

The Confessor's Tongue for July 1, A. D. 2018

Fifth Sunday After Pentecost: SS Cosmas and Damian the Unmercenaries

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.

Update on Prospects for Building a Church

St. Maximus at the end of July will complete its 17th year since its founding here in the center of Denton County. Hence, compared to many here in the USA let alone those in the Old World, we are a young parish. We started in 2001 with ten adults and two children. From that foundation, God has blessed us with abundant increase. While only four of the original ten founding adults remain in the parish, in a sense, we all who worship here and work for the construction of a permanent temple are founders. We must also understand that we build not only for ourselves, but also for generations to come. We want to build a building that will endure for those generations, a building that will be a beautiful adornment to our city which, by its very presence and architecture, bears witness to the Truth who became man. To be a founder of a parish means to be prayed for at every Liturgy served here until Christ returns. It is a privilege and an honor to be a founder. This opportunity inspires us to stretch to build the best, most beautiful and enduring temple we possibly can and not settling for something with which "to get by". Such a temple will not only bring us join and draw others, it will bless those of generations to come.

Your mission council continues to work on the question of building a church for our parish. Our work has largely consisted of identifying our options, investigating them, and then discarding those that are not viable—"putting a tombstone on them" in the words of Junior Warder Joseph Pier.

One long considered option was recently laid to rest. Our neighbor holds several large lots across from the priest's home. We had long hoped to acquire some of his property upon which to build. Earlier this year, we wrote him formally about our interest and asking him to respond. When he did not respond, Fr. Justin and Warden Adam Skelton visited him on June 3 and heard him say very clearly that he has his own plans for the land and is not interested in selling.

With the death of that hope, our need for a temple remains. We felt it last Sunday with 150 persons present at Liturgy. Our primary options are two: build on our current property (1.2 acres, it goes well back into the trees and bushes in back) or acquire property elsewhere on which to build.

Each option may be broken into sub-options. If we build here, where on the property? Are we stuck permanently with our existing building, or would the city allow us to remove it at some time? Would they let us build in front (less likely), or will we have to build in back (more likely)? If we do stay here, the council concurs that the parish should plan to acquire the two properties behind us in the long run to give us access to the street behind, more parking, etc.

If we buy property elsewhere, how will we do it? Property in Denton is running at \$100,000 an acre. We could buy outright two to five acres to meet our need, or we could opt for what we have dubbed the "tycoon option" of buying a bigger piece of property than we need with the intention of selling off some of it. If the market keeps rising, this might help us fund the purchase of property—but markets do not rise forever. In both these cases, location is an issue. Our present location is central and convenient, but what about a new location? In both these cases, not only would we have to buy the property, we would have to develop it, build a church, build a parking lot, and build a hall and landscape it all.

If the money is there, all things are possible. At present, the council estimates that the parish could realistically support a debt up to \$1,000,000. That means we could borrow a million on top of whatever money we have raised to work with—currently \$140,000. As of now, that would give us a totally budget of \$1,140,000. If we were to buy just two acres, that would leave us \$940,000 to work with to build a church, a hall, and parking. We need to build a church with a footprint of no less than 3000 square feet. It is highly unlikely that we shall be able to build a church worth building for less than \$300 a square foot, which puts the cost of a church alone to \$900,000 minimum.

We cannot foresee how God may choose to provide. A single donor at St. John's in Euless gave more than a \$1 million to turn their dreams into reality. In approaching a project such as ours, we must approach both with hard, realistic analysis of the facts before us generously seasoned with faith in God to enable us to do what seems beyond our ability and to provide what we need to accomplish His will. We must not be careless and presumptuous, but neither may we be simply coldly calculating in walking by sight alone.

Currently, the way forward to get the most beautiful, enduring temple built most quickly is to build on our property. We already have a building to serve as a hall, we need mostly to increase our parking and build the temple. But the council continues to do due diligence in considering other possibilities—investigating them as thoroughly as possible so we may work with as much hard data as possible in making decisions. The council at the annual meeting in September hopes to be ready to give the parish a full presentation our options and its recommendation as to how to proceed. You are welcome to discuss matters with them: Adam Skelton, Joseph Pier, Jordan Rovny, Shane Gibson, and Melanie Betz. A parish meeting will have to give approval to any acquisition of property or decision to build according to our bylaws.

