

The Confessor's Tongue for May 1, A. D. 2016

Great and Holy Pascha, the Feast of Feasts; Christ is Risen! Indeed, He 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.

Sentenced to Immortality

St. Justin of Chelije

Man sentenced God to death; by His Resurrection, He sentenced man to immortality. In return for a beating, He gives an embrace; for abuse, a blessing; for death, immortality. Man never showed so much hate for God as when he crucified Him; and God never showed more love for man than when He arose. Man even wanted to reduce God to a mortal, but God by His Resurrection made man immortal. The crucified God is Risen and has killed death. Death is no more. Immortality has surrounded man and all the world.

By the Resurrection of the God-Man, human nature has been led irreversibly onto the path of immortality, and has become dreadful to death itself. For before the Resurrection of Christ, death was dreadful to man, but after the Resurrection of Christ, man has become more dreadful to death. When man lives by faith in the Risen God-Man, he lives above death, out of its reach; it is a footstool for his feet: "O Death, where is thy sting? O Hades, where is thy victory?" (I Cor. 15:55). When a man belonging to Christ dies, he simply sets aside his body like clothing, in which he will again be vested on the day of Dread Judgement.

Before the Resurrection of the God-Man, death was the second nature of man: life first, death second. But by His Resurrection, the Lord has changed everything: immortality has become the second nature of man, it has become natural for man; and death – unnatural. As before the Resurrection of Christ, it was natural for men to be mortal, so after the Resurrection of Christ, it was natural for men to be immortal.

By sin, man became mortal and transient; by the Resurrection of the God-Man, he became immortal and perpetual. In this is the power, the might, the all-mightiness of the Resurrection of Christ. Without it, there would have been no Christianity. Of all miracles, this is the greatest miracle. All other miracles have it as their source and lead to it. From it grow faith, love, hope, prayer, and love for God. Behold: the fugitive disciples, having run away from Jesus when He died, return to Him because He is risen. Behold: the Centurion confessed Christ as the Son of God when he saw the Resurrection from the grave. Behold: all the first Christians became Christian because the Lord Jesus is risen, because death was vanquished. This is what no other faith has; this is what lifts the Lord Christ above all other gods and men; this is what, in the most undoubted manner, shows and demonstrates that Jesus Christ is the One True God and Lord in all the world.

Because of the Resurrection of Christ, because of His victory over death, men have become, continue to

become, and will continue becoming Christians. The entire history of Christianity is nothing other than the history of a unique miracle, namely, the Resurrection of Christ, which is unbrokenly threaded through the hearts of Christians from one day to the next, from year to year, across the centuries, until the Dread Judgment.

Man is born, in fact, not when his mother bring him into the world, but when he comes to believe in the Risen Christ, for then he is born to life eternal, whereas a mother bears children for death, for the grave. The Resurrection of Christ is the mother of us all, all Christians, the mother of immortals. By faith in the Resurrection, man is born anew, born for eternity. "That is impossible!" says the skeptic. But you listen to what the Risen God-Man says: "All things are possible to him that believeth!" (Mark 9:23). The believer is he who lives, with all his heart, with all his soul, with all his being, according to the Gospel of the Risen Lord Jesus.

Faith is our victory, by which we conquer death; faith in the Risen Lord Jesus. Death, where is your sting? The sting of death is sin. The Lord "has removed the sting of death." Death is a serpent; sin is its fangs. By sin, death puts its poison into the soul and into the body of man. The more sins a man has, the more bites, through which death puts its poison in him.

When a wasp stings a man, he uses all his strength to remove the sting. But when sin wounds him, this sting of death, what should be done? One must call upon the Risen Lord Jesus in faith and prayer, that He may remove the sting of death from the soul. He, in His great loving-kindness, will do this, for He is overflowing with mercy and love. When many wasps attack a man's body and wound it with many stings, that man is poisoned and dies. The same happens with a man's soul, when many sins wound it with their stings: it is poisoned and dies a death with no resurrection.

Conquering sin in himself through Christ, man overcomes death. If you have lived the day without vanquishing a single sin of yours, know that you have become deadened. Vanquish one, two, or three of your sins, and behold: you have become younger than the youth which does not age, young in immortality and eternity. Never forget that to believe in the Resurrection of the Lord Christ means to carry out a continuous fight with sins, with evil, with death.

If a man fights with sins and passions, this demonstrates that he indeed believes in the Risen Lord; if he fights with them, he fights for life eternal. If he does not fight, his faith is in vain. If man's faith is not a fight for immortality and eternity, than tell me, what is it? If faith in Christ does not bring us to resurrection and life eternal, than what use is it to us? If Christ is not risen, that meant that neither sin nor

death has been vanquished, than why believe in Christ?

