

The Confessor's Tongue for December 10, A. D. 2017

Twenty-seventh Sunday after Pentecost: Martyrs Menas, Hermogenes, Eugegraphus
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.

St. John Chrysostom on Judging Others

And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them. For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret. But all things that are reprov'd are made manifest by the light: for whatsoever doth make manifest is light. Ephesians 5:11-13

He had said, "ye are light." Now the light reproves by exposing the things which take place in the darkness. So that if ye, says he, are virtuous, and conspicuous, the wicked will be unable to lie hidden. For just as when a candle is set, all are brought to light, and the thief cannot enter; so if your light shine, the wicked being discovered shall be caught. So then it is our duty to expose them.

How then does our Lord say, "Judge not, that ye be not judged"? Paul did not say "judge," he said "reprove," that is, "correct." And the words "Judge not, that ye be not judged," He spoke with reference to very small errors. Indeed, He added, "Why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?"

But what Paul is saying is of this sort. As a wound, so long as it is imbedded and concealed outwardly, and runs beneath the surface, receives no attention, so also sin, as long as it is concealed, being as it were in darkness, is daringly committed in full security; but as soon as "it is made manifest," becomes "light"; not indeed the sin itself, (for how could that be?) but the sinner. For when he has been brought out to light, when he has been admonished, when he has repented, when he has obtained pardon, hast thou not cleared away all his darkness? Hast thou not then healed his wound? Hast thou not called his unfruitfulness into fruit? Either this is his meaning, or else what I said above, that your life "being manifest, is light." For no one hides an irreproachable life; whereas things which are hidden, are hidden by darkness covering them.

Holy Forefathers

Next Sunday, we celebrate the Holy Forefathers, all the saints of the Old Testament. The Sunday of the Holy Forefathers occurs between the 11th and the 17th of December. This Sunday commemorates all the ancestors of the people of God, the holy patriarchs living up to the law, given on Sinai, and under the law, - from Adam to Joseph the Betrothed; together with them are commemorated «those who preached Christ» the holy prophets - from Samuel to Zechariah and to John the Baptist, and all the Old Testament righteous men, who were righteous in the faith in the coming of the Messiah. Especially in the service for this day are praised "the pious youths" Ananias, Azarias, and Misael, who "in faith were thrown into the fiery furnace" and "who in the middle of the flames were cooled by the dew of the Spirit and who walked about rejoicing, are mystically a prototype of

the Trinity and the incarnation of Christ" from the Virgin, who after giving birth remained a virgin. With these holy youths are commemorated also "the righteous Daniel and the wonderful prophets", who, clearly revealing the divine second coming, saw Christ, "coming to all nations as Judge", and who, "your mind illumined by divine radiance", "that clearly the Virgin would give birth represented in mystical images". Though a few of the Old Testament saints have their own feast days, many of them are commemorated only on this Sunday coming next week.

Preparation for Holy Communion

Fr. Justin Frederick

We are reminded each week before Communion that only "Orthodox Christians who have prepared themselves with prayer, fasting, and a recent confession" should receive Christ's Body and Blood. What does this mean practically?

i. Prayer. Prayer is our spiritual breathing; not to pray suffocates our spiritual life. We are not ready for Communion if we have not been praying throughout the preceding week. Keeping one's prayer rule perfectly is not required to commune; but not praying at all or praying little during the week would not constitute adequate preparation.

Prayer also includes the particular "Prayers in Preparation for Holy Communion" which should be prayed either the evening before or morning of Communion. There are standard collections of these in the available prayer books.

The strict Russian practice involves praying three canons and an akathist the night before: the Canons of Repentance, to the Theotokos, and to the Guardian Angel. Then in the morning, one would pray the Order of Preparation for Holy Communion, which includes a canon for Communion. This is an excellent practice to follow. It should be strictly followed if one receives Communion only a few times a year. If, however, one is a regular communicant (which presupposes regular Confession, prayer, and fasting), one may simply pray the ten or so precommunion prayers found in the standard prayer book and the canon for Communion (also found in the St. Tikhon's and the Jordanville books). One should not normally pray less than this in preparation for Communion except in unusual circumstances or when so guided by one's Priest or spiritual father.

