

The Confessor's Tongue for August 5, A. D. 2018

Tenth Sunday After Pentecost: Eve of Transfiguration; SS Eusignius, Nona

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.

August 6: Holy Transfiguration

One of the Twelve Great Feasts, the Transfiguration of Our Lord primarily proclaims and glorifies Christ's Divinity. On the mountain with Peter, James, and John, Christ was transfigured before them, shining brighter than the sun and revealing His divinity so far as His disciples could bear it without being consumed. Because Christ's Divinity is made manifest, the feast has also been called "the second Theophany."

Traditionally, the Transfiguration is considered to have taken place forty days before the Crucifixion. The feast was originally appointed for February, falling during the Great Fast, but since the joyfulness of feast was not in keeping with the lenten spirit of penitence and fasting, it was transferred to August 6 to be observed forty days before the Feast of the Elevation of the Holy Cross.

Jesus Christ was fully God and fully man in one person, but He appeared to men who looked only on the external appearance to be only a man, for His Divinity was veiled except to the eye of faith. On Mt. Tabor, the veil was removed, and His Divine glory shone forth. It is the same at the weekly Eucharist at which Christ comes to us in the transformed bread and wine. We see bread and wine, just as the disciples and the people of Israel saw a man; but an infinitely greater reality is present to be perceived by the eyes of faith, the very Body and Blood of our Lord, which is our true food and our healing, and for us constitutes "the sacrament of transfiguration." By this mystery, we ourselves are transformed to become partakers of the Divine Nature.

Thus this Feast not only reveals Christ's Divinity, wrapped in humanity, it also reveals divinized human nature. Christ took our full human nature to transform it, to make us by grace what He is by nature. The Transfiguration reveals what we shall be when we no longer fall short of the glory of God, when we are glorified, or as St. John says, "When we see Him, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is."

The Kontakion of the Feast makes another point: by seeing Christ for who He truly was, the disciples would have no doubt when Jesus was crucified that He died voluntarily, not by compulsion. He chose to lay down His life; it was not taken from Him by force. Without this revelation, they and we might be tempted to think of Jesus as a weak man whose life was unjustly taken from Him by a corrupt state. Jesus Himself is emphatic on this point: "I lay My life down for the sheep . . . I lay down My life that I might take it again. No man taketh it from Me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again." (John 10: 15-18)

It is customary to bless summer fruits at the feast. You are encouraged to bring fresh fruits to be blessed at the end of Vigil and Liturgy.

The Feast is celebrated for eight days through its Leavetaking August 13. We sing or say the Troparion and Kontakion at meals and during our usual prayers during this time.

Troparion, Tone 7

Thou wast transfigured upon the mountain, O Christ God, / showing Thy glory to Thy disciples as far as they could bear it. / Through the prayers of the Theotokos, / make Thine everlasting light shine also upon us sinners. / O Giver of Light, glory to Thee!

Kontakion, Tone 7

Upon the mountain wast Thou transfigured, O Christ God, / and Thy disciples beheld Thy glory as far as they could see it; / so that when they would behold Thee crucified, / they would understand that Thy suffering was voluntary, / and would proclaim to the world / that Thou art truly the Radiance of the Father.

St. Maximus on Transfiguration

The Lord does not always appear in glory to all who stand before Him. To beginners He appears in the form of a servant; to those able to follow Him as He climbs the mountain of His transfiguration He appears in the form of God, the form in which He existed before the world came to be. It is therefore possible for the same Lord not to appear in the same way to all who stand before Him, but to appear to some in one way and to others in another way, according to the measure of faith. *Lord, increase our measure of faith!*

The All-Night Vigil: Prokeimenon to Augmented Litany

As the hymn "Gladsome Light" is sung, the clergy (and servers) enter the sanctuary and prepare for the prokeimenon by venerating the altar and going to the high place at the east end of the sanctuary.

Before the prokeimenon is chanted, however, the priest intones, "Peace be to all." Here, standing facing the people, the priest (or bishop) is a living icon of Christ as through him and his words Christ offers His peace to His people. After the Resurrection, Jesus often addressed his disciples with these words. It is not just a greeting, but the impartation of something essential to us. As we live in a world hostile to Christian faith in many ways, especially in temptations and persecutions, we may be tempted to worry and fret. Rather, we are to remember the words Christ spoke to His disciples on the night He was betrayed: "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14:27). Each time the priest gives the peace, we

should through him hear Christ Himself speaking peace to us.

The word “prokeimenon” comes from the Greek and means “what is set forth,” that is, what is appointed to be read. A prokeimenon (plural “prokeimena”) consists of selected verses from the Psalms which are sung before readings from the Holy Scriptures. Prokeimena occur first, at Vespers after “Gladsome Light,” second, at Matins on Sundays and feasts before the Gospel, and third, at the Divine Liturgy before the Epistle.

