

The Confessor's Tongue for December 6, A. D. 2020

26th Sunday after Pentecost; St. Nicholas the Wonderworker of Myra

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 Eucharist

Then Jesus said to them, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you.' John 6:53

And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them and said, 'Take, eat; this is My body.

Then He took the cup, and when He had given thanks He gave it to them, and they all drank from it. And He said to them, 'This is My blood... Mark 14:23-24

Instituted by Christ for His Church, the Holy Eucharist is not a peripheral part of our Faith. It is not optional. It is not an ancient rite maintained for sake of nostalgia. It is not a simple remembrance of what Christ has done for us, nor is it a mere symbol of Christian unity as we all partake of one loaf and one cup.

Christ's own words do not allow us to treat the Eucharist with such indifference or condescension. According to Christ, if we do not eat His flesh and drink His blood, we have no life in us. O, we may be physically alive, but at St. Justin of Chelije has expressed it, man without Christ is but a "walking corpse" who has an appearance of life but not the essence. Though there are other sources of grace, the Eucharist is the unique impartation of life to us by Christ's Body and Blood. The Early Church understood the uniqueness of the Eucharist by referring to it as the "medicine of immortality." Christ identifies His Body and Blood with the bread and wine He blessed and then offered to His disciples before His crucifixion, commanding them to "do this in remembrance of Me."

Our partaking of the Eucharist is the heart of our relationship with Christ. With it, we have life; without it, we lack His life. Excommunication is to be cut off from the life of Christ. We excommunicate ourselves when we neglect the Eucharist and do not bother to come to church or prepare ourselves to receive it. According to the canons, if we absent ourselves from the Divine Liturgy for three consecutive weeks without a good cause, we have excommunicated ourselves. Serious sin also prevents us from receiving Holy Communion until we have effected a good repentance. To go to Confession and to hear that one may not partaker of the Mysteries is not the arbitrary action of the priest to punish you, but is a simple declaration of the reality you have already embraced by choosing sin. In declaring your condition to you and the consequences of your actions, the priest serves as God's messenger to call you to repentance, cleansing, and restoration to fellowship in the Mysteries. Being severed from the Eucharist by choice or by sin is to be cut off from life; it is to abide in spiritual death.

The Eucharist is communal in nature. We gather together to celebrate it, and it cannot be celebrated

by the priest alone. It is not something we can do privately in our homes; it is not something we can have without direct connection to the Church. There is no substitute in Bible reading, prayer, or good works or anything else for the Eucharist. Hence we cannot be Christians without attending Church!

The Eucharist is festal in nature. It is a 'giving of thanks' as we remember all that God in Christ through the Spirit has done for us and continues to do. It is taking time away from the demands of life in this world to remember and honor the One who made us and restores us to life through the sacrifice of His Body and Blood. Because of its festal nature, it is not celebrated on weekdays of Great Lent when we are cultivating repentance through fasting.

Great is the good gift offered to us in the Eucharist, and great is our error and fault when we disdain it as something optional for spiritual life or when we are too lazy to attend the Liturgy regularly, or when do not make the effort to prepare ourselves regularly through Confession, Prayer, and Fasting to partake. Here is the medicine for what ails us, if we will come with faith and love to partake of our Master's good gifts. With this understanding of the Eucharist, how can we allow ourselves to be content with partaking infrequently? And how shall we answer Christ as to why we neglected the provision He made for us at great cost to Himself? *Fr. Justin*

Why Walk on Pilgrimage?

If physical walking provides a metaphor for the Christian's spiritual life in Christ, then attentive, purposeful walking on a pilgrimage promises insight and blessing. Walking, however, takes time and effort. Modern man, used to speed, convenience, physical ease, and quick changes in scenery and environment finds this initially difficult. Why spend three hours walking the six miles from Karyes to Vatopedi Monastery on the old foot path when you could drive and be there in thirty minutes without sweat or sore feet—or dropping and losing your water-skin on the way as I did?

"Sensory overload" is largely a modern phenomenon first noticed at the start of the twentieth century with the growing density of cities and the concentration there of sights and sounds. Since then with the proliferation of radio, television, movies, recorded music, and manufactured images bombarding man's senses at almost all times, it has only grown worse. Unless carefully guarded, the senses convey far more data to the brain than it can process, causing stress and anxiety, inability to concentrate, irritability, overexcitement, inability to complete tasks among other things.

Pilgrimage on foot offers a departure from the realm of overstimulation and a reduction of the

stimulation of the senses to a level normal to the natural world. With the senses less bombarded by impressions from the material world, the soul becomes freer to ponder deeper things, to become more aware of itself in the presence of God. Walking on pilgrimage allows this needed sensory decompression to take place.

