

The Confessor's Tongue for January 31, A. D. 2021

34th Sunday after Pentecost; Unmercenary Healers Cyrus & John

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.

Homily on the Meeting of the Lord

Archbishop Dmitri (+2011)

On February 2nd the Church celebrates the great feast of The Meeting of our Lord in the Temple. The Gospel lesson for that day relates how the mother of Jesus brought Him to the temple, as was the custom and requirement under the God-given Law of Moses, of Israel (Exodus 13:2, 12; Leviticus 12:2-8). When the righteous Simeon, who received Christ in his arms at the temple, saw the child he knew immediately that this was the Redeemer promised by all of Israel's prophecies, for the elder was inspired by the Holy Spirit (Luke 2:26-27). Being inspired he himself uttered prophetic words which form the hymn sung or chanted at the end of every Vespers service: "*Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word; for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation which Thou hast prepared before the face of Thy people, a light to lighten the gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel*" (Luke 2:29-32).

This particular feast is part of the great celebration that began forty days prior, with the Nativity of Christ (December 25). Eight days later (January 1) we remembered the Circumcision of Christ and then His Baptism (January 6). The commemoration of these events in our Lord's earth life basically form one feast, the feast of the Incarnation of God the Word.

God literally entered the world, into time and history. He was physically present in the midst of His people, His creatures whom He loves. Our Lord took on human nature in order to reconcile unto Himself, man who had strayed far from the Source of his life.

In taking on the "form of a servant" God, at the same time, in the Person of Christ, fulfilled every requirement of the Law that He Himself had given to His people through Moses. He demonstrated, thereby, that everything that had happened in Israel's history could not be described merely as a succession of unrelated events. Rather this was a history with a definite goal: the salvation of mankind. He identified Himself as the Director of that history and fulfilled its expectation.

When the righteous Simeon took the child into His arms and declared that this indeed was Salvation Incarnate, the "Light to lighten the gentiles, and the glory of Israel," a new era began; the era of God's presence among His children.

To this day, all of the Church's celebrations, no matter what the event commemorated may be, whether in the life of Christ, of the Theotokos, or of the saints, all are celebrations of Christ and the establishment on earth of the Kingdom of His presence. He initiated this Kingdom and promised its ultimate realization. And now, just as the Old Israel had awaited the beginning of God's Kingdom, the New Israel (the Church) awaits the Second and

Glorious Coming of Christ and the fullness of His Kingdom, revealed.

Although all of our celebrations are intimately rooted in the knowledge that we have been called for complete communion with Christ and to live in function of His Kingdom to which we already belong, we still live in a world that has for the most part rejected what Christ gave it, that is, authentic life "in abundance," life with real purpose and meaning. We Christians, in spite of having accepted what God's intervention in human affairs gave us, slip repeatedly and fall into the great temptation to convert the things of this world into gods. We are constantly attracted by ways of seeking happiness and fulfillment that exclude God. This, of course, always proves to be vain and futile.

So our lives vacillate, back and forth, between the assurance of salvation and indifference, between moments of real joy because we know that God is with us, and moments of boredom because we cannot give ourselves totally over to Him.

Every Christian celebration reaches its climax in the Divine Liturgy for the feast. In this sacred work, when God's people assemble in His name, we actually become participants in the Heavenly Kingdom to come. We are as literally present with Christ in His future Kingdom as the Apostles were with Him at the Last Supper. So the Kingdom is initiated among us and we enjoy it before our time, by anticipation. This is what every Eucharist is; this is what our feasts and celebrations are all about, and that is why the Eucharist is the very center of all of them.

I will emphasize again, however, that although what we have said is true, we continually orient our lives towards everyday pursuits, often living as though we had never experienced this divine reality. That is why repentance and penitential seasons are in order. That is why in approximately one month we will enter the Great Fast or Lent during which time we are exhorted to repent of our sins.

It is a particularly fortunate coincidence that in 1999 the feast of the Meeting of our Lord, a feast of His Kingdom, coincides almost to the day with the start of the Lenten Triodion and the announcement of the beginning of the Great Fast. On the Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee (January 31) we are reminded of one of the basic reasons for our need of repentance: our self-righteousness, our pride, our feeling of superiority and mistreatment and intolerance of our neighbor.