At one time, the whole Psalm from which the prokeimenon is taken was sung, but gradually the Psalm was reduced to the key verse (the refrain) and the first verse, which identified the Psalm. Since many Christians knew the Psalter nearly by heart, they readily recognized the Psalm from which the prokeimenon was taken. Since every Sunday is a major feast of the Resurrection and the prokeimenon for Saturday refers to Sunday, the prokeimenon at Vespers is a “great prokeimon,” which simply means that more verses accompany it. The prokeimenon is Psalm 92 which begins: “The Lord hath become King, with beauty hath He clothed Himself.”

Vladyka Dmitri’s translation of the prokeimenon is of interest here. The standard OCA translation (and those of other jurisdictions) based on the Revised Standard Version of the Old Testament read “The Lord IS king, He is clothed with majesty”. Modern translations read “the Lord reigns.” But there is a problem with these translations. The Greek verb in Psalm 92:1 is aorist in tense (past, *ebasileusen*) and the Slavonic verb *воцарися* is also past tense. We find the same verb in the aorist tense in Psalm 96:1, 98:1 (LXX), and Revelation 19:6, made famous in Handel’s chorus: “Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.” The Greek verb indicates something that happened in the past, but aorist is difficult. It does not mean an action completed in the past with enduring results in the present (perfect), or a progressive ongoing action or repeated action in the past (imperfect). The Slavonic verb indicates something that happened and was completed in the past. Literally, it means “to come to the throne”. So how are we to understand this?

God as God has reigned over His creation always. If these passages merely assert God’s kingship as God, the verbs would not be in the aorist tense. Theologically, there is another aspect to God’s kingship to consider. While God cosmically is king from eternity, in another sense, by taking human flesh, clothing himself in human nature and glorifying it, by facing temptation, the devil, and death and prevailing over these mortal enemies of man, he has won the right to be king of mankind. Revelation 19:6 celebrates Christ’s putting down all enemies and beginning to reign without opposition at His second coming. Psalm 92:1 then may be taken to speak prophetically about what the Son of God accomplishes by becoming incarnate and trampling down death by death: he becomes the rightful king of mankind by

His service and victory. He comes to the throne, much as the rightful heir Aragorn comes to the throne of Gondor in *Lord of the Rings*—but only after winning the right and doing the service to his people of defeating the enemy. He does this in us personally at Baptism and universally at His Second Coming. So the dynamic rendering “the Lord hath become King”, “the Lord hath begun to reign”, or “the Lord hath come to the throne” captures the meaning better than the static “the Lord reigns,” and thus it glorifies Christ for the accomplishments of His incarnation.

At Vespers, the prokeimenon functions as the turning point of the service: liturgically, the old day (Saturday) ends, and the new day (Sunday) begins. This turning point is clearly seen at Forgiveness Vespers, where the clergy begin the service in bright vestments for Sunday, but after the prokeimenon, they vest in darker lenten vestments and the choir begins singing the lenten melodies.

The “Paroemia” are the Scripture readings or lessons appointed for Vespers. They have largely disappeared except for Great Feasts and Saints for whom a Vigil or Polyeleion Matins are served. The readings are related to the feast or saint in some way, and at Vespers, the readings are primarily from the Old Testament. Usually there are three readings to symbolize the three parts of the Old Testament (Law, Prophets, Writings), and if they are from the Old Testament, the Royal Doors are closed and the church is darkened. If the readings should be from the New Testament, the lights remain on and the doors open. This difference, of course, shows that what was darkly seen in signs, types, and shadows in the Old Testament is now clearly revealed in Christ. This is one reason the Old Testament is not read at the Divine Liturgy: the Liturgy represents the Kingdom, the New Covenant, the Church, and the fulfillment of the Old Testament, and reading from the Old Testament (apart from the Psalms) is not in keeping with the nature of the Divine Liturgy. But on the eve of a feast in the time and service of preparation, the reading of the Old Testament is appointed in accordance with its preparatory nature.

After the readings at Vespers, the Deacon (or Priest) comes out of the altar to stand before the closed royal doors in the darkened church to intone the Augmented Litany, also known as the Litany of Fervent Supplication. The response of the choir and people is a three-fold “Lord, have mercy” rather than the usual one.

Christ’s coming into the world has been portrayed in the entrance, and He has spoken through His Word. In response, the faithful are called to intensify their prayerful communion with God through the petitions of the Augmented Litany.

If the Great Litany is the Church’s prayer for the whole Church and the entire world, the Augmented Litany offers intercession for the local church and local needs. This is demonstrated by the mention of specific names of those in need and who have departed this life. The Church prays specifically by

name in Her services only for those who have been united to her through Baptism. She prays for those not joined to the Church generally (not by name) in the services and specifically by name in the private prayers of the faithful.