For the one who by faith in the Risen Lord fights with each of his sins there will be affirmed in him gradually the feeling that Christ is indeed risen, has indeed vanquished the sting of sin, has indeed vanquished death on all the fronts of combat. Sin gradually diminishes the soul in man, driving it into death, transforming it from immortality to mortality, from incorruption to corruption. The more the sins, the more the mortal man. If man does not feel immortality in himself, know that he is in sins, in bad thoughts, in languid feelings. Christianity is an appeal: Fight with death until the last breath, fight until a final victory has been reached. Every sin is a desertion; every passion is a retreat; every vice is a defeat.

One need not be surprised that Christians also die bodily. This is because the death of the body is sowing. The mortal body is sown, says the Apostle Paul, and it grows, and is raised in an immortal body (I Corinthians 15:42-44). The body dissolves, like a sown seed, that the Holy Spirit may quicken and perfect it. If the Lord Christ had not been risen in body, what use would it have for Him? He would not have saved the entire man. If His body did not rise, then why was He incarnate?

Why did He take on Himself flesh, if He gave it nothing of His Divinity?

If Christ is not risen, then why believe in Him? To be honest, I would never have believed in Him had He not risen and had not therefore vanquished death. Our greatest enemy was killed and we were given immortality. Without this, our world is a noisy display of revolting stupidity and despair, for neither in Heaven nor under Heaven is there a greater stupidity than this world without the Resurrection; and there is not a greater despair than this life without immortality. There is no being in a single world more miserable than man who does not believe in the resurrection of the dead. It would have been better for such a man never to have been born.

In our human world, death is the greatest torment and inhumane horror. Freedom from this torment and horror is salvation. Such a salvation was given the race of man by the Vanquisher of death – the Risen God-Man. He related to us all the mystery of salvation by His Resurrection. To be saved means to assure our body and soul of immortality and life eternal. How do we attain this? By no other way than by a theanthropic life, a new life, a life in the Risen Lord, in and by the Lord's Resurrection.

For us Christians, our life on earth is a school in which we learn how to assure ourselves of resurrection and life eternal. For what use is this life if we cannot acquire by it life eternal? But, in order to be resurrected with the Lord Christ, man must first suffer with Him, and live His life as his own. If he does this, then on Pascha he can say with Saint Gregory the Theologian: "Yesterday I was crucified with Him, today I live with Him; yesterday I was

buried with Him, today I rise with Him" (Troparion 2, Ode 3, Matins, Pascha).

Christ's Four Gospels are summed up in only four words. They are: "Christ is Risen! Indeed He is risen!" In each of these words is a Gospel, and in the Four Gospels is all the meaning of all God's world, visible and invisible. When all knowledge and all the thoughts of men are concentrated in the cry of the Paschal salutation, "Christ is Risen!", then immortal joy embraces all beings and in joy responds: "Indeed He is risen!"

Prayer in the Paschal Season

Greeting: The Paschal greeting, "Christ is risen!" and the response, "Indeed, He is risen!" are used many times in the services from Pascha until the Leavetaking of the Feast forty days later. It also is a greeting to be exchanged daily during the entire Paschal season between all believing Christians as a proclamation of our faith in the risen Lord!

Paschal Troparion: We sing the troparion for the feast many times during the 40 days of Pascha. Like the paschal greeting, the paschal troparion proclaims our faith in the triumph of Christ over death. Thus we sing it not only at church but also at home. "Christ is risen..." may be sung before meals throughout the paschal season and at the beginning of our evening and morning prayers from Thomas Sunday to the Leavetaking of Pascha.

Prostrations: We do not kneel or make prostrations either in services at church or during prayer at home during the Fifty Days between Pascha and Pentecost (as well as all Sundays of the year). Following a tradition that comes down from the Holy Apostles, Orthodox Christians have ever held that kneeling is incompatible with the joy of the Resurrection we experience during the Fifty Days and on all Sundays. Whenever we would ordinarily kneel or make a prostration during prayer on these days, we make a bow to the waist (*metania*) instead.

Prayers to Omit: The introductory prayers "Glory to Thee, O God, Glory to Thee!" and "O Heavenly King..." are not said either in the liturgical services or in prayers at home from Holy Pascha until the Feast of Pentecost. The omission of the beautiful prayer to the Holy Spirit should awaken within us a longing for and expectation of the coming of the Comforter at the Feast of Pentecost when we resume saying this prayer.

