

# The Confessor's Tongue for March 18, A. D. 2018

Fourth Sunday of Lent; St. John of the Ladder; Ss. Cyril of Jerusalem, Nikolai of Zicha  
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.

## From the Triodion for the Fifth Week

With God's help we have rounded the turning-post of the Fast. Let us run the remainder of the course with all our strength and win a victor's crown.  
*Monday Matins Canon of the Fifth Week*

The holy Fast feeds our hearts, ripening within us thoughts acceptable to God, and causing the deep abyss of our passions to dry up; and with the rain of compunction, it cleanses those who in faith offer praise to the Almighty. *Monday Matins Canon*

Strengthened in spirit by fasting, Elisha once raised up the child of the Shunammite. We have been killed by the pleasures of passion; through the life-giving Fast, O ye faithful, let us regain life once more.  
*Monday Matins Canon of the Fifth Week*

O Word of God, Thou hast given us the time of the Fast, that we may turn again and live, and in now way perish. Grant that all of us may please Thee, O Christ, and serve Thee with fervent compunction, like the wise and holy harlot: for because of the sweet-smelling ointment and the warm tears which she shed, she received forgiveness of her sins. *Monday Vespers of the Fifth Week*

Like the man who fell among thieves and was wounded, I have also fallen through my sins, and my soul has been wounded. To whom shall I fly for healing, but to Thee, Physician of souls and bodies? Pour out upon me Thy great mercy, O God. *Monday Vespers of the Fifth Week*

Fleeing from the icy cold of self-indulgence, let us all warm ourselves with the light of abstinence and the Holy Spirit. *Tuesday Matins Canon of the Fifth Week*

Let us make our own pure fasting, prayer, tears, meditation on holy things, and every other virtue; and let us bring them now as an offering to God our Master. *Tuesday Matins Canon of the Fifth Week*

Cleansed through fasting, let us draw near to the mountain of the virtues, and let us clearly hear what God will say within us; for He will speak to us of peace and illumination and the healing of our broken souls. *Tuesday Matins Canon of the Fifth Week*

## Report from the Mission Council

The Mission Council met last Sunday. Its primary current business is how and where to build a church that we may have adequate space for worship. We are on the verge of sending our neighbor Dr. Park a letter formally asking him if he can be persuaded to negotiate with us for some of his land down the street. We have had our building and land appraised (nearly \$700k). We are looking at the real estate that is on the market around Denton, which is quite expensive. Perhaps the best possibility we have seen is 5.7 acres on Teasley Lane just north of Lillian Miller for \$695,000. We are assessing the costs of our options.

## Liturgical Changes: Countryside

You may have noticed that in the Great Litany, we are now praying "For this city, for every city and countryside, and for those who in faith dwell therein...", replacing "country" with "countryside." This better reflects the meaning of the Greek word *χωρας* which means rural areas, 'the country', rather than 'country' in the modern sense of 'nation state.'

## From St. Cyril of Jerusalem

Excuse thyself from talking many idle words; neither backbite, nor lend a willing ear to backbiters; but rather be prompt to prayer. Show in ascetic exercise that thy heart is nerved. Cleanse thy vessel, that thou mayest receive grace more abundantly. For though remission of sins is given equally to all, the communion of the Holy Spirit is bestowed in proportion to each man's faith. If thou hast labored little, thou receivest little; but if thou hast wrought much, the reward is great. Thou art running for thyself, see to thine own interest. *Lecture 1*

## On the Holy Spirit, the Comforter

Homily by St. Nicholas of Zicha (+1956)

*But the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He shall teach you all things and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." John 14:26*

What practical meaning have these words other than that we must pray every day that the Holy Spirit be sent to us, just as we pray every day for our daily bread? God is willing every day to send us the Holy Spirit, but He seeks from us that we pray every day for Him to be sent to us. For as, with regard to bread, there is sometimes abundance and sometimes dearth, so it is with regard to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit comes to us and leaves us according to our good works and our patience. Therefore, the Church has ordained that the first morning service in church begin with the invocation of the Holy Spirit: "O heavenly King, the Comforter, the Spirit of Truth--come!", and after that comes the prayer: "give us this day our daily bread." Why? Because, without the Holy Spirit, we cannot even make use of bread in the way that we must for our salvation.

"He shall teach you all things." That is: every day and every night, according to the situation in which you find yourself, He will instruct you, advise you, and direct you in what you must think, say, and do. Therefore, ask God only for the Holy Spirit, and He will Himself bring all that you need in any given moment. When He has descended upon you, you will know all things and be capable of all that is needful.