The pilgrim typically arrives on Athos by boat. At the modest port of Daphni on the southwestern side of the Athonite peninsula, he disembarks and takes a bus crowded with pilgrims up and over the steep spine of the Athonite peninsula down to Karyes, the administrative center of the mountain. The distance is not far, perhaps three miles at most, but it is steep. We spotted a couple adventuresome pilgrims walking the route, but we did not attempt it. We took the bus.

Karyes has the appearance of a medieval stone village that has reluctantly made room for the automobile. The main street boasts a number of shops selling food, books, liturgical items, clothing, prayer ropes, incense, and the like, along with a post office, a medical clinic, a bakery, and a police station. The administrative offices for the mountain are there. Next to them stands the Protaton Church which houses the wonderworking icon of the Theotokos "Axion Estin" ("Meet it is"). Clustered around the main street are representation houses for each of the twenty monasteries and other buildings. During the day, Karyes bustles with pilgrims, lay workers, and monks there on business. Here one may catch a ride to many destinations. Here, one may visit Koutloumousiou Monastery, St. Andrew's Skete, and Panagouda Hermitage where St. Paisios lived. Here, too, one may strike out on foot by the ancient paths to any monastery on the mountain.

Choosing to hike the six miles (ten kilometers) to Vatopedi Monastery, we found the beginning of the way and set out. Quickly we left the bustle of Kayres behind. Stillness and peace closed in. The only noises to be heard were those of nature, of our walking, and occasionally, of our voices. Insects buzzed, leaves rustled, birds sang. Our feet sounded on dirt, on rock, on grass. The straps of our backpacks creaked. Labored breathing could be heard on steep ascents. Water tinkled in streams or gurgled through pipes laid along the ground to supply monastic dwellings. We walked under the chestnut trees, which flourish on the mountain. Along the path wildflowers bloomed in abundance. The spring sun shone, lighting our way and warming the air without overheating it. We passed intersections with other paths heading to other places. Often we saw those other places: hermitages, sketes, monasteries.

Whatever the sight, because of the easy measured pace of our walking, we had time to see it, register it, study it, reflect on who chose to build it long ago, who had worked out their salvation there over the centuries, and who now lived there. If the building was neglected, abandoned, or falling into ruin, we wondered who last lived there and why monastic life

in that place had ceased, and whether it would be repaired and again inhabited or would fall into complete ruin. We had time to ponder the attractions of each setting. We could stop for a longer look, if we wished, or to take pictures.

Despite an abundance of beauty to take in, it did not overload the senses. Unlike the overwhelming rush of sights from a car at sixty miles an hour, the procession of things to see was slow, measured, manageable. Unlike the swift cutting from one image to another in a modern move trailer or music video, objects could linger before our eyes for as long as it took to take them in and appreciate them. All the senses were in play. We could feel the breeze, smell the air, taste the water, feel the ground under our feet, and hear the quiet. All this, rather than overloading the senses, gave us the context of what we were seeing and allowed us to process it.

How can a pilgrim properly appreciate three or four venerable monasteries built a thousand years ago and inhabited continuously since when visiting them by car on a single day? He cannot. But if he walks, he can reflect on where he has been, anticipate where he is going, appreciate the effort taken to reach his destination, receive well-earned hospitality, attend services there, venerate the relics, talk to the monks, eat with them, spend the night, and taste something of the life in a venerable monastery. Walking the courtyard, standing in church, and visiting the ossuary, the pilgrim may ponder those who in centuries past stood in the same places. He may feel the connection with them as his brothers in the faith who have gone on before him. He may formulate questions about their lives, the history of the monastery and its practices, and about his own life—questions he would scarcely have had time to ask if he had not taken the time to go on foot. *Fr. Justin, Allegories from Athos*

Choruses from the Rock

T. S. Eliot, 1934

This poem of T.S. Eliot, inspired by his faith in Christ, speaks much truth to us today. Important themes in this installment include building well, loving our neighbor, our dependence on the past for good and ill, the centrality of community in human life.

III (3rd installment)

The Word of the **Lord** came unto me, saying:
O miserable cities of designing men,
O wretched generation of enlightened men,
Betrayed in the mazes of your ingenuities.
Sold by the proceeds of your proper inventions:
I have given you hands which you turn from worship,
I have given you speech, for endless palaver,
I have given you my Law, and you set up commissions,
I have given you lips, to express friendly sentiments,
I have given you hearts, for reciprocal distrust.
I have given you power of choice, and you only alternate
Between futile speculation and unconsidered action.
Many are engaged in writing books and printing them.
Many desire to see their names in print.

Many read nothing but the race reports.
Much is your reading, but not the Word of God,
Much is your building, but not the House of God.
Will you build me a house of plaster, with corrugated
roofing,

To be filled with a litter of Sunday newspapers?

