

# The Confessor's Tongue for January 15, A. D. 2017

30<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost, Venerable Paul of Thebes & John Kalyvides

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.

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## The Choir & the Congregation

Orthodox worship is a work of the people, but it requires trained personnel to lead it. Such is the ministry of the choir: to lead the congregation in hymning their Creator and Savior. As beautiful, harmonious singing can work powerfully on the souls of both those who execute it and hear it, a church choir must strive to be the best it can be not only to offer praise worthy of God but to draw those who hear its beauty to God who is supreme Beauty.

Singer is a ministry in the Church. A singer sings in the choir with the blessing of the priest and the permission of the choir director, offering his God-given voice and ear to serve God's people. To discharge this well requires training and work: not only the personal work of learning to use one's voice, to read music, and to hit the right notes, but also the communal work of learning to sing with the other singers under the director's direction. It also requires humility, for a singer must humble himself to follow the director and to blend his voice with the rest of the singers for the best overall sound rather than trying to show it off. A dozen egos will sing harmoniously together only with the sacrifice of time and effort to hone their skills and the ascetic labor of cutting off self-will, vainglory, and cultivating humility. Good chemistry in choir comes through frequent rehearsal and each member's diligent cultivation of his spiritual life. Only one or two egos out of control suffice to mar a choir.

For the reasons above, only members of the choir may normally sing in the area set aside for the choir. Every person present in the nave is invited to sing in the nave as the gifts of each permit, but only those with sufficient gifts and who have submitted to the training and discipline of singing as a choir may sing at the stands. Sometimes when choir members are few at the stands, others think they can "help out" by coming over to sing, but unless invited by the priest or director to do so, they should not. Two voices trained to sing together will generally sound better than two trained and two untrained together.

Over the years, our choir has done well under Subdeacon Anthony's direction, but it has plenty of room for improvement. This year, we will be taking steps to improve the quality of our choir's singing here at St. Maximus that we may offer to the Lord a more beautiful and intelligible song.

Much of the beauty of our worship depends on the choir, but not all. We, the people in the nave, we too, are responsible to do our part to make it beautiful. We do this by making our joyful noise to the Lord, but not without restraint or awareness. The choir is there to lead us: when we sing, we must listen to it and do our best to follow, matching pace and pitch. We are to sing in such a way that we blend with

others around us rather than causing our voice to stand out in a distinctive way, not singing so loudly we (or others around us) cannot hear the choir or so that others are annoyed if our joyful noise is not on pitch or in harmony. Self-awareness is essential here. (This also means we teach our children, too, to blend their voices rather than to belt, regardless of how cute we may think it to be.) Singing in this way glorifies God and uplifts our neighbor—and will have power to touch the hearts of our visitors. As the choir works to improve its part, may the rest of us also work to improve our part to the glory of God and the higher lifting up of our hearts to Him. *Fr. Justin*

## Commentary on the All-Night Vigil 2

Often we think of the meaning of a church service exclusively in terms of the service's text, but in an Orthodox service, many other elements work together with the text to convey meaning and to reinforce what the text has to say. The Vigil service uses these other elements extensively. Of these, we shall consider movement, singing, light and darkness, and bells, as well as the way in which several services are joined to form the Vigil and what that means.

### Movement

Orthodox services always involve movement. The faithful move their bodies in response to what is happening in the service, usually in making the sign of the cross and bowing or prostrating. Beyond this, however, the Vigil involves other sorts of movement. First, there are more processions than occur in the daily forms of Vespers or Matins. Daily Vespers has no entrance at Gladsome Light, for example, while the Vigil does. The Vigil opens with a great censuring of the whole church, which is lacking at Daily Vespers. Matins also has the two great censurings of the church: during the Evlogitaria ("Blessed art Thou, O Lord, teach me Thy statutes...") and at the Magnificat during the canon. During Matins, the Gospel is brought out, and the faithful go to venerate it and receive the priest's blessing. If a Litia is served during Vespers, there is an additional procession of all the people and clergy to the narthex (or to the back of the church if there is no adequate narthex). Thus, Vigil is a dynamic service. The movement of people and clergy during it expresses the movement of the Body of Christ towards the Kingdom of God. It vividly recalls the history of salvation.

### Singing

Whether a part of a service is sung or merely chanted is not a matter of convenience but an expression of a certain theological idea. Singing is always a festal act. This is most evident at the Feast of Feasts, Pascha, when the Matins and the Hours, along with the Paschal Vespers later in the day, are sung in their entirety—nothing is read by a reader. It is evident

at the Divine Liturgy also, which is always festive in nature and is sung. The reader only reads the Hours before the Liturgy, the Prokiemenon and Epistle during it, and the Prayers of Thanksgiving afterwards. Other parts of the service that are normally read by a reader at Vespers, Compline, and Matins—"Holy God," the Lord's Prayer, the antiphons, the Creed—are sung by all instead of being read by a reader.

