

The Confessor's Tongue for October 7, A. D. 2018

19th Sunday After Pentecost: Martyrs Sergius, Bacchus, and Pelagia

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.

All-Night Vigil: Polyeleon to Magnification

The Polyeleon (meaning 'many mercies'), comprising Psalms 134 and 135, is the most festive part of Matins. It glorifies God for the greatness of His mercy shown to His people of old when He brought Israel out of Egypt and into the Promised Land. Every member of the new Israel, every Christian, identifies with Israel's Exodus from slavery in Egypt and the passage through the Red Sea as a sign of his own deliverance from bondage to sin through Baptism and Chrismation.

Praise the name of the Lord: praise Him O ye servants of the Lord. Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia! Praise be to God in Zion, He that dwelleth at Jerusalem. Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia! O confess unto the Lord, for He is good, for His mercy endureth forever. Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia! O confess unto the God of heaven, for His mercy endureth forever. Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!

Typically, only a selection of verses from the two Psalms is sung: probably most commonly (and minimally) four (first and last of each Psalm), but each verse is followed by the joyful refrain of the thrice-fold "alleluia." Locally, we sing a longer version for feasts and a complete version when we do a full All-night Vigil.

As these verses are sung, all the lamps and candles in the church are lit, the Royal Doors are opened, and if it be a Great Feast, the festal icon is brought out to the center of the church which the Priest sets on an analogion and then censes. If it is not a Great Feast, the priest remains censing at the front of the altar. This censing is done with both Priest and Deacon bearing candles as at the beginning of the Vigil.

If the Vigil is a Resurrectional Vigil taking place in the three weeks preparatory to Great Lent (Prodigal Son through Cheesefare), Psalm 136 ("By the Waters of Babylon") is added to the Polyeleon.

The Polyeleos is not prescribed at every Resurrectional Vigil, though commonly it is always done. According to the *Typicon*, it is taken from the Leavetaking of the Elevation of the Cross until Cheesefare Sunday and any Sunday outside of that time when an important saint is celebrated. If it is not prescribed, Psalm 118—the longest psalm—is taken in its place. Our custom is to take Psalm 118, but only an eighth of it each week. This Psalm, which extols the law of God, represents Christ Himself in total surrender to the will of His Father, even unto death. Chanting Psalm 118 constitutes the real life of man in God, that of obedience to His statutes which are life-giving. Christ's death in history is the greatest act of life. Life is, in fact, to say, "I love Thy statutes."

It is unfortunate that this Psalm extolling the glories and blessing of God's law is so often abbreviated or even omitted from our services, for it imparts to us an accurate assessment of God's law

which can serve as an antidote to negative attitudes towards God's law that afflict some of us.

This Psalm forms an important part of the funeral service, too, though it is usually abbreviated. It is used at the funeral because it is a hymn of Resurrection, which is the chief theme of a Christian funeral.

One verse from Psalm 118, "Blessed art Thou, O Lord, teach me Thy statutes," comprises the familiar refrain in the next part of Matins: the Evlogitaria or 'Troparia of the Undeified.' They take their name from the first verse of Psalm 118: "Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord." A number of troparia on the theme of the Resurrection are sung, each preceded by the refrain, "Blessed art Thou..." For example, the third:

"Very early in the morning the myrrhbearers ran with sorrow to Thy tomb. But an angel came to them and said: "The time for sorrow hath come to an end; do not weep but announce the resurrection to the apostles. Blessed art Thou, O Lord, teach me Thy statutes."

There is life and blessing in keeping God's law, and the way of God's statutes leads us to our participation in the Resurrection. To ignore God's will expressed in His law is to court death. As the Troparia of the Undeified are sung, the Priest, accompanied by the Deacon, censes the whole temple and the people.

If the Vigil is being served for a Great Feast, the Troparia of the Undeified, which glorify the Resurrection, are not taken. Instead, a hymn glorifying the saint or feast known as the Magnification is taken, which begins with the words, "We magnify, we magnify Thee..." This practice is not found in the Greek usage, but only in the Slavic. The Priest chants this in front of the appropriate icon. He then carries out the great censing of the temple as above while the choir repeats the Magnification with its psalm verses several times. If the whole prescribed psalm were used, the Magnification could take nearly half an hour in itself! This part of the Matins is followed by a Little Litany with its exclamation.

12 October: St. Symeon the New Theologian

Saint Simeon the New Theologian was born in the year 949 in the city of Galatea (Paphlagonia), and he was educated at Constantinople. His father prepared him for a career at court, and for a certain while the youth occupied a high position at the imperial court. When he was fourteen, he met the renowned Elder Simeon the Pious at the Studion Monastery, who would be a major influence in his spiritual development. He remained in the world for several years preparing himself for the monastic life under the Elder's guidance, and finally entered the monastery at the age of twenty-seven.

Saint Simeon the Pious recommended to the young man the writings of Saint Mark the Ascetic (March 5) and other spiritual writers. He read these books attentively and tried to put into practice what he read. Three points made by Saint Mark in his work "On the Spiritual Law" (see Vol. I of the English *Philokalia*) particularly impressed him. First, you should listen to your conscience and do what it tells you if you wish your soul to be healed (*Philokalia*, p.