1st Male Voice: A Cry from the East:

What shall be done to the shore of smoky ships?
Will you leave my people forgetful and forgotten
To idleness, labour, and delirious stupor?

There shall be left the broken chimney,
The peeled hull, a pile of rusty iron.

In a street of scattered brick where the goat climbs,
Where My Word is unspoken.

2nd Male Voice: A Cry from the North, from the West and
from the South

Whence thousands travel daily to the timekept City;
Where My Word is unspoken,

In the land of lobelias and tennis flannels

The rabbit shall burrow and the thorn revisit,

The nettle shall flourish on the gravel court,

And the wind shall say: "Here were decent godless people:

Their only monument the asphalt road

And a thousand lost golf balls."

Chorus: We build in vain unless the Lord build with us.

Can you keep the City that the Lord keeps not with you?

A thousand policemen directing the traffic

Cannot tell you why you come or where you go.

A colony of cavies or a horde of active marmots

Build better than they that build without the Lord.

Shall we lift up our feet among perpetual ruins?

I have loved the beauty of Thy House, the peace of Thy

sanctuary,

I have swept the floors and garnished the altars.

Where there is no temple there shall be no homes.

Though you have shelters and institutions,

Precarious lodgings while the rent is paid,

Subsiding basements where the rat breeds

Or sanitary dwellings with numbered doors

Or a house a little better than your neighbour's;

When the Stranger says: "What is the meaning of this city?

Do you huddle close together because you love each

other?"

What will you answer? "We all dwell together

To make money from each other"? or "This is a

community"?

And the Stranger will depart and return to the desert.

O my soul, be prepared for the coming of the Stranger,

Be prepared for him who knows how to ask questions.

O weariness of men who turn from God

To the grandeur of your mind and the glory of your action,

To arts and inventions and daring enterprises.

To schemes of human greatness thoroughly discredited.

Binding the earth and the water to your service,

Exploiting the seas and developing the mountains,

Dividing the stars into common and preferred.

Engaged in devising the perfect refrigerator,

Engaged in working out a rational morality,

Engaged in printing as many books as possible,

Plotting of happiness and flinging empty bottles,

Turning from your vacancy to fevered enthusiasm

For nation or race or what you call humanity;

Though you forget the way to the Temple,

There is one who remembers the way to your door:

Life you may evade, but Death you shall not.

You shall not deny the Stranger.

IV

There are those who would build the Temple,
And those who prefer that the Temples should not be
built.

In the days of Nehemiah the Prophet
There was no exception to the general rule.

In Shushan the palace, in the month Nisan,

He served the wine to the King Artaxerxes,

And he grieved for the broken city, Jerusalem;

And the King gave him leave to depart

That he might rebuild the city.

So he went, with a few, to Jerusalem,

And there, by the dragon's well, by the dung gate,

By the fountain gate, by the king's pool,

Jerusalem lay waste, consumed with fire;

No place for a beast to pass.

There were enemies without to destroy him.

And spies and self-seekers within,

When he and his men laid their hands to rebuilding the
wall.

So they built as men must build

With the sword in one hand and the trowel in the other.

V

O Lord, deliver me from the man of excellent intention and
impure heart: for the heart is deceitful above all things,
and

desperately wicked.

Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite and
Geshem

the Arabian: were doubtless men of public spirit and zeal.

Preserve me from the enemy who has something to gain:
and

from the friend who has something to lose.

Remembering the words of Nehemiah the Prophet: "The
trowel

in hand, and the gun rather loose in the holster."

Those who sit in a house of which the use is forgotten: are
like

snakes that lie on mouldering stairs, content in the
sunlight.

And the others run about like dogs, full of enterprise,
sniffing

and barking: they say, "This house is a nest of serpents, let
us

destroy it,

And have done with these abominations, the turpitudes of
the

Christians." And these are not justified, nor the others.
And they write innumerable books; being too vain and
distracted

for silence: seeking every one after his own elevation, and
dodging his emptiness.

If humility and purity be not in the heart, they are not in
the

home: and if they are not in the home, they are not in the
City.

The man who has builded during the day would return to
his

hearth at nightfall: to be blessed with the gift of silence,
and

doze before he sleeps.

But we are encompassed with snakes and dogs: therefore
some

must labour, and others must hold the spears.

