

The Confessor's Tongue for February 14, A. D. 2021

36th Sunday after Pentecost; Zacchaeus,

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.

Zacchaeus Sunday

Not formally a commemoration, the Sunday on which the Gospel about Zacchaeus is read is often referred to as "Zacchaeus Sunday". It is significant in that it marks the end of the series of Gospel readings determined by the length of time after Pentecost and warns us that the following Sunday opens the *Triodion* and the pre-lenten season. Indeed, next Sunday, we open our 'lenten hymnal', the *Triodion*, and begin our preparation for the Great Fast with the Sunday of the Publican and Pharisee followed by a fast-free week. Most of the hymns from the *Triodion* will be heard at Vigil the night before and not at the Divine Liturgy.

The hymns from the *Triodion* powerfully express the nature of the Fast, why we undertake it, and how to do it. They encourage us to keep at it; they lift our prayer to God for His aid in the contest of the Fast. These hymns are heard at every Vespers and Matins throughout the week. They are heard at Vigil on Saturday night. They are very little heard at Divine Liturgy on Sunday morning. Thus, it behooves us during the Fast to endeavor to attend Vigil Saturday night and to come some time during the week to a service. Failing this, get a copy of the *Triodion* to read at home, or find it online. The hymns there are a treasure of spiritual wisdom and experience. We are poorer for not hearing or using them.

Historical Notes for St. Maximus

February 15, 2004 First Choir Workshop on the 8 tones in Obikhod.

February 2006 We purchase our small Gospel book.

February 17-20 We host the Diocese of the South's annual pastoral conference. Michael Rehmet tonsured a reader.

February, 2015 Abbot Gerasim first nominated to be our bishop at a special diocesan assembly in Miami.

February 2019 Michael Rehment ordained Deacon.

Spiritual Reading for Lent

Spiritual reading, the reading of the Scriptures, lives of the Saints, patristic literature, and other Orthodox Christian literature that nourishes our faith and cleanses our minds, should be a normal part of our spiritual life. Just as we eat food each day to sustain our body, so we need spiritual food regularly to nourish our souls. This spiritual food includes not only spiritual reading but also Holy Communion.

Part of our ascetic effort during the Great Fast is to cut back on or cut out "spiritual junk food"—stuff we might consume that offers no nourishment to our souls or even does harm. What is spiritual junk food must be honestly discerned in the light of Christ by each one of us, but certainly it would include much of what the "entertainment industry" offers us:

television, movies, magazines, novels, video games, secular music, internet, radio (yes, even talk shows!), etc. We cut back on this so that our attention is not so scattered and dispersed on so many things, so that we can focus on Christ with less distraction, and so we can grow in our relationship with Him, which will not grow unless we devote time to it, much like any other earthly relationship. We cut out what is harmful, we cut back on what is not nourishing and profitable, and we feed our souls on what will give them true nourishment.

If we are to have any success in this upcoming Fast, we must give this matter some thought. What will I cut out? What will I cut back on? How much? And what will I put in its place to nourish my soul?

The Scriptures should come first. They contain words inspired by the Holy Spirit for the nourishment and illumination of our souls. During Lent, besides more extensive use of the Psalms, the Church reads through Proverbs and Genesis (and the first part of Exodus and a little from Job). A chapter a day of each will get us through them in the course of the Fast. Genesis tells us where we come from, what God intended for us, how man messed things up, and what God did to begin to restore man. Proverbs shows us what virtue and wisdom look like so that we have a standard to which we can compare our lives and strive for virtue.

In addition to these Old Testament books, pick a Gospel or two and read through them: at a chapter a day, you can read Mark and Luke in 40 days. Pick a short epistle: James, I John, Philippians, Colossians, and read through it several times during the Fast. Really get to know it. Let its words sink into your soul. For those who are more ambitious, we have a reading plan on our website that will take you through the whole New Testament in the forty days of the Fast.

Whenever we read Scripture, we must pray first, making the sign of the Cross and asking God to illumine and nourish us through the reading of His Word. The Scriptures will never be opened to us through reason and intellect alone; we must put the teaching into practice.

Besides Scripture, take an Orthodox book out of the library, purchase a book from the bookstore, take a book off your shelf you've always meant to read but haven't—whatever you do, pick a book and read it—and begin to practice what it teaches.

Go to oca.org and find the daily lives of the saints, and read those short lives for each day of the fast. Read the life of Sts. Seraphim of Sarov, Nektarios of Aegina, Silouan of Athos, Sergius of Radonezh, or any of the Optina Elders. Nourish your mind and soul on their good example. It will be just the opposite of the lives you find displayed before you in the grocery store checkout line.

