

The Confessor's Tongue for May 13, A. D. 2018

Sixth Sunday of Pascha: Blind Man

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.

Liturgical Change: Stand Aright!

The Church's worship addresses and involves the whole man, soul and body, with all the senses. For us to offer ourselves fully to God, every sense is engaged and both the soul and the body must participate in harmony.

Two different words have been translated as "Let us attend" or "attend" in our translation of the Liturgy. One of them *proschomen* (Gr), *vonmem* (Slav), may well be translated "Let us attend" meaning "pay attention". The other word, *orthoï, prosti* is not well-translated as "attend". The Greek *orthos* is the same first root of "Orthodox" or "orthodontics". It means "straight", "correct", "right". It is an abbreviated call for the worshippers to correct their posture, to stand if sitting, to straighten up if slouching.

These two different words call us to pay attention during services. One addresses the mental faculties, the attention. The other addresses the body. This shows us that soul and body are related. Our worship involves both and what we do with each affects our ability to enter fully into the true worship of God.

The standard OCA translation now corrects this matter, and we shall making that correction. Where *proschomen* (Gr), *vonmem* (Slav) occurs, we shall continue to say "let us attend." But *orthoï, prosti* will now be expressed with the words "stand upright". May God grant us all grace to attend and stand upright in our worship.

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 daily 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!

The Rule For Attending To Oneself For One Dwelling In The World

By St. Ignatii Brianchaninov

The soul of all practices in the Lord is vigilance. Without vigilance, all these practices are fruitless. He who is desirous of saving himself must so establish himself that he might remain continuously vigilant toward himself, not only in solitude, but also under

conditions of distraction, into which he is sometimes unwillingly drawn by circumstances.

Let the fear of God outweigh all other sensations upon the scales of your heart; and then will it be convenient for you to be vigilant toward yourself, both in the silence of your cell and in the midst of the noise that surrounds you from all sides.

A well-reasoned moderation in foodstuffs, diminishing the passionate heat of his blood, tends greatly to facilitate your being able to attend to yourself; while the impassioning of your blood, stemming, as it does, from an excessive consumption of foodstuffs, from extreme and intensified bodily movements, from the inflammation of wrath, from being heady with vanity, and by reason of other causes, gives rise to a multitude of thoughts and reveries—in other words, to distraction. The Holy Fathers, first of all, ascribe to such a one as is desirous of attending to himself a moderate, evenly-measured, constant abstention from food.

Upon awakening from sleep—an image of the awakening from the dead, which awaits all men—direct your thoughts to God, offering up to Him the first-thoughts of your mind, which has not yet become imprinted with any vain impressions whatsoever.

Having carefully fulfilled all the needs of the flesh upon arising from sleep, quietly read your customary rule of prayer, taking care not so much for the quantity of your prayerful expression, as for the quality of it; i.e., do it attentively, so that, by reason of your attention, your heart might be enlightened and enlivened through prayerful feeling and consolation. Upon concluding your rule of prayer, do you again, direct all your strength to the attentive reading of the New Testament, primarily the Gospel. In the course of this reading, intently take note of all the instructions and commandments of Christ, so that you might direct all your actions—both manifest and veiled—in accordance with them.

The quantity of the reading is determined by one's strength and by one's circumstances. It is unnecessary to weight-down one's mind with an excessive reading of prayers and Scripture; likewise, is it unnecessary to neglect one's needs in order to practice immoderate prayer and reading. Just as the excessive use of foodstuffs disorders and weakens the belly, so too does the immoderate use of spiritual food weaken the mind and create in it a revulsion to pious practices, leading it to despair.

For the novice, the Holy Fathers suggest frequent—but brief—prayers. When one's mind matures with spiritual age, becoming stronger and more manly, then shall one be in proper condition to pray without ceasing. It is to such Christians as have attained to maturity in the Lord that the words of the Apostle Paul pertain:

“I desire, therefore, that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without anger and reproach.” (I Tim. II, 8) i.e., dispassionately, and without any distraction or inconstancy. For that which is natural to the man is not yet natural to the infant.

Enlightened, through prayer and reading, by our Lord, Jesus Christ, the Sun of Righteousness, one may then go forth to carry out the affairs of one's daily course, vigilantly taking care that in all one's deeds and words, in one's entire being, the All-holy will of God might prevail, as it was revealed and explained to men in the Commandments of the Gospel.

Should there be any free moments during the course of the day, use them to read attentively some chosen prayers, or some chosen portions of Scripture; and, by means of

these, fortify the powers of your soul, which have become exhausted through activity in the midst of a world of vanities.

Should there not be any such golden moments, it is necessary to regret their loss, as though it were the loss of a valuable treasure. What is wasted today should not be lost on the day following, because our heart conveniently gives itself up to negligence and forgetfulness, which lead to that dismal ignorance, so ruinous of Divine activity, of the activity of man's salvation.

Should you chance to say or to do something that is contrary to God's commandments, immediately treat your fault with repentance; and, by means of sincere contrition, return to the Way of God, from which you stepped aside through your violation of God's will. Do not linger outside the Way of God! Respond with faith and humility to sinful thoughts, reveries and sensations by opposing to them the Gospel commandments, and saying, along with the holy patriarch Joseph:

How shall I speak this evil word and sin before God? (Gen. 30:9)

One who is vigilant toward oneself must refuse himself all reverie, in general—regardless of how attractive and well-appearing it might seem, for all reverie is the wandering of the mind, which flatters and deceives it, while being outside the truth, in the land of non-existent phantoms, and incapable of realization. The consequences of reverie are: loss of vigilance toward oneself, dissipation of the mind, and hardness of heart during prayer, whence comes distress of the soul.

In the evening, departing into slumber—which, in relation to the day just past, is death—examine your actions during the course of that day. Such [self-] examination is not difficult, since, in leading an attentive life, that forgetfulness which is so natural to a distracted man is destroyed through vigilance toward oneself. And so, having recollected all your sins, whether through act, or word, or thought, or sensation, offer your repentance to God for them, with both the disposition and the heart-felt pledge of self-amendment. Later, having read the rule of prayer, conclude the day which was begun by meditating upon God by meditating, once again, upon God. Whither do they depart—all the thoughts and feelings of a sleeping man? What mysterious state of being is this sleep, during which the soul and body are both alive and yet not alive, being alienated from the awareness of their life, as though dead? Sleep is as incomprehensible as death. In the course of it, one's soul reposes, forgetting the most-cruel earthly afflictions and calamities that have beset it, while it images its eternal repose; while one's body (!) ... if it rises from sleep will also arise, inevitably, from the dead.

The great Agathon said: "It is impossible to succeed in virtue without exerting vigilance toward oneself." (*The Patericon of Skete*) Amen.

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Upcoming Events 2018

16 May: Leavetaking of Pascha, St. John's, Euleus
17 May: Ascension
26 May: Veazey Baptism, 10 a.m.
27 May: Pentecost
28 May: Memorial Day Picnic

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!