

# The Confessor's Tongue for September 23, A. D. 2018

17th Sunday After Pentecost: Conception of St. John the Baptist

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.

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## Annual Meeting 2018

In preparation for the annual meeting, excerpts from the Uniform Parish Bylaws for the Diocese of the South pertaining to membership and the parish meeting have been posted on the bulletin board. The full parish bylaws are available on the website of the Diocese of the South under "Parish Resources". Here you may see how membership for purposes of voting is defined.

The definition mentions fulfillment of "the financial obligations established by the parish". 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.

As we are still formally a mission, our parish council is appointed by the priest with the bishop's blessing rather than elected.

This year, the only items on the agenda are approving a budget and choosing a lay representative for the diocesan assembly next summer. We will also present to those present the status of the building program and invite discussion.

## New Class on St. Maximus 400 Chapters on Love

If you have been a reader of the bulletin at St. Maximus, you will have noticed that every week we run a small selection from the writings of our patron saint. Over the years, we have run selections from *200 Chapters on Knowledge*, *The Mystagogy of the Church*, and *The Lord's Prayer*, but, preeminently and repeatedly, we have run *400 Chapters on Love* nearly in full. Currently, we are excerpting again from it, and we are into the Fourth Century.

If you have been a reader of the selections from St. Maximus, you will have noticed that his writings are often not easy to understand. He uses a particular technical spiritual vocabulary, and he speaks of deep matters of the heart and the exalted things concerning God that are beyond the experience of many. Those who live in the Church cultivating the life in Christ through faith, repentance, prayer, fasting, almsgiving, and keeping Christ's commandments can gain much from carefully reading and rereading his work. It is possible to gain some understanding just reading him without living the life, but much of his work will remain opaque to us unless we undertake to live the life in Christ.

The words he uses to convey his experiential knowledge of God are often difficult, sometimes unfamiliar. Even words seemingly familiar to us are used in unfamiliar ways with special meaning. While we are blessed to have this most profound theologian as our patron, his work requires some work on our part to be understood.

To this end, we shall offer this fall an opportunity to talk a bit about the saint's various works available to us and then spend a couple months reading and discussing the *400 Chapters on Love* with an eye to defining difficult words and explaining difficult concepts so that we may gain an understanding of his view of man's goal and what is involved in achieving it. We will meet on Wednesdays at 6:10 and run to 6:55—45 minutes to read and discuss a bit of his work. All are interested in this are invited to participate.

There are at least three English translations available, but we will primarily use the one found in Volume Two of the *Philokalia*. The other two, one translated by Polycarp Sherwood in the *Ancient Christian Writers Series* and one by George Berthold in *The Classics of Western Spirituality* series are also of value and may be profitably consulted. For those who have none of these, I may make some sort of provision.

## Building Christian Community

The word "community" is much used and abused in our time. You may decide for yourselves whether such usages as "the business community", "the homosexual community", "the gamer community", "the hunting community", "the educational community", "the online community", etc., are valid, but I would contend they abuse language and trivialize the meaning of the word.

Fundamentally, a community is "a social group of any size whose members reside in a specific locality, share government, and often have a common cultural and historical heritage." The groups above, to the degree that they are groups at all, are ostensibly united by a common interest and perhaps some common experiences. But there is no common life together in a locality, no shared government or way of life, and often no personal knowledge of one another.

The Christian Church from the beginning was a community of those called out of the world to follow Jesus Christ as Master and Lord. While the Church submitted to the local authorities, it largely governed its own life, its members urged to settle their disputes in the Church rather than to go to secular law. It was Christ's commands that guided them in a common way of life. They were united by sharing the one Faith in the One Risen Lord, having received the one Baptism and partaking regularly of the one loaf and one cup. They were urged to love one another as Christ had love them, and this love was not a feeling but a willingness and commitment to take care of one another.

True community has largely been destroyed in the modern Western world for many reasons. If we are not to be lost in the crowd as atomistic individuals

with no meaningful connections to anyone and nothing to unite us other than living under a common national or international government, we need community. And if we are to survive whatever hard times may be ahead of us, it is through community and God's mercy that it will be accomplished.