You feed your body daily, even though you know it will die one day and rot. Your soul is immortal. Don't let it go into eternity starving. What we expend on the body is lost in the end, but what we give to the soul is ours forever. Starve your body and senses (relatively) and feed your soul this Lent!

Our profit comes not from the quantity of words, but from the quality. Sometimes, much is said, but nothing is heard, and at another time, you hear only one word and it remains in your memory for your whole life. *St. Anthony of Optina*

Preparation for Great Lent

Zacchaeus Sunday each year marks the last Sunday counted from Pentecost before the Lenten Triodion is opened. Zacchaeus shows us that we need to see Jesus, and that to see Him as we need to see Him will take some effort on our part, but that it will be well worth it.

Great Lent itself begins three weeks after the opening of the Triodion, halfway through the Vespers (at the Prokeimenon) of Forgiveness Sunday (Cheesefare). At that point, the vestments of the church and clergy are changed to the dark lenten colors, and the lenten melodies to the litanies are sung. Fasting begins in full force at midnight.

The three Sundays prior to Forgiveness Sunday are preparatory to Great Lent. The *Triodion*, the liturgical book that contains the services pertaining to the Fast, is opened for the first time on the Sunday of the Publican and Pharisee, the first of the three preparatory Sundays. The Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee begins the "Week of Proclamation" in the Church during which begin to ready ourselves for the contest.

The next is the Sunday of the Prodigal Son, and the last is the Sunday of the Last Judgment, also known as Meatfare, as it is the last day that meat is eaten until Pascha.

The Church does not ask us to change immediately from our normal routine to the intense ascetical effort of the fast; rather, She helps us make the transition gradually. The week after the Publican and Pharisee is a fast-free week. The week after the Prodigal Son has the usual Wednesday and Friday fasts, and the week after Meatfare (Last Judgment) is observed with a special fast from meat only. Moreover, the services for Wednesday and Friday of that week are Lenten: no Divine Liturgy is permitted, the lenten tones are used, and lenten forms observed—a warm-up for what is to come.

To get the most spiritual benefit out of the Great Fast, we need to give some thoughtful prayer now to the matter of how we shall keep the Fast, particularly in the following areas: private prayer, corporate prayer and worship at the Church services, almsgiving, fasting, and spiritual reading. We should also consider how we can cut back on busy schedules and especially

on elective parties, secular entertainment so that we can pray more with greater attention to God.

We cannot expect to keep the Fast with great benefit in most cases if we attend only the Sunday Liturgy. Plenty of opportunity will be given to pray with the Church in the Church in the spirit of the Fast's "bright sadness." All the faithful are strongly encouraged to take advantage of the weekday services.

Please consult your priest or father-confessor if you have any questions about the Fast.

On the Profit in Reading the Scriptures

St. John Chrysostom

For, tell me, who of you that stand here, if he were required, could repeat one Psalm, or any other portion of the Divine Scriptures? There is not one.

And it is not this only that is the grievous thing, but that while ye are become so backward with respect to things spiritual, yet in regard of what belongs to Satan ye are more vehement than fire. Thus should any one be minded to ask of you songs of devils and impure effeminate melodies, he will find many that know these perfectly, and repeat them with much pleasure.

But what is the answer to these charges? "I am not," you will say, "one of the monks, but I have both a wife and children, and the care of a household." Why, this is what hath ruined all, your supposing that the reading of the divine Scriptures appertains to [monks] only, when ye need it much more than they. For they that dwell in the world, and each day receive wounds, these have the most need of medicines. So that it is far worse than not reading, to account the thing even "superfluous:" for these are the words of diabolical invention. Hear ye not Paul saying, "that all these things are written for our admonition?"....

For if thou wouldst learn how great is the profit of the Scriptures, examine thyself, what thou becomest by hearing Psalms, and what by listening to a song of Satan; and how thou art disposed when standing in a Church, and how when sitting in a theatre; and thou wilt see that great is the difference between this soul and that, although both be one. Therefore Paul said, "Evil communications corrupt good manners." For this cause we have need continually of those songs, which serve as charms from the Spirit. Yes, for this it is whereby we excel the irrational creatures, since with respect to all other things, we are even exceedingly inferior to them.

Upcoming Events 2021

7 March: Meatfare Sunday
14 March: Forgiveness Sunday
15-20 March: Clean Week
26-30 April: Great & Holy Week
2 May: Holy Pascha

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!