The first two petitions of the litany, which have but a single "Lord, have mercy" as the response, are said only at Vigil or Great Vespers. At Daily Vespers, this litany is moved to the end, just after the troparia and before the dismissal, and the first two petitions are dropped. During Lenten Daily Vespers, it is dropped entirely and replaced with forty "Lord, have mercy's".

In the litany, we pray for ourselves, for "pious Orthodox Christians," for our hierarch, for the civil authorities, and all clergy. Though these are not exclusively local concerns, they do concern and affect the local community. Then we pray for the departed, those who have passed the faith to us and those who have recently left us. We pray for all the departed because the Church is one. We are joined by Baptism to the one Body of Christ, and so the death of any believer anywhere in the world affects us even though we are not personally acquainted with him. We then pray for what each believer needs: "mercy, life, peace, health, salvation, visitation, pardon and forgiveness of the sins of the servants of God. . ." who can then be mentioned by name, "the brethren of this holy temple." Here we are called to intercede for those we know, with whom we live our lives and work out our salvation. Finally, "we pray for those who bear fruit and do good works in this holy and revered temple, for those who labor and those who sing, and for the people present who await of thee great and rich mercy." Sometimes, it may seem our service in the Church is thankless, but not only does God see all and reward what is done in secret, so, too, the Church offers prayer for all who serve locally and even for those who are simply present.

An exclamation (*vozglas*) from the priest concludes each litany. It differs from litany to litany, and each teaches us something about God and His character. The exclamation for the Augmented Litany is "For Thou art a merciful God who lovest man, and unto Thee do we send up glory..." We are able to pray effectively for others and ourselves because it is God's nature to be merciful. We need only to read the accounts of Abraham interceding for Sodom and Gomorrah, or Moses repeatedly interceding for wayward Israel to find the Scriptural basis for this appeal.

When Israel stumbled the first time with the Golden Calf (Exodus 32), God said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and, behold, it is a stiffnecked people: now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them: and I will make of thee a great nation" (Ex 32:8-9). Moses interceded for the people, and God spared them. On another occasion, Moses appeals directly to God's mercy for the people: "The Lord is long-suffering and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and

transgression... pardon, I beseech Thee, the iniquity of this people according unto the greatness of Thy mercy..." (Numbers 14:18-19). And God answered his prayer. (Those who say that the God of the Old Testament is a "God of wrath" have not read it with spiritual understanding.) Because God is merciful, we may offer prayers for others and ourselves.

5 August: Martyr Eusignius

The Martyr Eusignius was born at Antioch in the mid-third century. For sixty years he served in the Roman armies of the emperors Diocletian, Maximian Hercules, Constantius Chlorus, Constantine the Great and his sons. Saint Eusignius was a companion of Saint Basiliscus (March 3 and May 22), and he provided an account of his martyrdom. At the beginning of the reign of Saint Constantine the Great, Saint Eusignius was a witness to the appearance of the Cross in the sky, a prediction of victory.

Saint Eusignius retired in his old age from military service and returned to his own country. There he spent his time in prayer, fasting, and attending the church of God. So he lived until the reign of Julian the Apostate (361-363), who yearned for a return to paganism. Through the denunciation of one of the Antiochian citizens, Saint Eusignius stood trial as a Christian before the emperor Julian in the year 362. He fearlessly accused the emperor of apostasy from Christ, and reproached him with the example of his relative, Constantine the Great, and he described in detail how he himself had been an eyewitness to the appearance of the sign of the Cross in the sky. Julian did not spare the aged Saint Eusignius, then 110 years old, but ordered him beheaded.

On the Emperor Julian and St. Basil

The Emperor Julian (361-361) was a Christian who in his youth studied in Athens with Basil and Gregory of Nazianzus. The latter two later became bishops and were recognized as saints; the former became emperor, fell away from Christ, tried to restore paganism in the Roman Empire, persecuted Christians, received the sobriquet "Apostate" for his efforts, and died in battle against the Persians, struck down by a random missile at the age of 31 after having reigned for all of twenty months. His last words were, "Thou hast conquered, O Galilean!" Here is his surviving correspondence with his classmate, St. Basil. Some scholars think it spurious, but it is included in Basil's collected letters.

