

The Confessor's Tongue for May 27, A. D. 2018

Eighth Sunday of Pascha: Pentecost—Holy Trinity

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.

God is Our Ally in the Struggle

St. Symeon the New Theologian

When God endowed us with free will, giving commandments to teach us instead how we must oppose our adversaries, He left it to the free choice of each either to oppose and vanquish the enemy, or to relax and be miserably defeated by him. Nor does He leave us entirely to ourselves—for He knows the weakness of human nature—but rather is present Himself with us and, indeed, allies Himself with those who choose to struggle, and mysteriously imbues us with strength, and Himself, not we, accomplishes the victory over the adversary....

God,...who is mighty and invincible, becomes, as we just said, an ally of those who willingly choose to do battle with the enemy, and he establishes them as victors over the cunning of the devil. He does not, however, compel to this war any who do not so choose, in order that He not destroy the power of choice which is proper to our reasoning nature, made according to His own image, and bring us down to the level of unreasoning brutes.

The Ministry of the Holy Spirit

St. Basil the Great

Grant, they say, that He is to be glorified, but not with the Father and the Son. But what reason is there in giving up the place appointed by the Lord for the Spirit, and inventing some other? What reason is there for robbing of His share of glory Him Who is everywhere associated with the Godhead; in the confession of the Faith, in the baptism of redemption, in the working of miracles, in the indwelling of the saints, in the graces bestowed on obedience? For there is not even one single gift which reaches creation without the Holy Ghost; when not even a single word can be spoken in defense of Christ except by them that are aided by the Spirit, as we have learned in the Gospels from our Lord and Saviour. Matthew 10:19-20 And I know not whether any one who has been partaker of the Holy Spirit will consent that we should overlook all this, forget His fellowship in all things, and tear the Spirit asunder from the Father and the Son. Where then are we to take Him and rank Him? With the creature? Yet all the creature is in bondage, but the Spirit makes free. And where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. 2 Corinthians 3:17 Many arguments might be adduced to them that it is unseemly to coordinate the Holy Spirit with created nature, but for the present I will pass them by. Were I indeed to bring forward, in a manner befitting the dignity of the discussion, all the proofs always available on our side, and so overthrow the objections of our opponents, a lengthy dissertation would be required, and my readers might be worn out by my prolixity. I therefore propose to

reserve this matter for a special treatise, and to apply myself to the points now more immediately before us.

Let us then examine the points one by one. He is good by nature, in the same way as the Father is good, and the Son is good; the creature on the other hand shares in goodness by choosing the good. He knows the deep things of God; 1 Corinthians 2:10-11 the creature receives the manifestation of ineffable things through the Spirit. He quickens together with God, who produces and preserves all things alive, and together with the Son, who gives life. He that raised up Christ from the dead, it is said, shall also quicken your mortal bodies by the spirit that dwells in you; Romans 8:11 and again my sheep hear my voice,...and I give unto them eternal life; John 10:27-28 but the Spirit also, it is said, gives life, 2 Corinthians 3:6 and again the Spirit, it is said, is life, because of righteousness. Romans 8:10 And the Lord bears witness that it is the Spirit that quickens; the flesh profits nothing. John 6:63 How then shall we alienate the Spirit from His quickening power, and make Him belong to lifeless nature? Who is so contentious, who is so utterly without the heavenly gift, and unfed by God's good words, who is so devoid of part and lot in eternal hopes, as to sever the Spirit from the Godhead and rank Him with the creature?

Now it is urged that the Spirit is in us as a gift from God, and that the gift is not revered with the same honour as that which is attributed to the giver. The Spirit is a gift of God, but a gift of life, for the law of the Spirit of life, it is said, has made us free; Romans 8:2 and a gift of power, for you shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost has come upon you. Acts 1:8 Is He on this account to be lightly esteemed? Did not God also bestow His Son as a free gift to mankind? He that spared not His own Son, it is said, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? Romans 8:32 And in another place, that we might truly know the things that are freely given us of God, 1 Corinthians 2:12 in reference to the mystery of the Incarnation. It follows then that the maintainers of such arguments, in making the greatness of God's loving kindness an occasion of blasphemy, have really surpassed the ingratitude of the Jews. They find fault with the Spirit because He gives us freedom to call God our Father. For God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts crying Abba, Father, Galatians 4:6 that the voice of the Spirit may become the very voice of them that have received him. From *On the Holy Spirit*, chapter 24.