"And bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." That is: do not fear

that you will forget My teaching and My words. The Holy Spirit knows all that I know; so, when He is present with you, then all My teaching will be present in you together with Him.

O Lord, the Holy Spirit, be pleased to descend upon us, not according to our merit but according to the merit of the Lord Jesus and according to Thine endless goodness. To Thee be glory and praise forever. Amen.

### **Faith, Hope, and Love**

*St. John Cassian*

There are three things that restrain people from vice—namely, the fear of Gehenna or of present laws; or hope and desire of the kingdom of heaven; or a disposition for the good itself, and a love of virtue. For we read that fear detests the contagion of evil: “The fear of the Lord hates wickedness.” Hope, too, prevents the incursion of nay vice, for “all who hope in Him shall not fail.” Love also dreads the destruction of sin, because “love never fails.” And again: “Love covers a multitude of sins.”

Therefore the blessed Apostle includes the entire sum of salvation in the perfection of these three virtues, saying: “Now there abide faith, hope, love, these three.” For it is faith that, through the dread of future judgment and punishment, makes us refrain from the contagion of vice; hope that, calling our minds away from things present, despises all the pleasures of the body and waits for heavenly rewards; love that, inflaming us mentally with the love of Christ and with the fruit of spiritual virtue, makes us utterly despise whatever is contrary to those things.

*Conference II*

### **Preparation for Holy Communion: Vespers & Matins**

“Since the Liturgy is the summit of the whole liturgical cycle, the attendance at the services that precede the Liturgy – primarily, Vespers and Matins (or the Vigil) – is an important part of preparation for the partaking of the Holy Body and Blood of Christ.

“If a person was absent at the evening services on the eve of communion or did not recite his prayer rule in its fullness, his spiritual father or a priest who hears his confession must urge him to a more thorough preparation for communion, but also must take into account the circumstances of his life and possible existence of excusable reasons.” (*On Participation of the Faithful in the Eucharist, Official Document of the Russian Orthodox Church, 2015.*)

Such is the sound direction given by the Church of Russia for its faithful, reflecting the mind and long practice of the Church as a whole.

This practice has been taught at St. Maximus from the beginning of the mission here in Denton, that part of one’s preparation for receiving Holy Communion consists in attendance in the services of the Daily Office that lead up to the Divine Liturgy, namely Vespers and Matins, which are celebrated together as the Vigil on Saturday nights and the eves

of Great Feasts. Archbishop Dmitri of blessed memory fully supported this position.

This year, so far on average, 127 people are attending the Sunday Divine Liturgy, while 45 attend at least part of the Saturday evening Vigil. While not all those present on Sunday morning are able to commune or are prepared to, nevertheless, far more people commune Sunday morning than were present at Vigil Saturday night. Compared to many parishes, our Saturday evening attendance is strong; compared to the Orthodox norm, however, it is weak.

The Divine Liturgy represents a fulfillment, a completion of the Church’s celebration. We sing hymns celebrating God’s work for our salvation in Christ. We remember. We honor Him. We offer praise. We give thanks. We pray. The bulk of this remembrance and celebration of what God has done takes place at Vigil (Vespers and Matins). If we regularly do not attend Vigil, we deprive ourselves of a full knowledge of what we are celebrating at the Divine Liturgy. This might be likened to reading the last couple chapters of a gripping novel without reading the rest of it.

Strictly, if we do not attend Vigil, or at least a part of it, we should not receive Holy Communion on Sunday as we are not properly prepared. The Church recognizes that there are circumstances in life which may provide excusable reasons why a particular person cannot regularly be present. But that is to be the exception, not the rule. When we have the means and opportunity to attend but we choose not to, offering weak excuses, we deprive our souls of much good and limit the grace we are able to receive at the Divine Liturgy. We fail to exercise and nourish our souls as they need, leaving them weak, malnourished and underdeveloped.

Orthodox Christianity is the fullness of the Christian Faith. It is maximal, not minimal, Christianity. The attitude is never “what is the minimum I must do to be saved” but is “how may I most fully appropriate all the good things that God has made available to me in Christ.”

It is always the hope and prayer of your priest to see a larger percentage of Sunday communicants at Vigil on Saturday night—for your good. Those who rarely or never attend Vigil but still receive Holy Communion should either make it a point to attend at least a part of Vigil or speak to their priest about their circumstances which preclude their attendance that they may receive direction on how to prepare to receive the Eucharist in their circumstances. *Fr. Justin*

### **Upcoming Events 2018**

25 March: Annunciation

1-7 April: Holy Week

8 April: Pascha: All-Night Vigil, Agape Vespers,  
Picnic

**GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!**