To be the member of the Church is to be the member of a local community, where, united by our common faith and worship, we learn to love one another, even when we don't find one another particularly lovable. (We must always remember that we ourselves are not always particularly lovable.) Such community does not happen automatically. It takes an effort on the part of each. We choose to come to church regularly, and not just Sunday morning. We partake regularly of Confession and Holy Communion. We embrace the path of Christ's commandments and seek to live by them in all our relations. We make the effort to get to know others at coffee hour, picnics, and classes, as well as outside formal parish gatherings. We pray for one another. We look out for one another. If someone is absent, we care enough to enquire. If someone is ill or in need, we make it our business to render whatever aid we can. If we have differences with someone, we humble ourselves and in love seek to be reconciled rather than running away.

Community of this sort is truly community, and such a community will sustain us through all manner of hardships. Consider the existence of Christian communities in the Middle East that survived for 1400 under alien Muslim rule. Without community, though, we are weak in the face of a world which would conform us to its own image.

*Fr. Justin Frederick*

### **The All-Night Vigil: The Six Psalms of Matins**

After the Vesperal portion of the All-night Vigil (about 40 minutes in parish practice), the second part begins: Matins. Matins is the Church's daily service of morning prayer. It combines two themes: the end of night, and the beginning of day. Night is the image of death. Night is when early Christians especially prayed in their eschatological anticipation of Christ's return and Eternal Kingdom. Night has been conquered and death overthrown. Night is the reality of the world without Christ; it gives man the feeling of chaos, fear, insecurity.

Only the Word of God takes us out of the night. Light comes only from God. Light always is from God, for there is no darkness in God. The light of the day is a resurrection every morning. Matins celebrates this victory over night—the resurrection of light—and God's goodness in not leaving us in perpetual darkness.

At the All-night Vigil, Matins begins with the Six Psalms, or "Hexapsalms," as they are sometimes called: the lights are extinguished, the bells rung, and the reader stands in the midst of the temple with a lighted candle to read them. As the candles (except

for the lampadi before the icons; in most places, however, only the electric lights are dimmed or turned out) are gradually extinguished, we experience in the descending darkness the dark night Christ entered at His coming.

The rubrics direct that the Six Psalms be read slowly, without haste. Both reader and faithful are to read and hear the words as though they were praying them directly to God as a prayer. This is a time for stillness and concentration, and everyone, if at all possible, should stand attentively throughout the reading of the psalms. The rubrics even note that bows are not to be made after the first three psalms during the Glory... Alleluia...Glory. All is quiet, dark, and as motionless as possible to facilitate concentration as we strive to enter into the psalms and make the prayer of the Psalmist our own.

The Six Psalms begin with thrice-fold repetition of the hymn of the angelic choir at Christ's Nativity: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace, good will toward men," followed by a repeated verse from Psalm 50: "O Lord, open Thou my lips, and my mouth shall declare Thy praise." Christ was born into our dark, fallen world to show us the way by which we might return to God on high and find peace with ourselves and with others.

The Six Psalms (3, 37(38), 62 (63), 87 (88), 102 (103), 142 (143) represent the history of the opposition of night to day. They express the whole range of experience and prayer in the Christian life. They alternate between confidence in and gratitude towards God for His salvation and deliverance, and desperate outcry to God from those in distress, darkness, bondage, and affliction. The themes thus alternate between actualized salvation and potential salvation, and the overarching mood is penitential.

The first psalm of the Six (3) expresses confidence in God as man cries out to the Lord for help against a multiplying number of enemies who say that God cannot save him. These enemies are first of all the sinful passions of our souls and the demons that work to stir them up (only secondarily are they humans that may oppose us). "God can't save you from us," they mock. But this is a lie, for man has cried out to the Lord, who heard him, and protected him so that he could sleep and wake again. With God on his side, he need not fear ten thousand foes. The man speaking in the Psalm is Christ first of all, the God-man, but it is also us in our own spiritual warfare. Praying this Psalm enables us to call on the Lord against seeming great odds without despair, knowing He will save us.

At the end of each psalm a verse or two from the psalm is repeated to conclude the psalm and to summarize its contents. For Psalm 3, the repeated verse is "I fell asleep and slept; I rose again, for the Lord succoreth me." The verb "to succor" literally means "to run to" or "to run to support" and hence has the fuller meaning "to help or relieve when in difficulty, want or distress." Sleep itself is an image of death; when we sink into the sleep of spiritual death through sin, when our spiritual enemies have

prevailed against us and are multiplying so that they are too many to defeat, it is the Lord who raises us up again to life and consciousness that we may continue the fight.

