

The Confessor's Tongue for July 8, A. D. 2018

Sixth Sunday After Pentecost: Great Martyr Procopius

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.

Grandson of Genghis Khan

The city of Rostov the Great, Russia, has a long, glorious history dating back to before 862, when it was first mentioned in the Russian Chronicle as an important settlement. Its inhabitants were baptized into the Christian faith in 991 shortly after the conversion of Prince Vladimir, and the town became an important Christian center. The city's growth was hampered by being sacked multiple times by the Mongols between 1237 and 1408 and by the Poles in 1608 and by the growth of Moscow, which displaced Rostov as the center of governance and subjected it to the rule of its prince in 1474. Since then, the glorious city of yesteryear has become a run-down provincial backwater of 30,000, a wide spot in the road between modern great cities that have left this one behind. Despite its diminished size and condition, this city contains many treasures.

One such treasure may be found in a modest, nondescript neighborhood of small wooden and brick houses in the yard of an unimpressive church. It is not on the beaten tourist path. It is not on the regular program for pilgrims. Few outside of this town know of it.

A black granite slab lies over a rectangular box of unmortared brick. On it is a decorative edge, a three-bar Orthodox cross, and, at the top, the words: "Venerable Prince Peter, pray to God for us." The slab continues: "Here rest the relics of the founder of a monastery, the great grandson of Genghis Khan, the Prince Daer, Peter in holy Baptism and monasticism. +1290"

The slab hints at an intriguing story. How does a princely descendent of history's greatest conqueror come to die as a monk in the faith of a conquered people fifty years after the conquest? The Prophet Moses at least had common blood as a reason for rejecting the pleasures of Pharaoh's house to identify with the enslaved Hebrews. Why would a privileged prince of a conquering race adopt the alien faith of the race subjected to his own?

The story behind this curious slab begins with the Mongol Conquest of Rus. From 1237 to 1240, the Mongol Hordes under Genghis Khan's grandson Batu Khan swept away all opposition by the Russian principalities, massacring multitudes and subjugating the remnant as tributaries and slaves. More than a decade after the conquest with Rus firmly under the Mongol yoke, St. Kiril, Bishop of Rostov travels to the Golden Horde in 1253 to intercede with Rus's rulers about the needs of the Church. Though Batu, conqueror of Rus still ruled, Kyril appears to have met with Batu's brother Berke or Bergai Khan who ruled the Golden Horde after Batu's death from 1257-1266—and converted the Horde to Islam. A young prince, named Daer, nephew to Berke and grandson

to the great Genghis, present at their meetings, was impressed by St Kiril's tales of miracles worked on the relics of St. Leonty of Rostov. He was further drawn to the Bishop when Berke's son was healed from illness by the prayers of St. Kirill. When the Khan sent St. Kiril back to his diocese, Daer ran after him and asked to go with him. In Rostov, much like St. Vladimir's emissaries in Constantinople, he was impressed by the singing in the church and the grandeur with which the services were conducted. Some time after St. Kiril reposed in 1261, Daer received Holy Baptism and was given the name of Peter. As a Christian, Prince Peter loved silence, contemplation and prayer, but the bishop urged him to marry. He married a noble Tatar maiden who lived in Rostov and they had many children. After his wife's death and shortly before his own in 1290, Peter received monastic tonsure at the Petrovsky Monastery he had founded earlier in life.

Thus, a pagan Mongol became a Christian saint. His feast is kept on June 30.

The All-Night Vigil, Part 1

The Church's celebration of Sunday, the Lord's Day, the day of Resurrection, begins each week on Saturday evening with the celebration of the All-night Vigil. Though in the Church's mind, this service is an essential part of our worship of God and of our preparation to partake of Christ's Body and Blood, in the mind of many in the Church, judging from typical attendance, it is optional, an unnecessary bother and imposition one's busy schedule. To correct this mistaken view and to impart a better understanding to all about the meaning and importance of the Resurrectional All-night Vigil, we shall spend the next couple months examining the Resurrectional Vigil in detail so that we may be better prepared and motivated to make it a regular part of our worship, as it should be.

The All-Night Vigil comprises the daily services of Great Vespers, Matins, and First Hour. It is appointed by the *Typicon* to be served the evening before each Great Feast and every Sunday (which is, in effect, a Little Pascha). The feasts of certain saints also call for a Vigil. It is called "all-night" because in ancient times in Palestine where it first developed, it began at sunset and continued through the night until dawn. Later, as the service spread through the Church, out of condescension to the weakness of the faithful, it was abbreviated to begin late in the evening (but before midnight) and to last until morning. Now in normal parish use, it is abbreviated still further, beginning earlier in the evening and lasting but two or three hours. In our parish, it typically lasts two to two and a quarter hours.

