

The Confessor's Tongue for August 12, A. D. 2018

Eleventh Sunday After Pentecost: Martyrs Anicetus & Photius

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.

The Annual Meeting

The parish annual meeting will be held the last Sunday of September (30th). Adult members (who have been members for at least six months of age 18 and older), who are in good standing (have gone to Confession and Communion in the past year and have fulfilled their financial obligation to the parish) are eligible to vote, though anyone who attends the parish is welcome to attend. While we have not offered a formal process to become a member beyond Baptism, your presence, participation in the Mysteries, and giving here make you a member.

The definition mentions fulfillment of "the financial obligations established by the parish". While our diocese teaches tithing, our parish has so far chosen not to establish any hard definition of the obligation, leaving it to the priest's discretion to decide the question in each case. The priest in making a determination takes into account all he knows about the person in addition to the recorded amount that person has given over the past year. Any questions about this as it pertains to your case should be addressed to him.

The main purpose of the meeting is to hear reports from the priest and officers, ask questions, consider and pass an annual budget, and resolve any questions about the acquisition of property or the construction of buildings. The Uniform Parish Bylaws of the Diocese of the South describe all this. They may be found on the diocesan website, dosoca.org under the 'parish resources' tab.

If there is some item that you think should be discussed and acted upon at the annual meeting, please submit it this month to Fr. Justin or any member of the Parish Council: Adam Skelton, Joseph Pier, Maximus Gibson, Melanie Betz, Jordan Rovny. Any such items should be submitted before September 1.

Dormition of the Most-Holy Theotokos

This feast, celebrated on August 15, is the last Great Feast of the liturgical year, which ends on August 31. The Dormition refers to the "falling asleep" or death of the Theotokos.

According to the ancient tradition of the Church, when it came time for the Theotokos to pass from this life to the Kingdom, an angel appeared to her three days before her death to inform her of this passage. The Virgin made preparations for her death, ascending the Mount of Olives to pray and give thanks to the Lord. Meanwhile, the Holy Apostles were miraculously carried away from where each had been to the house of the Theotokos. There, they prayed with her, and she committed her soul to her Son and God. The Apostles laid her body to rest in a tomb in the valley of Kedron near Gethsemane. By God's providence, Thomas arrived late, on the third

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day after her death. He was grieved that he had missed Mary's last moments, and so he wanted to see her one last time and venerate her body. The other Apostles took him to the tomb and had it opened. Inside, they discovered her body missing and the empty grave clothes. In this way, they realized she had already partaken of the Resurrection.

The focus of the Dormition Feast is the glorification of the Holy Theotokos in death and her participation in the Christ's Resurrection before the day of the general resurrection. This shows her to have reached man's goal of perfect life in union with God. The feast is also eschatological in that it points to the victory over death that every faithful believer will gain.

In commemorating the Theotokos' repose or death, Dormition is akin to the feast of any other saint. It differs, however, in that it affirms her bodily resurrection and her participation in the life of the age to come. Though affirmed in the hymnology and by many of the Fathers and thus represents Orthodox teaching, this belief in Mary's "assumption" is not dogma in the Orthodox Church, though by papal decree in 1950, it is dogma for Roman Catholics.

We celebrate the Dormition for 8 days, from August 15 through the Leave-taking August 23. We add the festal troparion and kontakion to our regular morning and evening prayers, in place of our usual prayers before and after meals, and when setting out to travel. It is customary to bless herbs and flowers on this feast.

Troparion, tone 1

In giving birth, thou didst preserve thy virginity, / in falling asleep thou didst not forsake the world, O Theotokos. / Thou wast translated to life, O thou who art the Mother of Life, // and by thy prayers thou dost deliver our souls from death.

Kontakion, tone 2

Neither the tomb nor death could hold the Theotokos, / who is constant in prayer and our firm hope in her intercessions. / For being the Mother of Life, she was translated to life / by the One who dwelt in her virginal womb.

The All-Night Vigil: Vouchsafe to Evening Litany

After the Augmented Litany, the Deacon steps aside from before the Royal Doors while the priest intones the exclamation. Then the reader chants the prayer, "Vouchsafe, O Lord, to keep us this evening without sin...", a short prayer derived from the longer Great Doxology. It is always read by the reader except during Bright Week, when it is sung.

After the prayer "Vouchsafe", the Deacon, back in his place before the royal doors, intones the Evening Litany, also known as the Litany of Supplication. Normally each service of the Church ends with a prayer or litany of supplication. At Vespers, this is the Evening Litany, and at Matins, it is called the Morning Litany. This litany is known at once from its first petition, "Let us complete our evening/morning prayer unto the Lord." It is also

distinguished by the response of the people, "Grant this, O Lord," making a more daring request of the Lord than the more penitential and usual response, "Lord, have mercy." The Evening Litany, with its response "Grant this, O Lord," makes request for some things we have not yet asked during the Vigil.

It begins with the last petition of the Great and Little Litanies: "Help us, save us, have mercy on us, and keep us, O God, by Thy grace," and the usual response, "Lord, have mercy." Thus it starts where the other litanies leave off.