In accordance with this principle, singing also makes up an important part of the All-night Vigil. The opening psalm of Vespers, the Psalm of Creation (103), the kathisma Psalms (1-8) Blessed is the Man, and St. Symeon's Prayer, all of which are read by the reader at daily Vespers are sung at the Vigil. Ten hymns for Sunday rather than the typical six of a weekday are inserted and sung at Lord, I Have Cried. At Matins, the Polyeleos and Evlogitaria, not a part of Daily Matins, are inserted and sung, as is the hymn Having Beheld the Resurrection of Christ at resurrectional Vigils, and the Magnification is sung on Great Feasts and for important saints. The Great Doxology is sung, replacing the read Lesser Doxology of Daily Matins, and the Praises are sung with eight hymns inserted.

The restored man, the new Adam doesn't speak to God. He sings to God, joining with the choirs of angels in heaven. As St. Paul writes, "Be not drunk with wine...but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ..." (Ephesians 5:18-20). Singing is a liturgical expression of the feast and its joy: as St. James puts it, "Is any among you merry? Let him sing psalms" (James 5:13). Singing musically transforms the language of the service. The Lord's Day is the new song, and the singing at the Vigil is the beginning of that day and preparation for the fulfillment of it at the Liturgy. Since Vigils are celebrated only for Sundays, the twelve Great Feasts, and the feasts of certain important saints, it is reserved for particularly festive occasions, and the amount of singing at the Vigil in contrast with the daily services conveys that festivity.

### Light & Darkness

The symbolism of light and darkness is one of the earliest and most central Christian ideas. Light represents the new time ushered in by Christ, the Kingdom, fulfillment, the New Testament, and, of course, Christ Himself—the Light of the world. Darkness, on the other hand, represents the old time, this world, penitence, expectation, and the Old Testament. At the Vigil service, the light is normally increased and decreased at certain times during the service to indicate whether the coming action represents the Kingdom of God or this world, the New Testament or the Old. Thus, the light in the church is always increased for a reading of the Gospel, which represents the Kingdom of God, the New Testament, and Christ Himself who is the Light and the Truth. On the other hand, nearly all the light is

extinguished during the Six Psalms of Matins, which are penitential in nature.

### The Bells of the Church

Theologically, the bell is the sound of time. The bells summon the faithful to services (the fifteen-minute 'early bell'). They express the triumphal joy of the Church and Her Divine services. They also announce to those not present in the Church the times of especially important moments in the services, so that those at home "for a cause worthy of a blessing" may be united in prayer with those at the Divine services.

At the Vigil, the bells are rung several different times. Besides the "early bell" common to most services, the "Good News Peal" or *blagovest*, the measured striking of one bell, is rung just as the service begins. It is followed immediately by the "Treble Peal" or *trezvon* which is the ringing of all the bells of the church simultaneously three times. The "second bell" of the Vigil occurs at the start of the Six Psalms of Matins, indicating the beginning of Matins. As the reader chants the angels' doxology before the shepherds at Bethlehem "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, good will to men," all the bells are simultaneously rung twice, in two refrains, called the *druzvon*, announcing here the joy of the Incarnation. The "third bell" of Vigil, a *trezvon*, is rung at the beginning of the Polyeleon ("Praise ye the name of the Lord...") and is also known as the bell before the Gospel. It expresses the joy and festivity of Christ's resurrection. The "fourth bell" of Vigil is rung at the beginning of the Magnificat ("My soul doth magnify the Lord"). This is a short "good news peal" of nine strokes of the large bell. Alternatively, another tradition has a single small bell rung thrice at the end of each refrain ("verily, Theotokos, we magnify thee"). Lastly, the *trezvon* is sounded again at the end of a festal (but not resurrectional) Vigil. Fr. Justin Frederick

### In and Out

At the recent council meeting, it was brought to the priest's attention that there is still a lot of going in and out by people during the Liturgy, especially during the Gospel or the Anaphora when no one should be moving about if at all possible. Leaving the Liturgy should be restricted to parents taking out unruly children or a bodily emergency, not for reasons of wanderlust or idle curiosity. If we must go out or come late, we should not come into the nave while the Gospel is being read, but should wait until it is finished before re-entering. The same goes for the anaphora ("Let us lift up our hearts" to the hymn to the Theotokos).

### Upcoming Events 2016

21 January Patronal Feast: Liturgy, Meal, Lecture  
27-28 January Orthodox Christian Perspectives: The Church as Family, Friday at St. Barbara's, Saturday at St. Sarkis Armenian Church in Carrollton. See [ntom.org](http://ntom.org) for more.  
26 February Forgiveness Vespers, 6:00 p.m.

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!