

The Confessor's Tongue for November 20, A. D. 2016

22nd Sunday after Pentecost, Prefeast of the Entrance of the Theotokos

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.

Preparation for Communion at Optina Monastery in the Nineteenth Century

According to the monastery rule, laymen must, for two days before Communion, eat food prepared without oil. There was always a special table for those who were preparing for Communion. During this time [of preparation] one had to attend all church services. The services were set forth as follows: Vespers and the reading of the Canons lasted from 3:30 until 5:30 p.m. Afterwards, at 7:00, there was supper, and at 8:30 there were Evening Prayers in a particular church [the monastery had several churches and chapels]. Then people would go and rest until 12:30 a.m. At this time the bell would sound for Matins. This would last until 4:00 a.m. From 4:00 until 5:00, the Canons were read and the prayers before Holy Communion. We were so exhausted after the night that we were falling asleep. The early Liturgy was at 7:00 a.m.

When blessing those preparing for Communion, Elder Barsanuphius advised them, after Vespers [the night before] not to eat anything before communing the Holy Mysteries. In exceptional cases he would permit someone to have tea. *From Elder Barsanuphius of Optina, by Victor Afanasiev.*

And we think it strict to be asked to attend at least a part of a two-hour vigil on Saturday night in preparation for Holy Communion! If only we understood what we are doing in Holy Communion, what a grace is given to us, what a privilege we are vouchsafed, we would not come only on Sunday morning and commune week after week but would take pains to prepare ourselves more carefully. What grace we might know, what experience of God we might have, if we prepared ourselves to commune with greater seriousness and care!

Why Are Vigil Lamps Lit Before Icons?

St. Nikolai of Zicha

First, because our faith is light. Christ said: 'I am the Light of the world' (John 8:12). The light of the vigil lamp reminds us of that light by which Christ illumines our souls.

Second, in order to remind us of the radiant character of the saint before whose icon we light the vigil lamp, for saints are called 'sons of light' (John 12:36, Luke 16:8).

Third, in order to serve as a reproach to us for our dark deeds, for our evil thoughts and desires, and in order to call us to the path of evangelical light; and so that we would more zealously try to fulfill the commandments of the Savior: 'Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven' (Matthew 5:16).

Fourth, so that the vigil lamp would be our small sacrifice to God, who gave Himself completely as a

sacrifice for us, and as a small sign of our great gratitude and radiant love for Him from whom we ask in prayer for life, and health, and salvation, and everything only boundless heavenly love can bestow.

Fifth, so that terror would strike the evil powers who sometimes assail us even at the time of prayer and lead away our thoughts from the Creator. The evil powers love the darkness and tremble at every light, especially at that which belongs to God and to those who please Him.

Sixth, so that this light would rouse us to selflessness. Just as the oil and the wick burn in the vigil lamp, submissive to our will, so let our souls also burn with the flame of love in all our sufferings, always being submissive to God's will.

Seventh, in order to teach us that just as a vigil lamp cannot be lit without our hand, so too, our heart, our inward vigil lamp, cannot be lit without the holy fire of God's grace, even if it were to be filled with all the virtues. All these virtues are ours, after all, like combustible material, but the fire which ignites them proceeds from God.

Eighth, in order to remind us that before anything else the Creator of the world created light, and after that everything else in order: 'And God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light.' And it must be so also at the beginning of our spiritual life, so that before anything else the light of Christ's truth would shine within us. From this light of Christ's truth subsequently every good deed is created, springs up, and grows in us.

21 November:

Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple

When the Most Holy Virgin became three years old, her parents, true to their vow to the Lord to dedicate their child (refer to Sept. 9) to Him, in procession with young maidens "adorned with the beauty of virtues" "with lamps in their hands" and accompanied by relatives and acquaintances, "with gladness" solemnly led their Most-pure Daughter into the Jerusalem Temple "to be brought up in divine grace" "before the Lord." Though at that time the Most Holy Virgin, as expressed in church hymns, was yet "three years old in the body" she was already "many years in the spirit" although still "a child in the flesh, she was already perfect in soul". She looked at the temple of the Lord as at a paradisiacal dwelling of the glory of God, as at the most cultivated haven, for which Her soul thirsted more than the home of her parents, is why she entered into the temple majestically and rejoicing. The Holy Virgin was put on the first step of the temple and to the surprise of everyone, with no one supporting her, being encouraged by the spirit of love for God, climbed firmly up the fifteen steps of the temple. Invisible

angels of God surrounded her and served her. Embraced with priestly delight, the high priest Zechariah, "having blessed, receives" "the Holy young Child" "with rejoicing, as the dwelling place of God", and according to a special revelation of God, entered into the Holy of Holies where only the high priest entered once a year. Not only all the participants in this celebration were amazed, but also "the angels were amazed seeing the Most Pure as Virgin entering with glory into the Holy of Holies". Having left their daughter in the temple, Saints Joachim and Anna returned home, rejoicing and thanking God, who granted them the fulfillment of their vow to Him.

