

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

3rd Sunday after Pentecost, New Martyrs of the Turkish Yoke, St. Anthony of the Kiev Caves
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.

New Martyrs of the Turkish Yoke

The New Martyrs are those who suffered for their faith under the Moslems from the fall of Constantinople to the Turks in 1453 until now. St. Nicodemus (+1809) of the Holy Mountain and a couple others labored for many years to gather the accounts of the new martyrs. We have the names and individual accounts of martyrdom of 166 of them, but there were many more. We celebrate this feast, appointed for the third Sunday after Pentecost, for the first time at St. Maximus this weekend.

In their violent hatred of Christianity, the Moslem Turks embarked on a course of persecution designed to effectively muzzle the flock of Christ. Most of the churches of Constantinople were converted to mosques. Their movable icons were destroyed and whole walls of inspiring and radiantly beautiful mosaics were covered with paint or plaster. Crosses were torn off domes and broken off the roofs of churches. The Moslems guaranteed Christians a definite place in Turkish society; but it was a place of guaranteed inferiority. Orthodox Christians were required to pay an annual head tax, like cattle. To the Turks they were unbelievers, and they had absolutely no rights of citizenship. They even had to wear distinctive dress. They could not marry Moslems, nor could they engage in missionary work of any kind; in fact, it was a crime, usually punishable by death, to convert a Moslem to the Christian Faith.

As if these measures were not enough, the Moslems actively undertook to control the Church itself. The Sultan ironically considered himself the "protector" of Orthodoxy, supposedly guaranteeing the existence of the Church, but actually keeping it in the vise of a terrible stranglehold. Under this system each Patriarch had to pay a stiff fee to the Sultan before he could be enthroned. Unable to raise the funds himself, the Patriarch was forced to exact a fee from each new bishop before installing him in his diocese, and this burden was eventually placed on the flocks. Taking advantage of this financially lucrative situation, the Turks forced re-elections of the Patriarch with undue rapidity. The majority of the Sultans themselves were sick, demon-ridden men, whose irrational rule and unbridled power only heightened the already demoralizing effect of Turkish rule on the Church. It is not without reason that an Englishman living in Istanbul in the 17th century wrote these words: "Every good Christian ought with sadness to consider and with compassion to behold this once glorious Church tearing and rending out her bowels and giving them as food to vultures and ravens."

The aim of Orthodoxy in the Ottoman Empire became, simply, one of survival. Little could they know, in 1453, that the heavy sword of Islam would weigh upon them not for a generation or two, but for

five hundred years, five long centuries of darkness and difficulty. But even under such ruinous circumstances, God did not allow the light of Christianity to be extinguished. It was kept alive through the courageous confession of the New Martyrs of the Turkish Yoke. Holy New Martyrs, pray to God for us!
Taken largely from a lecture by Fr. Alexey Young.

The Commandments of Christ

"If ye love Me, keep my commandments." John 14:15

Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed. Then said they unto him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent. John 6:27

A common distortion of the Christian faith asserts that there is no work in salvation but merely a gift received by grace. Christ's words reveal this view for the distortion it is.

Having fed the five thousand in the wilderness, slipping away, and then being found again by the multitude, Jesus directs these words to those who had gone to considerable trouble to search for him, working to find him in hopes that He would again feed them. Here before them stands the eternal Word of God made man, and they are occupied with the desire for bodily food when Jesus would give them something much more valuable.

Acknowledging their misplaced zeal in laboring for bodily food, Jesus by his command redirects them to labor for spiritual food ('meat' in the KJV often has the meaning of 'food' in general). Bodily food perishes, either by spoiling before it can be eaten or by being consumed, processed, and excreted by the body. The benefit is temporary, and food must be sought again; and no matter what, the body eventually dies. In contrast, Jesus offers a food that only He, the Son of God, can give, which endures unto everlasting life.

King Solomon observes, "All the labour of man is for his mouth, and yet the appetite is not filled" (Ecclesiastes 6:7). Since the curse came upon the earth, man must earn his bread by the sweat of his brow. The earth does not gratuitously support man without work. God meant this to bring man to repentance, but many, blinded by the temporary pleasures of the body, work only with their satisfaction in mind.

