

The Confessor's Tongue for May 21, A. D. 2017

Sixth Sunday of Pascha: Blind Man; SS Constantine & Helen

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.

The Ascension of Our Lord

The Great Feast of the Ascension is commemorated on the fortieth day after Pascha, which always falls on a Thursday. It has a post-feast of nine days, concluding on the Friday before Pentecost.

It is preceded on Wednesday by the Leavetaking of Pascha, which marks the end of the forty-day Paschal season. On the Leavetaking of Pascha, all the services of the Church are celebrated as they were celebrated during Bright Week. (In general, services of Leavetakings of Great Feasts are the same as the services of the feast itself—with the omission of a few festal features to distinguish it from the feast itself.)

The Ascension marks the end of our Lord's earthly work and his triumphal return to Heaven.

On a deeper level, the Ascension marks the first entrance of human nature into God's Kingdom in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. Christ's glorification in the Ascension is also our glorification, for it is the elevation of human nature. Man's nature now shares Divine honor as Christ our brother by His humanity enters Heaven in human form. The Feast leads us to consider seriously the nature of our true home in God's plan of salvation. Too often we think of the Kingdom of God as an afterlife, a postscript to our existence in this world. In reality, our true home is not on this fallen planet, but in the perfect and eternal Heavenly Kingdom. As St. Paul writes to the Colossians:

If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.

(Colossians 3:1-4)

Our life is hidden with Christ in God in heaven.

It is there and there alone where God desires us to live in common union with Him to its fullest. If we indeed have the vocation to become saints, to share in the Divine nature, we must be prepared to inhabit the abode God has prepared for us, which was first experienced in the flesh by our Lord Jesus Christ after His Ascension. Our Lord has prepared the way for us to participate fully in God's Divine plan for our salvation. We glorify Him for establishing us as heirs to the Heavenly Kingdom and prepare ourselves in holiness to become worthy citizens of it.

St. John Chrysostom proclaims in his homily on the Feast, "Today, the human race is completely reconciled with God. The ancient battle and enmity have disappeared. We, who were unworthy to live even on earth, are now lifted up to Heaven. Today, we become heirs to the Kingdom of Heaven, we, who do not even deserve earth, we ascend to heaven and inherit the throne of the King and Lord. Human

nature, against which the cherubim guarded paradise, is now raised up above all the cherubim."

During the nine days of the Ascension, we say or sing the troparion and kontakion of the Feast at meals and during our usual morning and evening prayers.

Ascension, Troparion, tone 4

Thou hast ascended in glory, O Christ our God, / granting joy to Thy disciples by the promise of the Holy Spirit. / Through the blessing they were assured / that Thou art the Son of God, / the Redeemer of the world.

Ascension, Kontakion, tone 6

When Thou didst fulfill the dispensation for our sake, / and unite earth to heaven; / Thou didst ascend in glory, O Christ our God, / not being parted from those who love Thee, / but remaining with them and crying: / I am with you and no one will be against you!

Recommendation of St. Porphyrius

The recently glorified St. Porphyrius, who ran away to Mt. Athos at age twelve and later served for many years as priest at the chapel attached to a hospital, recommended that those who came to him use the kontakion of the Sunday of the Paralytic as a regular prayer, as it well expresses our need. It may be read or sung.

Paralytic, Kontakion, Tone 3

As of old Thou didst raise up the paralytic, / O Lord God, by Thy God-like care and might, raise up my soul / which is palsied by diverse sins and transgressions / and by unseemly deeds and acts, / that saved I may also cry out: / O Compassionate Redeemer, / O Christ God, / glory to Thy dominion and might.

The Commandments of Christ

"If ye love Me, keep My commandments." (John 14:15)

Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

Matthew 6:19-21

"Don't store up treasures on earth; rather, store up treasure in heaven." So commands Christ.

What are treasures? Treasures are those things we value and to which we are attached. What constitutes treasure, then, will differ from person to person. Gold, silver, jewels, are the stuff of our childhood notions of buried treasure, and at a later age, currency, investment accounts, stocks and the like come to constitute desired wealth. Some spend their lives storing up such treasures for themselves—or

trying to. Treasures can also take the form of clothing, exotic and fine foods, fast cars, technological gadgets, computers, and experiences of travel, sporting events, concerts, dining out, sex. Some treasure gaining power over others and getting things done in this world, or having leisure and free time to spend as they please. Others find treasure in people, in family, friends, and children. Then there are those who find treasure in obedience to God and carrying out His work on earth.