115). Second, only by fulfilling the commandments can one obtain the activity of the Holy Spirit. Thirdly, one who prays only with the body and without spiritual knowledge is like the blind man who cried out, "Son of David, have mercy upon me" (Lk 18:38) (*Philokalia*, p. 111). When the blind man received his sight, however, he called Christ the Son of God (Jn 9:38).

Saint Simeon was wounded with a love for spiritual beauty, and tried to acquire it. In addition to the Rule given him by his Elder, his conscience told him to add a few more Psalms and prostrations, and to repeat constantly, "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy upon me." Naturally, he heeded his conscience.

During the day, he cared for the needs of people living in the palace of Patricius. At night, his prayers grew longer and he remained praying until midnight. Once, as he was praying in this way, a most brilliant divine radiance descended upon him and filled the room. He saw nothing but light all around him, and he was not even aware of the ground beneath his feet.

It seemed to him that he himself became light. Then his mind rose upward to the heavens, and he saw a second light brighter than the light which surrounded him. Then, on the edge of this second light, he seemed to see Saint Simeon the Pious, who had given him Saint Mark the Ascetic to read.

Seven years after this vision, Saint Simeon entered the monastery. There he increased his fasting and vigilance, and learned to renounce his own will. The Enemy of our salvation stirred up the brethren of the monastery against Saint Simeon, who was indifferent to the praises or reproaches of others. Because of the increased discontent in the monastery, Saint Simeon was sent to the Monastery of Saint Mamas in Constantinople. There he was tonsured into the monastic schema, and increased his spiritual struggles. He attained to a high spiritual level, and increased his knowledge of spiritual things through reading the Holy Scriptures and the writings of the Fathers, as well as in conversation with holy Elders.

Around the year 980, Saint Simeon was made igumen of the monastery of Saint Mamas and continued in this office for twenty-five years. He repaired and restored the monastery, which had suffered from neglect, and also brought order to the life of the monks.

The strict monastic discipline, for which Saint Simeon strove, led to great dissatisfaction among the brethren. Once, after Liturgy, some of the monks attacked him and nearly killed him. When the Patriarch of Constantinople expelled them from the monastery and wanted to hand them over to the civil authorities, Saint Simeon asked that they be treated with leniency and be permitted to live in the world.

About the year 1005, Saint Simeon resigned his position as igumen in favor of Arsenius, while he himself settled near the monastery in peace. There he composed his theological works, portions of which appear in the *Philokalia*.

The chief theme of his works is the hidden activity of spiritual perfection, and the struggle against the passions and sinful thoughts. He wrote instructions for monks: "Theological and Practical Chapters," "A Treatise on the Three Methods of Prayer," (in Vol. IV of the English *Philokalia*) and "A Treatise on Faith." Moreover, Saint Simeon was an outstanding church poet. He also wrote "Hymns of Divine Love," about seventy poems filled with profound prayerful meditations.

The sublime teachings of Saint Simeon about the mysteries of mental prayer and spiritual struggle have earned him the title "the New Theologian." These teachings were not the invention of Saint Simeon, but they had merely been forgotten over time. Some of these teachings seemed unacceptable and strange to his contemporaries. This led to conflict with Constantinople's church authorities, and Saint Simeon was banished from the city. He withdrew across the Bosphorus and settled in the ancient monastery of Saint Makrina.

The saint peacefully fell asleep in the Lord in the year 1021. During his life he received the gift of working miracles. Numerous miracles also took place after his death; one of them was the miraculous discovery of his icon. His Life was written by his cell-attendant and disciple, Saint Nicetas Stethatos. His feast is observed March 12, but because it falls during Great Lent, it is transferred to October 12. oca.org

On Faults Often Considered Trifling

St. Symeon the New Theologian

There will be those who, like myself, have been insubordinate and disobedient toward God's commandments who vainly calculate and say, "But I have not committed fornication! Swearing is nothing. I have not committed adultery! But what sin is it to have stolen a penny or a piece of bread?" And again, "I should attain bliss, if I do not commit the foul and sacrilegious vice of homosexuality. But what sin is there in being insulting or jealous, in being flippant or frivolous?" Then again there are those who in their folly think highly of themselves for being pure from the practice of sins of the flesh, and think that they are like angels of God, but take no account of the virtues and passions of the soul. They have nothing but contempt for all the rest of the Lord's commandments and do not force themselves to fulfill them. They refuse to do anything that is strenuous or to undergo any suffering for a commandment of God, and live carelessly.

What benefit, brethren, is there from abstaining from fornication and other impure acts of the body and yet seek after glory and strive for money? The one corrupts the body, and the other corrupts the soul. Moreover, glory from men and love for it makes us to be unbelievers, according to the word of the Lord when He says, "How can you believe, who receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?" What good is it to be innocent of homosexual acts, but to waste away with envy, hatred, and jealousy toward your neighbor? Hatred toward one's brother makes him who feels it into a murderer, for the apostle says, "anyone who hates his brother is a murderer." According to the sacred canons, a sodomite and a murderer are subject to the same penalty, and if they fail to repent they will be subject to eternal condemnation.

Upcoming Events 2018

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!