Sunday for Christians is the day of the Lord's Resurrection, the day of the Eucharist, and the day of the Lord's Kingdom (the 8th day). The Sunday services communicate these themes. Note we said the Sunday *services*. The Divine Liturgy is not the only Sunday service. Since the Liturgical day begins at sunset, each Sunday has its Vespers and Matins before the Divine Liturgy. These services are essential, for they prepare us for the Liturgy. Indeed, the Liturgy may not be served with Vespers or Matins having been served, or at least read privately by the clergy. Holding fast to the Orthodox idea of preparation and fulfillment, we see that the preparation of the Vigil is fulfilled in the Eucharist of the Liturgy.

Though we may be tempted to think of the "All-Night" Vigil in terms of the quantity of time spent in the service, the primary concept of time contained in the term "vigil" is qualitative. In ancient times, "vigil" referred to time spent on guard duty, or 'keeping watch'. In the Church, it means time spent in attentive preparation and 'waiting on God'. Spiritual life needs time for development. No one can achieve results in one's spiritual life without time. Modern man's spiritual life is in a state of collapse because of his impatience to achieve results. Vigil is taking time seriously. It relates all time to history, specifically to the history of salvation. When God became man, the Kingdom of God appeared in the time of this world. Vigil becomes the time of the proclamation of that kingdom. Vigil takes us back to the beginning of time and prepares us for the end of time, when all things will be fulfilled in the fullness of Christ's kingdom.

Moreover, Christ instructed His disciples to "watch and pray" so that, though they did not know the hour of His return, they might be ready for it. To keep vigil in the historical and ascetic sense is to deprive oneself of a measure of usual sleep to keep watch, waiting in readiness for the coming of the Son of Man at midnight, training oneself to live life in expectation of Christ's coming: first, in the Holy Mysteries at Every Liturgy, and second, in glory to judge the world and inaugurate His Kingdom. To this day in places like Mount Athos, the Vigil is served through the night (for up to eight hours), preserving the ascetical effort and eschatological anticipation of the service.

In parish practice, the two to three-hour service still represents a significant ascetical effort for us, as we stand in readiness, waiting on the Lord and contemplating in the hymns and psalms all that He has done for us, especially His Incarnation, Death on the Cross, and Resurrection. Having stood through the Vigil, our bodies tell us clearly that we have been in church keeping watch, focused on the 'one thing needful' for our lives. Inconvenient and demanding it may be, but it also offers indispensable training in waiting on the Lord and making Him our priority above all else in life.

The Vigil also gives us a much needed time for spiritual cleansing and renewal after all the cares,

struggles, and sins of the week. It gives us time to get our mind back on God, to honor Him and render thanks, to prepare ourselves for worthy participation in the Holy Mysteries. It gives us time to soften and warm our hearts before God if they have cooled or hardened during the week. Living in the world, we feel the pressure the world puts on us to conform to its mold. Each week, the Vigil helps us decompress from that pressure to conform to the world and to again offer ourselves to Christ. It allows us to free our minds from the cares and temptations of the week, to wash the "dust of sin" that has dirtied our soul in our sojourn in the world, so that we may present ourselves at the morning Liturgy with cleansed hearts, eager and ready to receive the Lord.

Since the Vigil service comprises Matins and Vespers, the beginning and end of the daily services, Vigil becomes the service encompassing the whole of time. Vigil transforms all of time into a time of preparation. Not only is Saturday night the solemn preparation for the Sunday morning Eucharist, it also is the solemn preparation of our lives for the coming of the Kingdom of God at the end of time. Vigil gives us time to increase our attention span for prayerful meditation on these matters of greatest importance to us, and to put aside all the cares and worries of life that would crowd out the growth of the kingdom in us. *Fr. Justin Frederick*

St. Theophan on Wandering Thoughts

Thoughts wander when one is reading spiritual works and during prayer. What should one do? No one is free from this. There is no sin in it, only vexation. Having wandering thoughts becomes a sin when one willingly allows flightiness of mind. But if thoughts scatter involuntarily, what fault can there be? There is fault, though, when one notices thoughts wandering and, taking no action, one wanders along with them. When we catch our thoughts wandering off, we must bring them back to their proper place at once.

Sayings of the Desert Fathers

Abba John the Dwarf prayed God to take his passions away from him so that he might become free from care. He went and told an old man this: 'I find myself in peace, without an enemy,' he said. The old man said to him, 'Go, beseech God to stir up warfare so that you may regain the affliction and humility that you used to have, for it is by warfare that we make progress.' So he besought God, and when warfare came, he no longer prayed that it might be taken away, but said, 'Lord, give me strength for the fight.'

Upcoming Events 2018

23-27 July: OCA All-American Council in St. Louis
28 July: 17-year anniversary of parish founding
1-14 August: Dormition Fast
30 September: Annual Meeting

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!