Julian to Basil Letter 39

The proverb says You are not proclaiming war, and, let me add, out of the comedy, O messenger of golden words. Come then; prove this in act, and hasten to me. You will come as friend to friend. Conspicuous and unremitting devotion to business seems, to those that treat it as of secondary importance, a heavy burden; yet the diligent are modest, as I persuade myself, sensible, and ready for

any emergency. I allow myself relaxations so that even rest may be permitted to one who neglects nothing. Our mode of life is not marked by the court hypocrisy, of which I think you have had some experience, and in accordance with which compliments mean deadlier **hatred** than is felt to our worst foes; but, with becoming freedom, while we blame and rebuke where blame is due, we **love** with the **love** of the dearest friends. I may therefore, let me say, with all sincerity, both be diligent in relaxation and, when at work, not get worn out, and sleep secure; since when awake I do not wake more for myself, than, as is fit, for every one else. I am afraid this is rather silly and trifling, as I feel rather lazy, (I praise myself like Astydamas) but I am writing to prove to you that to have the pleasure of seeing you, wise man as you are, will be more likely to do me good than to **cause** any difficulty. Therefore, as I have said, lose no time: travel post haste. After you have paid me as long a visit as you like, you shall go on your journey, wherever you will, with my best wishes.

Julian to Basil, Letter 40

While showing up to the present time the gentleness and benevolence which have been natural to me from my boyhood, I have reduced all who dwell beneath the sun to **obedience**. For lo! every tribe of barbarians to the shores of ocean has come to lay its gifts before my feet. So too the Sagadares who dwell beyond the Danube, wondrous with their bright tattooing, and hardly like **human** beings, so wild and strange are they, now grovel at my feet, and pledge themselves to **obey** all the behests my sovereignty imposes on them. I have a further object. I must as soon as possible march to **Persia** and rout and make a tributary of that Sapor, descendant of Darius. I mean too to devastate the country of the Indians and the Saracens until they all acknowledge my superiority and become my tributaries. You, however, profess a wisdom above and beyond these things; you call yourself clad with **piety**, but your clothing is really impudence and everywhere you **slander** me as one unworthy of the imperial dignity. Do you not **know** that I am the grandson of the illustrious Constantius? I **know** this of you, and yet I do not change the old feelings which I had to you, and you to me in the days when we were both young. But of my merciful will I command that a thousand pounds of gold be sent me from you, when I pass by Cæsarea; for I am still on the march, and with all possible dispatch am hurrying to the Persian campaign. If you refuse I am prepared to destroy Cæsarea, to overthrow the buildings that have long adorned it; to erect in their place temples and **statues**; and so to induce all **men** to submit to the Emperor of the Romans and not exalt themselves. Wherefore I charge you to send me without fail by the hands of some trusty messenger the stipulated gold, after duly counting and weighing it, and sealing it with your ring. In this way I may show mercy to you for your **errors**, if you acknowledge, however late, that no excuses will avail. I have learned to **know**, and to condemn, what once I read.

Basil to Julian Letter 41

1. The heroic **deeds** of your present splendour are small, and your grand attack against me, or rather against yourself, is paltry. When I think of you robed in purple, a crown on your dishonoured head, which, so long as **true** religion is absent, rather disgraces than graces your empire, I tremble. And you yourself who have risen to be so high and great, now that vile and honour-hating **demons** have brought you to this pass, have begun not only to exalt yourself above all **human nature**, but even to uplift yourself against **God**, and insult His Church, mother and nurse of all, by sending to me, most insignificant of **men**, orders to forward you a thousand pounds of gold.

I am not so much astonished at the weight of the gold, although it is very serious; but it has made me shed bitter tears over your so rapid ruin. I bethink me how you and I have learned together the lessons of the best and holiest books. Each of us went through the sacred and God-inspired Scriptures. Then nothing was hid from you. Nowadays you have become lost to proper feeling, beleaguered as you are with **pride**. Your serene Highness did not find out for the first time yesterday that I do not live in the midst of superabundant **wealth**. Today you have demanded a thousand pounds of gold of me. I hope your serenity will deign to spare me. My property amounts to so much, that I really shall not have enough to eat as much as I shall like today. Under my roof the art of cookery is dead. My servants' knife never touches blood. The most important viands, in which lies our abundance, are leaves of herbs with very coarse bread and sour wine, so that our senses are not dulled by **gluttony**, and do not indulge in excess.

2. Your excellent tribune Lausus, trusty minister of your orders, has also reported to me that a certain **woman** came as a suppliant to your serenity on the occasion of the death of her son by poison; that it has been judged by you that poisoners are not allowed to exist; if any there be, that they are to be destroyed, or, only those are reserved, who are to fight with beasts. And, this rightly decided by you, seems strange to me, for your efforts to cure the pain of great wounds by petty remedies are to the last degree ridiculous. After insulting **God**, it is useless for you to give heed to **widows** and **orphans**. The former is mad and dangerous; the latter the part of a merciful and kindly man. It is a serious thing for a private individual like myself to speak to an emperor; it will be more serious for you to speak to **God**. No one will appear to mediate between **God** and **man**. What you read you did not understand. If you had understood, you would not have condemned.

Upcoming Events 2018

1-14 August: Dormition Fast
6 August: Holy Transfiguration
15 August: Dormition of the Theotokos
30 September: Annual Meeting

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!