At this time, on the outside in front of the Jerusalem temple there were about thirty stone apartments, separate one from another, large and beautiful; on them were other apartments, and on those a third (as stories); in all there were ninety apartments, with everyone having a pleasant residence. In these apartments there were rooms for various persons: separately the maidens who lived there during the time they were dedicated to the services to God; separately widows lived there, promising God to keep the premises clean until their death; separately men, called supervisors, in the image of unmarried monks resided there. There were also other apartments for the comfort of pilgrims and strangers who came from a distance for worship in the temple. All of them served the Lord in the temple and had their livelihood from the church estates. The Most Holy Child Mary was lodged at the Jerusalem temple in the apartments where the maidens lived.

The Holy Young Child, living in the temple, spent all her time in prayer, reading the Word of God and thinking about God. She occupied half her time with her own needlework, especially loving to prepare clothes dedicated to serving in the temple; which she fulfilled while growing up, and occupied the other half with works of charity at the temple, serving the needy, the crippled and the infirm which tradition says, to whom she also gave all her food, herself eating only the "most glorious bread from heaven", brought to her by the angels", and "conversing with them". Living at the temple and devoting all her time to pious occupations, the Most Holy Virgin was continually used to being before the all-seeing, omniscient Lord God and His almighty will in soul and body, in mind and heart, in thought and desire, having formed in herself a living and firm faith in the word of the Lord, a fervent love for the Lord and for neighbor, an all-perfect fidelity to the will of God, the deepest humility and meekness, inscrutable patience and obedience to the word of the Lord. "Succeeding in wisdom and grace", she surpassed the high sincere qualities of those her age, as St. John of Damascus teaches, "presenting herself a paradigm of the best and purest life in comparison with others". In the early years of her life she lost her parents (see Sept. 9). After their death, she all the more turned to the One God with all her soul, and with all the desires of a pure heart and singularly sought Him out for joy and

consolation. Together with her growth and strengthening in spirit, she also grew in asceticism in her way of life. With diligence she expanded her meditation about God and prayer, and she ascended from power to power, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit grew in her. The "All-holy Spirit has sanctified all things, her dwelling inside the temple, and eating the heavenly food", "that she may become the divine Throne of the Master of all, His bridal chamber, His resting-place, and His dwelling filled with light", and "become the dwelling place of Him who was begotten of the Father without change before all ages, for the salvation of our souls". As though emulating her heavenly companions in purity and in the foreknowledge of her great destination, she firmly decided to be a Virgin forever and, when she reached her majority, she wedded herself to God, having made a sacred vow to virginity forever.

When the time has come for the Most Holy Virgin, according to the then existing custom, to leave the sacred dwelling of her pious formation and like other maidens to marry, she, "rich in goodness and purity of soul", declared to the high priest and to the priests her vow and with their advice and consent, for the protection of virginity, at that time being 11 years old, was betrothed to her relative, the aged righteous Joseph, and moved from the temple into his house which was in Nazareth.

In continuing her life the Most Holy Virgin Mary, as St. Ambrose of Milan attests, "was virgin not only in the flesh, but also in the spirit, restrained in her heart, divinely wise in her words wise, not hurried in her speech, chaste in her conversations, offends no one, wishes every one good, and does not shun the poor, and does not ridicule any one. Her visage was the paradigm of internal perfection; all day long she fasted. Sleep was betrayed only by the demand of need, but also as her body rested, her spirit was awake, repeating in dreams something read or reflecting about the some intention not fulfilled, or on some new plans. She left the house only for church, and then only traveling with close relatives. However, although she was outside the house accompanied by others, she was the best protection for herself. Others protected only her person, but she observed the customs by herself".

In the church hymns for this day the Most Holy Virgin "is piously praised", as "the most pure virgin", "more honorable and more glorious than the hosts on high", "the preaching of the prophets, the glory of the apostles, and the praise of the martyrs, and the renewal of all those born on earth", "the bridal chamber of God the Word", "the dwelling place of the King of All", "the Mother of God", "our glory and salvation".