Trisagion Replaced: The triple recitation of "Holy God, Holy Might, Holy Immortal: have mercy on us" at the beginning of liturgical services and our prayers at home is replaced by the triple repetition of the paschal troparion ("Christ is risen...") from the Sunday of Pascha until the Leave-taking of the Feast. The same is true for the triple recitation of "Come let us worship and fall down before God our King".

Paschal Office (Hours): A special short service of prayer known as the Paschal Office replaces the daily services of Hours, Compline, and the Midnight Office during Bright Week (see bulletin for text). The

faithful also say the Paschal Office for the morning and evening prayers and for the Prayers of Thanksgiving after Holy Communion on these days. The Paschal Office is a beautiful distillation of the joyful prayer of the Feast.

Fasting: There is no fasting during Bright Week, because it is a joyous extension of Pascha Sunday. The services are substantially the same as Pascha Sunday. On Wednesdays and Fridays from Thomas Sunday until Pentecost, fasting is mitigated with wine and oil being permitted, and fish on the Wednesday of Mid-Pentecost.

On the Artos

The Artos is an appropriate symbol for the risen Christ, who is the Bread of Life and gives Himself to us as bread.

The blessing of the Artos is one of the special paschal rites, "in honor and glory and memory of the glorious resurrection" of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Artos is understood to be a Proskynon with an image on it of the cross crowned with thorns or with the image of the resurrection of Christ as signs of victory of Christ over death. The word "Artos" is Greek; translated into Russian it means "bread".

The historical origin of the Artos is as follows: the Apostles, who were accustomed to partake a meal together with the resurrected Lord (Acts 10:41), after His ascension to heaven, remembering His covenantal words: "I am with you always" (Mt. 28:20), felt the invisible presence of the Lord through living faith in their assemblies, but could not see Him with carnal eyes. The natural expression of this burning faith of the disciples to their Teacher and their desire to have a constant reminder of His abiding with them, was that at a meal they left an unoccupied place for Jesus Christ to recline with them, but placed on the table before that place some bread as if for Him, and each time after the end of the meal, lifting up thanksgiving to God, lifted this bread, saying: "Christ is Risen."

When the disciples of Jesus Christ went away to various countries for the proclamation of the Gospel, they whenever possible tried to observe this custom: each of the Holy Apostles in whatever country founded a new society of followers of Christ and when beginning a meal left a place and a fragment of bread in honor of the Savior, and after the end of the meal together with them glorified the risen Lord, raising up the fragment of bread placed in memory of Him.

What is accepted by the first students of the Gospel from the lips of the Apostles and was done by them daily, that is what the fathers of the Church of the following centuries have applied to the feast of the Resurrection of Christ in order to keep forever the apostolic tradition in the Church. In this way this custom was really kept in the Church and through a number of centuries reached our time. As the Apostles during their assemblies have placed the particle of bread in the place appointed for the Savior reminded them of the risen Christ, so, intentionally

the Holy Church even at the present time places an Artos on Holy Pascha in the temple in full view of the faithful to serve as their same reminder of the invisible presence of the risen Lord with us. Thus, preparing the Artos, the Holy Church imitates the Apostles and by these blessed loaves remembers the appearances of the risen Lord to the Apostles.

At the same time the Artos reminds us that Jesus Christ by His death on the cross also has become for us the rising of the truly living bread. Such is the meaning of the Artos and is revealed in the prayer of its blessing (see below). Besides, in this prayer the priest, calling down the blessing of God on the blessed Artos, asks the Lord to heal any infirmity and illness and to grant healing to all who eat of the Artos. According to the Supplemental Book of Needs in monasteries the sanctification of the Artos is done on the first day of Holy Pascha and is done as follows: The Artos, which is bread usually with a cross on it prepared for this, is brought to the priest in the sanctuary. After the Prayer before the Ambo and the ending of the Divine Liturgy, the Deacon says: "Let us pray to the Lord", and the clerics: "Lord, have mercy" and the priest reads this prayer over it:

"O All-powerful God and Almighty Lord, Who by Thy servant Moses during the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt, and the liberation of Thy people from the bitter slavery of Pharaoh, didst command that a lamb be slain, prefiguring the Lamb, Thy beloved Son our Lord Jesus Christ, who voluntarily was slain on the cross for us, taking away the sins of the whole world, do Thou now also, we humbly pray Thee, look down upon this bread and bless and sanctify it. For we Thy servants, in honor and glory and in commemoration of the glorious Resurrection of Thy Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, by Whom we also have received remission, freedom and release from bondage of the eternal slavery of the enemy and from the indissoluble bonds of Hades, do now offer this before Thy Majesty on this bright, all-glorious and saving day of Pascha. Grant that we who offer this and kiss it and eat of it become partakers of Thy heavenly blessing, and by Thy power burn away from us every sickness and infirmity, granting health to all. For Thou art the source of blessings, and the Bestower of healing, and unto Thee we send up glory, to the Unoriginate Father, with Thine Only-begotten Son, and Thine All-holy, Good and Life-creating Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages".
Choir: "Amen".