The second Psalm of the Six (37) is a cry of repentance to God in the face of the distress, weariness, and suffering which our sins have brought upon us, even to the point of losing our usual sources of human aid from neighbors and friends. The repeated verse sums up our posture towards God: "Forsake me not, O Lord my God; turn not away from me. Attend to my help, O Lord of my salvation."

The third Psalm (62) returns to the theme of realized salvation and man's gratitude for it. Man rises early in the morning (for Matins) to seek the Lord in his great thirst for Him. What God has to offer him is far better than even life itself. The repeated verse declares: "In the mornings I have meditated upon Thee, for Thou hast become my Helper, and under the shelter of Thy wings will I rejoice. My soul hath cleaved unto Thee; Thy right hand hath uphelden me."

Now, midway through the Six Psalms, the reader says, "Glory to the Father...now and ever... Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia, glory to Thee, O God [3], Lord have mercy [3], Glory...now and ever..." and the last three psalms. In the Russian tradition, one does not do full bows during this interlude; one only crosses oneself and inclines the head slightly. In the Greek tradition, one does not bow or cross at all.

During this interlude, the Priest exits from the south door and stands bareheaded before the Royal Doors, wearing only his riassa and epitrachelion, to recite the 12 Matins prayers silently for those present, representing again fallen man standing outside of Paradise in the darkness of the fallen world, crying out to the only One who can deliver him.

The fourth psalm of the Six (87) is perhaps the darkest, showing man in his greatest desperation and need. Man cries out "for my soul is filled with evil and my life hath come nigh to hell." Man feels the weight of God's displeasure and rejection for his sins, what Christ experienced when He cried out on the Cross, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" Yet in our greatest despair and weakness, even when it seems God has closed His ears to us and forsaken us, we still cry out to the Lord, as the repeated verse expresses: "O Lord God of my salvation, I have cried in the day and in the night before Thee. Let my prayer come in before Thee; bow down Thine ear to my supplication."

Once man has been in the depths of the pit, when salvation finally comes, his response is joyous, and this joy is expressed in the fifth Psalm (102). If the fourth Psalm is the darkest of the Six, then fifth is the most joyful; indeed, it is the first Psalm sung during most Divine Liturgies (the first antiphon). "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless His holy name." How can man not be joyful when the Lord has healed him, given him good things, and removed his transgressions from him "as far as the east is from the

west." The repeated verse at the end of the Psalm declares what our response to God's goodness always should be: "In every place of His dominion, bless the Lord, O my soul!"

The last Psalm (142) returns to man's cry for help to God, but it is tinged with faith and hope. The enemy has persecuted me, brought me low, and made me sit in darkness. I am dejected. Don't judge me, for no one can stand worthily before the righteous Judge. "Hearken to me in Thy righteousness, O Lord, and enter not into judgment with Thy servant. Thy good Spirit shall guide me to the land of uprightness." As Jesus told His disciples, "In the world, ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). The Christian life alternates between times of trouble, tribulation, and distress, and times of joy, peace, and wellbeing. Each time we pass through the valley, it should be with a deeper faith in Christ than we had the previous time, and though we suffer, our suffering is eased by our previous experience of God's goodness and deliverance, for we know that suffering and tribulation is inevitable in this life, but God redeems it to work His good in our lives through it, that Christ may be formed in us. Thus the Six Psalms contain the full range of experience and prayer for the Christian, which is why we are called to attend carefully to them and enter into them at Matins.

### **From the Arena**

*St. Ignatius Brianchaninov*

From his very entry into the Church, a Christian should occupy himself with all possible care and attention with the reading of the Holy Gospel. He should make such a study of the Gospel that it may always be present in his memory, and at every moral step he takes, for every act, for every thought, he may always have ready in his memory the teaching of the Gospel. Such is the injunction of the Savior Himself. This injunction is linked with a promise and a threat. In sending His disciples to preach Christianity, the Lord said to them: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20).

The promise consists in the fact that the person who fulfills the commandments of the Gospel will not only be saved but will also enter into the most intimate union with God and become a divinely built temple of God. The Lord said: "He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me; and he who love Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will reveal Myself to him" (John 14:21).