The petitions are all personal, pertaining to each believer. Here are no prayers for hierarchs or government officials, but for the spiritual welfare of us, the faithful. We pray in the first person plural "we," as Christ taught us to pray, for we are connected by Baptism in one Body to one another and we cannot find salvation for ourselves if we care not for the salvation of others. We pray for our own essential spiritual needs which are the needs of all Orthodox Christians.

We pray that the specific time of day we are entering will be sinless: "That the whole evening may be perfect, holy, peaceful, and sinless..." Our struggle with sin is ongoing, and how rare are the hours when we do not fall short of God's glory in some way! But we never cease to seek that victory over sin. Notice that we ask for sinlessness only for the immediate future, for the next few hours. If one can go one hour without sin, one can go two; if two, one can go four, and so on. If we look to far into the future, the thought of how hard it is to guard constantly against sin will overwhelm us. We rather ask strength only for this day in which we are living. When tomorrow has become today, only then we shall concern ourselves with tomorrow's struggle.

We ask of the Lord "an angel of peace, a faithful guide and guardian of our souls and bodies." This petition reminds us that we are not alone in our spiritual struggles, but the angels of God also render us assistance, particularly our guardian angel, who always works for our salvation and deliverance and sees all we do. We need to cooperate with the angels rather than resist them by evil deeds and words.

We ask "pardon and forgiveness of our sins and offenses." Until now in the litanies, we have not asked this so specifically, so concretely for ourselves. The Augmented Litany requests "pardon and forgiveness of the sins of the servants of God, [insert names], the brethren of this holy temple," but we have not asked it for ourselves until now. As we are not saved alone, we ask it for "us", the Church gathered locally.

The next petition reads, "All things good and useful for our souls, and peace for the world, let us ask of the Lord." God alone knows what is best for us. Here, we ask that He will give us only what will benefit our souls, and not simply every request we might make. When we pray for specific things, we sometimes request something that will be harmful to us unbeknownst to us. The petition thus teaches us to seek only that which will be of spiritual benefit, in accordance with God's will for us. We also request peace for the world in the petition. This could be taken to mean the cessation of war and the prevailing of peaceful times in which to work out our salvation, but to take it only so seems out of place with the other petitions. Rather, the prophet Isaiah says, "The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose water casts up mire and dirt. There is no peace," saith my God, 'to the wicked'" (Isaiah 57:20-21). As we pray for our spiritual good, we do not forget the world, those yet outside the Church, and we pray for their peace, which comes only from Christ.

The Evening Litany concludes with a petition for "a Christian ending to our life, painless, unashamed, peaceful, and a good defence before the fearful judgment seat of Christ..." As Christians, we cannot only begin well in our spiritual lives, but must finish well, and this petition seeks that we may endure faithfully to the end with nothing to be ashamed of in the hour of death and nothing to fear before Christ's judgment. Baptism does us little good if we fall away before the end. Moreover, we are reminded that death will come to each of us and will usher us in to judgment. Each of us will give an account of his life before Christ—a sobering thought. Thus we pray that in the end we shall not stand condemned before Christ as unprofitable servants.

At the end of each litany, we remember the Theotokos and all the saints and "commend ourselves, and each other, and all our life unto Christ our God." Some Christian groups will have periodic calls to "rededication," in which the people are called to renew their faith and commitment to Christ. In Orthodox worship, that opportunity is given at the end of each litany. We offer ourselves body and soul to Christ as living sacrifices, entrusting ourselves to His care and protection.

The exclamation for the Evening Litany differs slightly from that of the Augmented Litany before it: "For Thou art a good God who lovest man..." God is not only merciful but is also good. As He is good, He works only good on our behalf, though because our definition of "good" is usually skewed, we sometimes struggle to see the good in the difficult situations that come to us. Our good God only gives good gifts (James 1:17; Matt 7:7-11), and because He is good, we may dare to commend ourselves to His care and ask of Him "what is good and useful for our souls."

After the exclamation of the Evening Litany, the Priest faces the people and blesses them, "Peace be to all," and then turns back to the east and says "Let us bow our heads unto the Lord." As the choir sings "to Thee, O Lord," the priest mystically prays for those who have bowed their heads: "...Unto Thee, the fearful Judge who lovest man, have Thy servants bowed their heads and subjected their necks, awaiting not help from man, but expecting Thy mercy and looking for Thy salvation. Keep them at all times, both during this present evening and during the approaching night, from every enemy, from every adverse operation of the Devil, and from vain thoughts and from evil imaginations." Rather than being stiffnecked resisters of God as ancient Israel, the faithful are called to bow their heads and subject their necks unto Christ, submitting to Him as King rather than being ruled thy their own self-will, and on the basis of that submission to the rightful ruler, they can expect His mercy and protection.

Herein is part of the blessing of being in attendance at any service: the priest prays mystically for those present, interceding for the faithful present (and those absent for a worthy reason). Though these prayers are often not read aloud, the faithful should know that at every service, the priest offers prayer on their behalf.

Upcoming Events 2018

- 13 August: Feast of St. Maximus
- 15 August: Dormition of the Theotokos
- 19 August: Blessing of Pupils, Students, and Teachers
- 22 September: Baptisms of Emily Stokes & Jacob Skelton
- 30 September: Annual Meeting
- 14 October: Octoberfest

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!