Attendance at the Saturday night "All-Night" Vigil (or at least at a portion of it) is also part of the normal preparation for the Eucharist. Each week, the Vigil provides the proper liturgical expectation for the Sunday feast, for the "Little Pascha" that every Sunday is. We need the Vigil to prepare ourselves for Liturgy just as we need this life to prepare for the next. During the week, we grow very scattered,

concerned about many things, and distracted from the things of God. The two hours of the Vigil helps us become recollected and refocused spiritually in preparation for receiving Communion with spiritual profit. One might occasionally miss the Vigil and still receive Communion, but we should know that the Vigil is part of our normal preparation for the Divine Liturgy and an essential part of living liturgically.

Lastly, having received Communion, our preparation for the following week begins with the "Prayers of Thanksgiving after Communion." If we do not stay in church after the Liturgy and attentively hear the prayers read there, we must read them on our own the same day, the sooner after Communion the better.

None of this should be construed as a rigid legalism, but as a general guide to regular, consistent, healthy practice.

2. Fasting. Every Wednesday and Friday, the Church calls us to fast: on Wednesday in memory of Christ's betrayal, and on Friday in memory of His suffering and death. These fasts are not optional for Orthodox Christians. Rather, they are necessary and for our benefit. If we have willfully broken the fast, we should go the Confession before receiving Communion again.

Additionally, there is the fast prescribed from midnight the night before receiving Communion until we have received the Mystery. We abstain entirely from food, drink, and marital relations. If we willfully not kept the fasts of the previous week, we should not commune without Confession.

3. A Recent Confession. The Holy Synod of Bishops has directed that regular communicants (receiving the Holy Mysteries more than once a month) should receive the Mystery of Confession not less than once a month, even if they have nothing particularly "serious" or unusual to confess. Regular confession is part of the rhythm of a healthy spiritual, liturgical life.

In reading this, you may think it too much for you to do. Remember three things.

First, Orthodoxy is maximalistic Christianity, not minimalistic. Christ gave His all for us; we give our all to Him.

Second, this is the norm of preparation for Communion. We should always strive to achieve the Church's maximalistic norm, but due to our weakness and circumstances, we may not be able to achieve it regularly or even at all. In such a case we confess our weakness and talk to our Priest or Confessor about what would be appropriate for us in our situation.

Third, the norm should not be seen as legalistic, but as therapeutic. This is what the Church in her long experience has found to bring the greatest spiritual help with the least spiritual danger to her members. Our failure to prepare diligently and attentively hinders our perception of what takes place at Communion, and so we are deprived of much joy and grace, while God, in His compassion, keeps the

Mysteries from doing us harm in our careless state. But we must not presume on His mercy!

So, with prayer, fasting, and a recent confession, let us draw near to Christ in the Holy Mysteries in the fear of God, with faith and love and hearts full of gratitude as we more clearly perceive the greatness of God's gift.

Question and Answer

Q. Why do you remember the saints you do at the dismissal? And why are there more than I hear at other parishes?

A. At the dismissal, a number of saints are invoked for their prayers. They typically include the Theotokos, her parents, the patron saint of the parish, and the main saint of the day. The Greeks have a set formula every day which changes only by adding the saint of the day. The Russian formula, which we follow, is more complicated. In addition to the Theotokos, her parents Joachim and Anna, the apostles, the patron of the parish, and the saint of the day (calendar date), we vary according to the day of week: Sunday, we mention Christ's resurrection; Monday, we invoke the protection of the holy angels; Tuesday, we ask the Forerunner's prayers; Wednesday and Friday we invoke the power of the precious Cross, on Thursday we add St. Nicholas to the Apostles, and on Saturday we add the right victorious martyrs and the venerable God-bearing fathers.

Here at St. Maximus, the priest also typically mentions the main North American saints. These are canonized saints with a significant connection to North America: St. Herman of Alaska, St. Innocent of Alaska (first bishop here), St. Nikolai Velimirovic, the great Serbian bishop who lived here after the Second World War and reposed at St. Tikhon's monastery, St. John of San Francisco, St. Raphael of Brooklyn, St. Tikhon who was bishop here for nearly ten years, the martyrs Peter the Aleut and St. Jacob of Lake Iliamna in Alaska. We mention St. Seraphim of Sarov, as he is patron of our mother church (the cathedral in Dallas). The priest mentions his patron. Lately, we have been reading not just the main saint of the calendar day but a more comprehensive list of saints the Church remembers that day.

Strictly, we need not remember all the North American saints after every service, but the priest does it for educational purposes in our young American Church. For the same reason he is giving a longer list of saints for the calendar day.

Upcoming Events 2017

13 December: St. Herman of Alaska Liturgy 9:00 a.m.;

Vigil Dec 12 6:00 p.m.

19 December: Holy Unction

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!