Meanwhile, the matter does not rest. It depends on all of us to build up the funds available by bringing our tithes and offerings. All funds given that are designated for building go directly to the building fund, and all general offerings above our monthly budget go there as well. If all of us who are gainfully employed tithed a full ten percent and those who were able were to give above and beyond that did so, we would be see the available funds increasing at a much more rapid rate than they presently are. May God reward all the founders and benefactors of this temple!

A Cross Procession *Fr. Justin Frederick*

The Sunday Divine Liturgy in the small church under the famous bells has ended, but the clergy and the faithful are not yet finished. One man takes in hand the processional cross; other men lift large banners as children rush into the room next to the nave to grab small banners to carry. An adolescent boy vested in a sticharion hefts a large metal bowl filled with holy water. One priest seizes the aspergillum for distributing the holy water. The other vested priests reverently raise the boxes containing the church's relics. Quickly, but without confusion or fuss due to weekly practice, all these gather at the church door to form a procession led by the cross and banners, followed by the priests, choir, and faithful—twenty-five to thirty in all.

The cross-procession issues out into a large courtyard enclosed by walls and buildings in the middle of which stands a cathedral. People cluster at the door of the small church; other groups of people dot the enclosure. Some are the faithful who were present for the Divine Service just concluded, but many are domestic sightseers and foreign tourists, for this is a famous ancient town rich with historical beauty. They are not dressed for worship, neither had they any intention this morning of entering the divine service, but the Church, nevertheless, comes out to them.

The procession marches counterclockwise around the cathedral. The priests and choir sing antiphonally: "O Jesus, Son of God, have mercy on us." "Most Holy Theotokos, save us." "O ye saints of the Lord, pray to God for us." To the unmitigated delight of the children, the priest armed with the aspergillum gleefully splashes water on everyone within range—on pious faithful and gawking sightseer alike—for no one watching holy things may escape without paying the price of a blessed dousing.

On this patch of ground, a church has stood since the time the inhabitants of this city were first baptized more than a thousand years ago—first a wooden church, now a magnificent temple in stone erected some six hundred years ago. On this ground for more than a thousand years, the divine services have been served and countless cross processions have passed, sanctifying it with holy water, saturating it with the tears and prayers of the people.

What effect has this holy activity had on the land? We have no physical instruments to measure the

effect of accumulated prayer and sanctity. But those who stand in such places with open hearts cannot but feel that something is different about this ground that sets it apart from all the ground of this earth given over to common use, and, with a little reflection, they will perceive man's deep need for places that by long use ease his drawing near to God. And, what is more, herein the faithful living in lands newer to the Gospel may discern their persistent task of sanctifying their own soil unto the Heavenly King.

Homily from the Prolog *St. Nikolai Velimirovic*

For such is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish men" (1 Peter 2:15).

Brethren, it is difficult to argue with an atheist; it is difficult to talk with an unreasonable man; it is difficult to convince an embittered man. It is difficult to convince the atheist, the unreasonable man and the embittered man with words. You will convince them easier by deeds. "They may through observing you by reason of your good works glorify God" (1 Peter 2:12). Do good deeds to those who wish to argue with you and you will win the argument. One deed of compassion will bring the unreasonable man to his senses and will pacify the embittered man quicker than many hours of conversation. If atheism, unreasonableness and bitterness stem from ignorance, that ignorance is as a fury, which can quickly be restrained by good works. If you argue with an atheist in his own rabid manner, you strengthen the fury of atheism. If you converse with the unreasonable by derision, the darkness of unreasonableness is increased. If you think you will overcome the embittered man with anger, you will stir up a greater fire of bitterness. A meek and good deed is like water over a fire. Always remember the holy apostles and their successful methods of behavior with men. If an atheist provokes you, the man does not provoke you but the devil provokes you: man by nature is religious. If the unreasonable man scolds you, the man does not scold you but the devil scolds you: man by nature is reasonable. If the embittered one persecutes you, then it is not the man who persecutes you but the devil who persecutes you: for man by nature is good. The devil provokes you to lengthy arguments and unfruitful conversations and flees from good deeds. Do good work in the Name of Christ and the devil will flee and only then will you have dealings with men, with true men; religious, reasonable and good men. Therefore whatever you do, do in the Name of the Lord. O All-good Lord, help us to do good and by good to conquer in Your Name. To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

Upcoming Events 2018

23-27 July: OCA All-American Council in St. Louis
28 July: 17- year anniversary of parish founding
30 September: Annual Meeting

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!