Basically what is important for us Christians is that we have really "seen the True Light, received the Heavenly Spirit, found the true faith" in this experience of the Kingdom of God. The question we must all ask ourselves sincerely, however, is "what are we like when we return into this world after this Heavenly experience?"

To Christ Who willed to be held in the arms of the righteous Simeon for our salvation be glory, honor and worship, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.

February 2: Meeting/Presentation of the Lord

This Tuesday, the Church celebrates the Meeting or Presentation of the Lord in the Temple, one of the Twelve Great Feasts. We shall observe it with Vigil Monday night at 7:00 and Divine Liturgy Tuesday morning at 6:00.

In the West, this feast became associated with the blessing of candles and is often referred to as "Candlemass".

The Feast of the Meeting of Our Lord has a post-feast until February 9th. During the festal time, the troparion and kontakion of the feast are said along with our daily prayers and at meals.

Troparion, tone 1

Rejoice, O Virgin Theotokos full of grace, / for from thee hath shone forth the Sun of Righteousness, Christ our God, / who doth illumine those in darkness. / Be glad also, thou righteous elder, / for thou hast received in thine arms the Deliverer of our souls, // who bestoweth upon us Resurrection.

Kontakion, tone 1

Thou who hast sanctified by Thy birth a virgin womb / and fittingly blessed the hands of Simeon, / Thou art come, O Christ our God, and on this day hast saved us. / Give peace to thy commonwealth in time of battle / and strengthen the Orthodox people whom Thou hast loved, // O Thou who alone lovest mankind.

The Commandments of Christ

"If ye love Me, keep My commandments." (John 14:15)

"Have faith in God." Mark 11:22

Jesus delivers this command to Peter after He withers the fruitless fig tree and Peter expresses his amazement. "Have faith in God," Jesus responds, and "what things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them."

"Have faith in God." Have it, possess it, hold it, keep it; do not be without it, do not let it go, do not lose it.

"Have faith in God." Be assured of the good things you hope for that He has promised and be convinced that you will possess what you do not yet see; do not doubt God.

"Have faith in God." Believe Him as a faithful, reliable person who acts on your behalf for you good; do not just have faith about Him, and there is no place outside of Him worthy of your faith.

"Have faith in God." Trust and believe the one true living God revealed in Jesus Christ who is proclaimed and worshipped in His Church which He established.. Do not trust some generic "god" or your own imagination regarding the divine. Have faith in God, not in man or in human institutions. Remember: man proposes, but God disposes.

Believe that God is.

Believe that God rewards those who diligently seek Him.

Believe that God answers fervent prayer.

Believe that God made you.

Believe that God loves you.

Believe that God predestined you for glory.

Believe that no power can forcibly separate you from God's love.

Believe that no power can tear you out of God's hand.

Believe that Christ the unique Godman died for you.

Believe that God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked.

Believe that God wants to save you.

Believe that God is more powerful than any man or government.

Believe that God is more powerful than any phenomenon of nature.

Believe that God is more powerful than Satan and all the demons.

Believe that God is able to deliver you from any and all danger.

Believe that God is able to deliver your loved ones from any and all danger.

Believe that God loves your loved ones far more than you do.

Believe that He is better able to take care of them than you are.

Believe that God is able to bring eternal good for you out of any situation.

Believe that God always has your eternal well-being in mind.

Believe that God always keeps His Word;

Believe that God does not break His promises, nor is He a man that He should lie.

Believe that He will return to judge the world and to reward each man according to his deeds.

Believe that God actively holds the universe together and governs it.

Believe that God governs the affairs of men.

Believe that even in the most desperate situation, God is able to make a way out.

Believe that having faith in God pleases Him.

Believe that even a little faith in God is potent.

Have faith in God. *Fr. Justin*

Upcoming Events 2021

2 February: Meeting of Lord in Temple

7 March: Meatfare Sunday

14 March: Forgiveness Sunday

15-20 March: Clean Week

25 March: Annunciation

25 April: Palm Sunday

26-30 April: Great & Holy Week

2 May: Holy Pascha

3-8 May: Bright Week

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!