December Birthdays, Namedays, Anniversaries

- 05 Aleksandr Sancer BD
06 Nicholas Heitzenrater ND (St. Nicholas)
06 Aleksandr Sancer ND (St. Nicholas)
06 Gary Reynolds BD
06 Magdalene Davis BD
07 Nancy Saito Hollembeak BD
09 Gabriel Wells BD (2008)
11 Jenilee Skelton BD
11 Lydia Sancer BD
15 Adam Skelton BD
- Namedays on Sunday of Forefathers (Dec 11-17)*
11 Adam Betz ND (Adam the First Created)
11 Adam Kaufman ND (Adam the First Created)
11 Benjamin Morris ND (Patriarch Benjamin)
11 Reader Benjamin Tolleson ND (Patriarch Benjamin)
11 Solomon Morris ND (King Josiah)
11 Derek Sancer ND (Righteous Joseph the Comely)
11 Nathan Brouillette ND (Prophet Nathan)
11 Rebecca Rovny ND (St. Rebekah)
11 Rebekah Skelton ND (St. Rebekah)
11 Chloe Stokes ND (St. Rebekah)
11 Rachel Rovny ND (St. Rachel)
11 Nancy Saito Hollembeak ND (St. Rachel)
11 Mindy Armeanu ND (St. Ruth)
11 Evangeline Lyda ND (St. Ruth)
11 Emailie Northam ND (St. Ruth)
11 Sara Semerikov ND (St. Sarah)
- 13 Jonathan & Mary Ann Strand WA
16 Emmanuel Lyda BD (2005)
16 Joel & Alta Morris WA (2006)
17 Daniel Kaufman ND (Prophet Daniel)
17 Daniel Van Hoose ND (Prophet Daniel)
17 Daniel Brown ND (Prophet Daniel)
17 Liam McAnear ND (Prophet Daniel)
17 Holly Bellan BD
17 Donna Lange BD
19 Patrick St. Jean BD
19 Robert & Elisabeth Terry WA (1998)
21 Lauren Bramlett ND (St. Juliana)
22 Kitara Van Hoose ND (St. Anastasia)
22 Gideon Morris BD (2010)
22 Maria Sidorenko BD
23 Subdeacon Maximus Gibson BD
23 Aemilia Heitzenrater BD (2005)
24 Kersten Davis BD
26 Joseph Pier ND (Joseph the Betrothed)
27 Steven Killfoil ND (Protomartyr Stephen)
27 Stephen Van Hoose ND (Protomartyr Stephen)
27 Estefania Dean ND (Protomartyr Stephen)
28 Nathan Brouillette BD
28 Seraphim Davis BD (2010)
28 Brian & Adrienne Freas (1991)
30 John Roberts BD
31 Melanie Betz ND (St. Melania of Rome)
31 Melanie Strand (St. Melania of Rome)
31 Nun Susannah Cole BD
31 Fr. Justin Frederick Ordination to Priesthood (2000)

You must firmly remember this spiritual law of life: if you condemn someone for something or are disturbed by something in another person, you will experience the very same thing. You will do that which you condemned someone else for doing, or you will suffer from the same infirmity. *St. Nikon of Optina*

St. John of Kronstadt on Candles in Church

Do not grudge burning a wax taper before the image of the Lord during prayer; remember that you burn it before the Light inaccessible, before Him who enlightens you with His light. Your candle is as though a burnt offering to the Lord. Let it be a gift to God from your whole heart. Let it remind you that you yourself should also be a burning and shining light. *He was*, says our Lord of John the Forerunner, *a burning and a shining light*.

I offer light to the Lord in order that He may bestow the light of grace, spiritual light, upon me, that He may lead me from the darkness of sin into the light of the knowledge of God and of virtue; I offer fire that the fire of the grace of the Holy Spirit may be kindled in my heart, and that I may quench the fire of the vices of that miserable heart. I bring a light that I myself may become a light, burning and shining to all that are in the church.

It is well to place candles before the icons. But it is still better if you bring as a sacrifice to God the fire of your love for him and your neighbor. It is well that the one should accompany the other. But if you place candles before the icons and have no love for God and your neighbor in your heart, if you are grasping, if you do not live in peace with others—then, your offering to God is useless.

I am an infirm, carnal, sinful man. I am not always able to bring to my Lord a heart burning with faith and love—but at least I bring, as a carnal, material man, a material gift as a gift to heaven, a lighted candle. May the Lord look down from heaven upon this little gift of my zeal, and may he give me more in return. He alone is rich, and enriches all, whilst I am poor and needy. He dwells amid light inaccessible, whilst I am in darkness. I am of little faith; may He grant me the gift of faith. I am poor in love; may He enrich my heart with this priceless heavenly treasure. I am powerless to do good; may He give me that power. From *Spiritual Counsels: Select Passages from My Life in Christ*, SVS Press

Upcoming Events 2020

- 22 December: Holy Unction, 6:30 p.m.
24 December: Nativity Eve: Royal Hours, Vespers, Liturgy, Vigil
25 December: Nativity of Our Lord Liturgy
31 December: All Night Vigil for St. Basil and New Year

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!