Treasures are of two types: those stored up on earth, and those stored up in heaven.

Earthly treasures are subject to being taken from us through moth, rust, and thieves. Think about that sports car that was so impressive twenty years ago. Chances are, it quietly rusts away in a junkyard. Moths eat clothes. They also lay eggs, and the hatched larva will infest and eat man's stored food. Other things decay. Our treasured computers decay quickly, their life-spans are short, and when they no longer serve us, they create a severe problem of toxic waste management. Our houses age, foundations shift, wood rots or is eaten by termites, bricks crumble, adhesives no longer adhere, roofs leak. Few are the buildings of any age that survive for long centuries. Our image-making clothes—that outfit that was so fashionable (and expensive) now hangs unworn in the closet, and even if the moths haven't eaten it yet, the fickle fashion gods have consumed its appeal and rendered it worthless. And things that do not readily tarnish, rust, or rot such as precious metals, precious stones, and land are still threatened by thieves and governments and unstable markets. Family members and friends are ultimately stolen from us by the thief Death working in time. Even if we manage to hold on to our earthly treasures throughout our life, Death will still come for us, depriving us of all our treasures for good.

Heavenly treasures have the advantage that they do not rust, moths do not eat them, and no thieves can steal them. The investment is perfectly secure, and it pays dividends for eternity.

How do we store up earthly treasure? We think of our time, our energy, and our money as our own, and we use these God-given resources as we please, usually without asking His blessing or His guidance in our use of them, using them with our own pleasure in mind. More subtly, we may recognize our duty to God, but once we think we have discharged it, we claim the rest for ourselves ('I paid my tithe, the rest is mine!' or 'I went to church on Sunday, the rest of the week is mine!').

How do we store up heavenly treasures? We use the time given to us to repent, to worship, to pray, to engage the Scriptures, to fill ourselves with the Light and the Truth. We persistently seek to know God more intimately. We invest our time, money, and energy in the work of God on earth. It is said that every penny given to a beggar is a deposit in our heavenly treasury. So is every good deed done for Christ's sake (rather than our glory or recognition).

To store up treasure in heaven means we support our local church. It may mean giving to monasteries, to missionaries, or to charities serving those in need. It certainly means cultivating the ability to live frugally so that we always have something beyond our basic tithe we may give to someone in need. It means taking time to instruct our children in the Faith and in training them in godliness—while seeing to it that we ourselves are actively living it too. We share our energy and resources in helping those God puts in our lives—all for Christ's sake and in obedience to His commands, seeking to please Him and to do His will.

May we all make more abundant deposits in the heavenly treasury this year and for the rest of our lives.

From the Priest

I have noticed a few things over the past couple months that I should address. Please read to see if any of this applies to you, and then make the necessary changes.

1. Venerating the Cross. When we come to venerate the Cross, we properly make the sign of the cross before kissing it, as we do with any holy object (icons, relics, etc). Too many of us, both children and adults are forgetting this.

2. Making the Sign of the Cross. This should be done with careful precision: holding the thumb against the first two fingers and the last two fingers against the palm, we touch our forehead, our stomach, our right shoulder, and our left shoulder. A few of us are not holding our fingers to confess the Trinity and the two natures of Christ. Many more are waving their hands carelessly, not touching all four points, or out of laziness not going all the way down to the stomach or all the way to the shoulders. I'm seeing too many crosses that are not crosses! I ask every one to observe how he is making the Cross and correct any sloppiness or carelessness.

3. When we come to Holy Communion, we come with our arms crossed, left over right. We keep them crossed while we receive. Some of us are uncrossing ourselves when we receive.

4. Confession. When we step before the cross and icon to make our confession, we venerate both by crossing and bowing twice, kissing both, and then crossing and bowing again. We do the same after absolution is given and then ask the priest's blessing. Some of us come before the icon to confess without venerating.

Upcoming Events 2017

25 May Ascension
29 May Memorial Day Picnic
31 May Vigil for St. Justin of Chelije, first time in English
4 June Pentecost, Youth Craft Sale
9 June No Fast Friday youth game night
12 - 28 June Apostles' Fast

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!