Some heretics (the Messalians, or Euchites, 4th to 7th centuries) read this as a command to live without working. Read in the context of all of Scripture, this interpretation is seen to be mistaken. Until the King returns and restores Paradise on earth, man will eat his bread by the sweat of his brow, and those in the

Church who refuse to work will not be given to eat at Church expense. But Jesus would not have us live our lives with only food for the body in mind, and so he calls us to work for that food which remains in us to produce everlasting life.

The distortion of faith which opposes faith and works and reduces salvation to a gift without any work falls on this command of Christ to labor. Christ's own parables speak of the labor required to acquire the kingdom. To acquire the pearl of great price or the field with the hidden treasure, the man must go to the labor of selling all that he has and making the purchase. Christ in the Sermon on the Mount commands us to do the work of asking, seeking, and knocking in order to receive, find, and have the way opened. He declares those blessed who hunger and thirst after righteousness. And here, further to confound the distorters of the Faith, he declares faith itself—faith that is so often set in opposition to works—to be the work of God. "What shall we do to works the works of God?" the people ask. Jesus answers, "The work of God is to believe on Him whom God sent."

Acquiring spiritual food requires labor. The children of Israel in the wilderness had to rise early to gather the manna God gave six days a week before the sun melted it, and from this labor of gathering their bread they rested on the seventh day, foreshadowing our work in securing the "daily bread" we ask of God each day. Man must work to prioritize his life to make room for the work of seeking that food. He must do the work: the prayer, the fasting, the almsgiving, the searching the Scriptures, and the keeping of Christ's commandments to be purified, that his heart may be opened to God and be able to receive that food unto His salvation. The food is a gift from God, to be sure, but the heart must be prepared to receive it as the ground is prepared to receive the wheat seed. There is labor in the search and in the preparation. Christ calls us away from our preoccupation with the temporary needs of a body that will die and need nothing that we may labor to gain the food that will give life to our souls and bodies as well. *Fr. Justin Frederick*

Concerning the Holy Prospora

Prospora, from the Greek which means "that which is brought as an offering" is the term used for the bread which offered during the divine Liturgy to God and of which we thereafter partake in Holy Communion.

The round prospora is baked with prayer from pure wheat flour, water, salt, and yeast. It is made of two round pieces of dough stuck together, one of lesser diameter than the other. This indicates that the perfect Lamb of God who was offered for us was one person of two natures, human and divine.

The top piece is stamped with a special stamp in the form of a cross with the Greek letters IC XC NI

KA in the four quarters, which means "Jesus Christ has conquered."

In the Slavic tradition, one of these loaves is prepared as "the lamb" which is consecrated during the Liturgy and consumed at Communion. Thus all communicants partake of one loaf, for there is but one Lord and Lamb, Jesus Christ. Four other prospora are used also: one from which a piece is taken for the Theotokos, one from which nine particles are taken for the nine ranks of saints, one from which commemorations are made for the living, and one for the departed. These particles remain on the diskos during Communion and are placed in the chalice only after Communion to be consumed by the deacon or priest.

In the Greek tradition, only one large prospora is used from which all the particles are taken.

The bread which we receive after the Divine Liturgy, known as "antidoron," is given especially to those who for some reason or other did not or could not prepare for the Holy Communion. This bread is the remainder of the loaves from which the small particles were taken out to be used in the Liturgy for the Holy Lamb and the other commemorative particles, and therefore it has a special blessing, although it is not the Body of Christ. Therefore, in many parishes, the antidoron is offered to catechumens and non-Orthodox also.

The faithful should partake of this blessed bread with great piety, taking care that a single crumb does not fall astray, and then when it is consumed it is done with fasting (even though we do not receive the Holy Mysteries, we normally come to the Divine Liturgy fasting so we can receive the antidoron and can participate in the service without feeling dull or heavy from eating food), and not treated as an ordinary food. Some pious Orthodox Christians keep a number of small particles of Prospora at home, and after their morning prayers (this is the first thing eaten in the morning to "break the fast" kept while one sleeps) partake of it, "instead of Holy Communion", as it was intended; in this way the whole week is sanctified and we continue to participate in the previously-celebrated Liturgy.

St. Innocent, Enlightener of the Aleuts

"...strive to possess and stir up within yourself the desire to do what the Holy Scriptures teach. If you presently lack such desires, fall down in fervent prayer before our Savior Jesus Christ and ask Him to grant you this. And once grace calls you to the way of salvation, never resist it."

Upcoming Events 2016
30-31 July, 15-Year Anniversary w/ Bishop Alexander
1-14 August Dormition Fast
12 August All-Night Vigil

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!