Appealing on this present "joyful day" to "the assembly of the faithful" to this praise of the Most Holy Virgin, the Holy Church together with those present "on this all honorable feast" the example the Saints Joachim and Anna teaches us to fulfill pious vows. And the deeply instructive example of the

upbringing of the Most Holy Virgin explains to us our duties to our children that we must as early as possible and to take them to the temple of God more often, to accustom them to the full complement of prayers at home, teaching them in the law of the Lord, particularly in their growth to properly use their time to develop in them love for their neighbor and diligence to inspire obedience in them to the church rules (Ustav), and to waken and strengthen in them the spirit of piety and the fear of God. The beginning of the establishment of this feast of the Entry of the Ever-Virgin Mary into the Temple is not known with complete accuracy. Saint Gregory of Nyssa (4th century) first mentioned. In the ninth century St. Gregory of Nicomedia composed the stichera, which we now sing on this feast.

We keep the feast for four days until it leavetaking November 25. We may use the Troparion of the feast before meals in place of our usual prayer and the Kontakion after meals in place of our usual giving of thanks. *Adapted from the Bulgakov handbook.*

Entrance of Theotokos, Troparion, tone 4

Today is the prelude of the good will of God, / of the preaching of the salvation of mankind. / The Virgin appeareth in the temple of God, / in anticipation proclaiming Christ to all. / Let us rejoice and sing to her: / Rejoice, O Fulfillment // of the Creator's dispensation.

Entrance of Theotokos, Kontakion, tone 4

The all-pure Temple of the Savior, / the precious Bridal Chamber and Virgin, / the sacred treasure of the glory of God, / is led today into the house of the Lord, / and with her she bringeth the grace of the divine Spirit. / Of her God's angels sing in praise: // "She is indeed the heavenly Tabernacle."

A Catechism on Confession: How To Make a Good Confession

Now that we are in the Nativity Fast and look to make a good confession before Nativity, this may help.

When preparing to go to confession, every Orthodox Christian should try to remember all the sins that he has committed, whether voluntary or involuntary, and should examine his life in detail. If there are sins that were committed before his last confession, but which he then forgot to confess, he should mention these also.

When you come to confession, you should confess your sins sincerely, remembering that you are not confessing them to the priest, but to God Himself, Who already knows, but wants you to admit your wrongs and your guilt. You should not feel embarrassed before your spiritual father, because, being a man like yourself, he knows human weaknesses and the inclination that all people have towards sin, and thus he cannot judge you harshly when you come to confession. But maybe you are embarrassed to confess your sins before your spiritual father because you are afraid of losing his good

opinion? On the contrary, if you value his good opinion, you should understand that he will respect you all the more for the sincerity of your confession. Also, if you are ashamed and afraid to lay bare your sins before your spiritual father, how will you bear it when at the Dread Judgment your sins—if you have not been freed of them by true repentance—will be revealed before God Himself, His angels, and all mankind, both people you know and strangers? If you remember this, you will want to free yourself from your sins and from the punishment that they bring upon you, and will confess them in all sincerity before your spiritual father. You should hide nothing wrong that you have done, but at the same time you should not add anything extra, and not blame yourself for what you have not done by simply saying, "Everything I have done is sinful," or some such catch-phrase. Nor should you admit every sin you are asked about whether you have done it or not, as some people mistakenly think they should. Your confession must be realistic and therefore true.

Another reason why you should not simply say, "I have sinned in everything, word, deed, and thought, and by omission," without giving further details, is because your spiritual father needs to know exactly what you have done in order to give you good advice. Also such a short, undetailed confession means that you are avoiding what confession is intended to achieve, i.e. to bring you to admit what you have done and to admit that you were wrong in doing it. Your spiritual father already knows that you are a sinner, for no man is without sin; even the holy Apostle Paul described himself as the "chief of sinners." Each sin must be mentioned in turn, just as you would enumerate all your symptoms to a doctor. You should not just think of a couple of main trends to "discuss," and neglect to mention the innumerable other sins.

Do not mention the sins of others in your confession, unless this is necessary for your spiritual father to understand how and why you yourself have sinned. If you have a personal problem involving other people, which you would like to discuss with your spiritual father, or if you are in need of advice or some consolation for some unkindness that has been done to you, make an appointment to see your spiritual father at some other time. Also, do not use the fact that many people commit some sin that you have committed as an excuse for it. Still less say "but everyone does that." For one thing, you have come to confess your own sins, not those of others. How can you be sure that without exception every human being commits any given sin? Or even though you might know of their sin, how can you be sure they have not repented of it in their heart? Pay no heed to the sins of others. Oftentimes we imagine the motives and intentions and sinful inclinations of others, for no man knows the heart of another.