From these words of the Lord, it is evident that the commandments of the Gospel must be so studied that they become the possession, the property of the mind; only then is the exact, constant fulfillment of them possible such as the Lord requires. The Lord

reveals Himself to the doer of the commandments spiritually, and He is seen with the spiritual eye, with the mind. The person sees the Lord in himself, in his thoughts and feelings transfigured by the Holy Spirit. On no account must the Lord be expected to appear to the eyes of sense. This is clear from the words of the Gospel that follow those we have just quoted: "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode in him" (John 14:23).

The threat to a person remiss in the fulfillment of the commandments of the Gospel is contained in the predication for him of unfruitfulness, estrangement from God, perdition. The Lord said: "Without Me, you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in Me, he is lopped off like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire and burned. Remain in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will remain in My love" (John 15:5-6, 9-10). "Not everyone who calls Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only those who do the will of My Father in heaven. On that day [the day of judgment] many will say to Me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Thy name, and expel demons in Thy name, and do many miracles in Thy name?' And then I will confess to them, 'I have never known you. Depart from Me, you whose work is sin'" (Matthew 7:21-23).

The giver, teacher, and model of humility, our Lord Jesus Christ, called His all-holy, almighty, divine commandments 'the least' on account of the very simple form in which they are expressed and which makes them easy to understand and easy to carry out for every type of person, even the most uneducated. But at the same time the Lord added that a deliberate and constant breaker of even one commandment 'will be called least in the Kingdom of Heaven,' or, according to the explanation of the holy Fathers, will be deprived of the heavenly Kingdom and will be cast into the fire of gehenna.

The Lord's commandments are "Spirit and life." They save the doer of them. They restore a dead soul to life. They make a carnal and worldly person spiritual. On the other hand, a person who neglects the commandments ruins himself and remains in a carnal and worldly state, in a fallen condition, and develops the fall in himself. "The carnal man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him" (I Corinthians 2:14). And therefore it is indispensable for salvation to be changed from a carnal man into a spiritual, from the old man into the new. "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God." And therefore it is essential for salvation to be freed not only from the influence of the flesh or coarse passions, but also from the influence of the blood by means of which the passions act on the soul. "Those who go far from Thee [not by position of body but by disposition of soul which dodges from doing the will of God] will perish. Thou destroyest all who go awhoring from Thee" by following their own will and their own understanding by refusing to

commandments of the Gospel or the will of God. The latter necessarily accompanies the former. "But it is good for me," as a true [Christian], "to cling to God, to put my trust in the Lord" (Psalm 72:27-28). CT 120318, 171203

### From Our Parish History in Septembers Past

In 2001, Liturgy started at 8:45.

First Labor Day picnic in 2002.

Sept 10, 2006 saw Vladyka Dmitri visit. We customarily had him in the fall, Sept or Oct.

Sept 13, 2008, Sister Magdalen of St. John the Baptist Monastery, Essex, England, visited and spoke after Hurricane Ike caused her planned program in Houston to be cancelled.

In 2010, the hallway on the left side of the nave was incorporated into the nave, making the church cruciform.

21 Sept, 2017 saw Reader Michael Rehmet made subdeacon and Maximus Gibson tonsured reader.

27 Sept 2017 saw nun Alexandra and lay sister Ana from St. Elizabeth Monastery, Minsk, Byelorussia, visit.

### Theology as a Liturgy of the Church: Selections

*Archimandrite Vasileios*

Those who think they know Christ outside the Church know very few things about Him; those who belong to the Church live "in Him." Thus, we can say that the Gospel is essentially a "private" book. It belongs to the Church, which has a world-wide mission. Or, to put it another way, outside the Church, the Gospel is a sealed and incomprehensible book. This is characteristically expressed in the way that it is placed on the altar in the Orthodox Church, for it is within the church that the ministry of the Gospel is accomplished.

The Gospel cannot be understood outside the Church, nor dogma outside worship.

The Gospel and dogma are expressions of the same Spirit of the Church. The Church is not producing literature when it writes the Gospel, nor engaging in philosophy when it formulates dogma, but in both cases it is expressing the fullness of the new life hidden within it. For this reason, the Gospel cannot be understood outside the Church, nor dogma outside worship. Dogma is the expression of the mystical life of the Church. . . .

### Upcoming Events 2018

30 September: Annual Meeting

14 October: Octoberfest

31 October: All Saints Party

11 November: Parish Thanksgiving Meal

2 December: Children's Craft Fair

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!