The Power in Guarding the Tongue

When Abba Macarius was praying in his cell on one occasion, he heard a voice from God, which said, "Macarius, thou hast not yet attained to the state of excellence of two women who are in such and such a

city.” The old man rose up in the morning, and took in his hand a palm stick, and he began to set out on the road to that city. Now, therefore, when he had arrived at the city, and learned the place of the abode of the two women, he knocked at the door, and there went forth one of the women and brought him into the house.

And when he had been sitting down for a little, the other woman came in, and he called them to him, and they came nigh and sat down before him. Then the old man said to them, “On your account I have made this long journey, and have performed all this labor, and with great difficulty have come from the desert; tell me, then, what are thy works?”

And they said unto him, “Believe us, O father; neither of us hath ever been absent from, or kept herself from her husband’s couch up to this day; what work, then, wouldst thou see in us?”

Then the old man made apologies to them and entreated them to reveal to him and to show him their spiritual labor, and therefore they said unto him, “According to worldly considerations we are strangers one to the other, for we are not kinsfolk, but it fell out that the two of us married two men who are brethren. And behold, up to this present we have lived in this house for twelve years, and we have never wanted to quarrel with each other, and neither of us hath spoken one abominable word of abuse to her companion. Now we made up our minds together to leave our husbands and to join the army of virgins, but, although we entreated our husbands earnestly to allow us to do so, they would not undertake to send us away. And as we were unable to do that which we wished, we made a promise between ourselves and God that, until death, no worldly word should go forth from our mouths.”

Now when Macarius heard this, he said, “Truly, virginity by itself is nothing, nor marriage, nor life as a monk, nor life in the world; for God seeketh the love of a man, and giveth the Spirit unto him.”

On Archbishop Dmitri’s Vision for the Diocese

The Diocese of the South began in 1979 with only twelve parishes and missions. The founder of the diocese, Archbishop Dmitri, desired that number to reach one hundred in his life. The growth of the diocese fell short of Vladyka’s goal, but it did reach 70 or so parishes before his repose in August, 2011. The diocese now includes 78 parishes and missions and three monasteries. The task of reaching one hundred and beyond remains for us to achieve.

Orthodox Christianity is the fullness of the Christian Faith. It is maximalistic. It asks with willing desire, “What must I do, how must I live in order to enter fully into the life of God and all blessings Christ has made available to us” rather than resting content to ask “what is the minimum required of me to get into heaven.”

To become an Orthodox Christian requires humility and a long process of learning and practicing

what we learn. One effective mission priest had a practice of telling those entering the church that it takes a full ten years to become fully Orthodox. This is true, but it still falls sort of the reality, for, in fact, it takes our whole lives to become fully Orthodox—fully conformed to the image of Christ. Because the instruction and conversion of those desiring entrance into the Church takes time, we cannot use clever gimmicks to promote numerical growth. Only prayer, our own authentic Christian lives full of faith and love, and the proclamation of the Gospel are our means of building up the Church. Each of us must believe, repent, pray, and learn to live the Gospel in love, and as others seeking the Truth that is Christ see our authentic lives in Christ, they will be drawn to His Church.

There is no easy path to reaching a hundred parishes in the Diocese (at which point it would certainly be divided into two dioceses; at some point, Texas alone should be a diocese) with ten (or more!) parishes in Denton County, parishes in every county of North Texas and in every major city of the state. But by God’s grace and our faithfulness to our calling as Christians, this and more is attainable.

Treatment of Big (and all) Donors

Father Archimandrite Moses always received every benefaction, every offering given out of love for the monastery, no matter how small, with sincere gratitude, especially in times of need. On the other hand, he was never overwhelmed by even the most sizeable contribution. Once, a family who had conferred many benefactions upon Optina Hermitage visited the monastery and stayed at a monastery guesthouse. They were displeased by some arrangement of the guestmaster and went to Abbot Moses to complain. “Look, Batiushka, we always eagerly welcome your fund collectors, we try to help them any way we can, we assist the monastery with love as much as we are able—and your guestmaster refused to do such and such for us!” “We had thought that you confer benefactions upon us for God’s sake,” replied the divinely-wise Elder, “and that you await rewards from the Lord for your good deeds. But if you expect a reward from us sinners, better not confer benefactions on us, because we the humble and heedless ones cannot reward you in any way.” The visitors not only were satisfied with this explanation, but also were comforted by the Elder’s frankness and later themselves recalled with pleasure and gratitude how they had received such lofty spiritual edification for their souls—instead of the apologies and catering to their self-esteem which they had expected. From *The Elder Moses of Optina*

Upcoming Events 2018

27 May: Pentecost
28 May: Memorial Day Picnic
1 June: Open House at Rectory, 5:30

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!