Confess your sins fully but concisely; one does not have to make a story of them! That in itself can be an evidence of pride. Particularly regarding carnal sins, do not go into detailed descriptions of sin. If your

spiritual father feels that you need to confess any particular sin in fuller detail, he will ask you about it, and then you should not hesitate to describe it fully and to answer all his questions.

Before going to confession make a thorough preparation, and examine your life so that you recognize your sins. If you wish you can write out a list, or keep a list day by day. In order to check your sins, it is wise to check them against some list. One can use the Ten Commandments, the Beatitudes, or the list of sins in the prayer of daily confession of sins read before going to sleep each day, or that in the prayer at the end of the Canon to the Guardian Angel in the Prayer Book. Such checking against a list is very beneficial, otherwise one tends to remember only the most serious sins, or the most noticeable or most extraordinarily, and to forget, perhaps deliberately, the underlying ones, the ones that have become habitual, and the things that we have forgotten even to remember as sins because they have become so much a part of our life. Sins of neglect, omission, and laziness often fall into this category, as do the ones that are seemingly respectable: pride, vanity, etc.

Do not try to make excuses for your sins, for the more that you justify yourself, the less forgiveness you will receive. It is important that you yourself should fully realize how wrong each sin you have committed is—and the more you understand the wrongfulness of any sin, the easier it will be for you to make an effort of will to avoid committing it in the future. However, you may mention if there is any special circumstance, such as some particular temptation or outside pressure that it would be useful for your spiritual father to know, so that he can advise you how to deal with it. *from "The Shepherd", London*

Confession Mechanics

When we come for Confession, we stand before the icon of Christ and the Cross; we cross ourselves and bow twice, kiss the cross and the icon, and then cross ourselves and bow a third time.

When our Confession is done, we again cross ourselves and bow twice, kiss the Cross and icon, and the cross and bow a third time. We then turn, bow to the priest, and ask his blessing by holding out our hands in the form a cross, right over left, and then kiss the priest's hand when he finishes giving his blessing.

During Confession, we do not use other people's names. We may speak of our husband, our wife, our third child, our mother, our father, our friend, but we don't use their names. This helps keep us focused on our sin and from speaking unnecessarily about others in our confession.

When we come to confession, we come ready to name our sins as specifically as we can. Most of us would do best to have a list of things written down, which we have prepared beforehand to confess. We name our sins, our faults, our failures to love God with all our heart, our neighbor as our self, our wives as Christ loved His Church. Any 'story' needed to give

the context of the sin should be only what is needed and be brief.

This last item becomes particularly important as the parish grows and more people are needing to come to Confession. If you do due diligence and come prepared, the confession line can be kept moving.

The Short Prayer Rule of St. Seraphim

From the Optina Monastery Prayerbook 2003

In extreme cases, if there is no possibility of reading the morning or evening prayers, the short rule of St. Seraphim of Sarov is used.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Meet it is in truth to bless thee, O Theotokos, who art every blessed and all-blameless and the Mother of our God, more honorable than the Cherubim, and more glorious without compare than the Seraphim, who without corruption gavest birth to God the Word, verily, Theotokos, we magnify thee.

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. (*thrice*)

Rejoice O Virgin Theotokos, Mary full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, for thou hast borne the Savior of our souls. (*thrice*)

Nicene Creed I believe in one God, the Father almighty, Maker of Heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Only-begotten, begotten of the Father before all ages; Light of Light, true God of true God; begotten, not made; of one essence with the Father; by whom all things were made. Who for us men and our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and became man. And was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered and was buried; and the third day He rose again according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven and sitteth at the right hand of the Father. And He shall come again with glory to judge the living and the dead; of His kingdom there shall be no end. And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of life, who proceedeth from the Father, who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified, who spake by the prophets. In one holy, catholic, and apostolic Church; I confess one baptism for the forgiveness of sins; I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the age to come. Amen.

O Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner. (*thrice*)

O Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, through the prayers of Thine immaculate Mother, our venerable and God-bearing fathers, and all the saints, save us. Amen.

Upcoming Events 2016

15 November – 24 December Nativity Fast

15 December Holy Unction, 7:00 p.m.

31 December Feast Day at Holy Nativity Monastery

31 December New Year's Eve Vigil 8:00 p.m.

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!