Immediately the priest sprinkles the Artos with Holy Water (of Theophany) saying: "This Artos is blessed and sanctified by the sprinkling of this Holy Water, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen", three times. And after this he goes out and places it on the Analogion, and the people, as they receive the Antidoron, kiss the Artos.

On the day of Pascha and during all Bright Week the Artos with an image of the Resurrection of the

Lord is placed on an Analogion purposely arranged either in the sanctuary or in the temple. In monasteries after the Liturgy there is a procession to the refectory with the icon of the Resurrection of Christ, with the Artos, with a lampada or two, with the ringing of all bells simultaneously, and with the singing of "Christ is Risen!". After the meal there is a lifting up of the Artos. At the raising of the Artos, the cellarer says: "Christ is Risen!" once; and all respond: "Indeed, He is Risen". Then, having signed the Artos cross-wisely, he says: "Let us worship His three-day resurrection", and places the Artos on the Panagiaron (a special vessel). Then everyone kisses the Artos, singing the ninth ode of the canon of Pascha: "Shine, shine". After kissing the Artos sing the Hypakoe and the Kontakion of Pascha, then comes the Dismissal, and the Artos is then returned to the temple, according to the former order, and is placed in its proper place in the temple (for details see "The Order of the Blessing of the Artos on the day of Holy Pascha in the Ustav and the Pentecostarion). In parish churches during the cross processions done during Holy Pascha (see about them below), the Artos is carried around the temple. Both on the first day of Pascha and during all Bright Week the Artos with the image of the Resurrection of the Lord is placed on the Analogion in the temple.

The Forty Paschal Days

St. Leo the Great of Rome (+461)

The forty days after Jesus spent in the desert before He began His public ministry were a period of preparation for His task of proclaiming the Kingdom of God to the people of Israel. After His Resurrection, He spent another forty days preparing His disciples for their task of preaching the Good News to the whole world. Throughout this time, His bodily presence remained with them, visible and tangible, in order that their faith in His Resurrection might be strengthened by the evidence of their senses.

The period between Christ's Resurrection and Ascension was in no means uneventful, for it was the time when the great truths of our redemption were made clear to the Apostles.

A Homily of St. Nicholas of Zicha

"Why seek ye the living among the dead?"

The angel of God asks the myrrh-bearing women, as if in wonder: "Why seek ye the living among the dead?" This witness of God and His power was seeming to say: How could you for one moment imagine that He could be death's booty? Do you not know that He is the Source of life? Do you not know that all life is through Him, and that no living creature can borrow a single drop of life from any other source? Did He not show you clearly enough on earth His power over live and over death? Who gave life to the dead Lazarus? Who withdrew life from the barren fig tree?

Oh, my brethren, let us stop seeking the living among the dead. If any of us is still doing so, let him stop this soul-destroying task. It is a vain task, one for Jews and pagans, not for Christians. We know that the Lord, the Giver of life, is not in the tomb but on His throne of glory in heaven. A spirit undimmed by sin looks into the heavens and sees no tomb; but a spirit darkened by sins looks into the tomb and sees no heavens. Sin and virtue both govern the spiritual sight of a man and reveal to him the whole of their realms, held in opposition one to the other. Sin turns the eyes of the spirit earthward and reveals the realm of corruption; virtue turns the eyes of the spirit heavenwards and reveals the realm of immortality, and the risen Christ as the King of that realm.

Oh, my brethren, let us seek life, not of creation, but of the Creator. And let us not commit the even graver sin of seeking the Creator in the created tomb or the radiant Immortal One in the darkness of death.

O Lord Jesus Christ, we sing to Thee: raise us also up to eternal life from the corruption and darkness of death. To Thee be glory and praise forever. Amen.

Upcoming Events 2015-16

1 May Holy Pascha, 3:00 p.m. Picnic, Egg Hunt
28 May Baptism of Estefania Dean 2:30 p.m.
11 June, Saturday, Installation of Bishop Alexander
30-31 July, 15-Year Anniversary with Bishop Alexander

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!