
- 28 May Baptism of Estefania Dean
- 11 June, Saturday, Installation of Bishop Alexander

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!