

The Confessor's Tongue for February 28, A. D. 2021

38th Sunday after Pentecost; Prodigal Son

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.

Le Sunday of the Prodigal Son

The theme of the Sunday of the Prodigal Son is that of squandering great riches and returning in repentance.

Each of us is to see himself in the Prodigal, as wasters of the Father's riches in a land far from the Father. How is this so?

First, man in falling was deprived of Paradise. Created in God's image, he had the potential to achieve the likeness of God, but he rejected this in order to try to become god in his own right and fulfill himself apart from his Creator. Each of us must repent of our own efforts to follow Adam in this rebellion. Man was made to attain to the likeness of God, to be conformed to the image of Christ, who is the very image of the Father. But when we live in sin, we do what is unworthy of our creation in God's image, and we squander the great benefit and potential that being made in God's image confers on us to live instead far from the Father as pigs in a pigpen!

Second, we who are baptized have been given a great deposit of grace from God, but to the degree that we sin, we squander that treasure. Our sin separates us from God and takes us to a "far land". Only the second Baptism of tears (repentance) allows us to recover that Baptismal grace and to renew it.

Lent helps us pursue both ends.

God's Use of Our Enemy the Evil One

The following hymn is found in the Octoechos for Vespers on Friday in tone 4. It carries quite an astounding message in just a few words and instructs us that eternal good may be found in the worst of things.

Thou who art compassionate
hast given me the enemy for my profit,
as a gift to scourge and teach me;
for his wickedness serveth as a test,
which, without being good, leadeth me to the good:
therefore it is now in thanksgiving that I cry:
Save me, O Lord, before I perish utterly.

After naming God as compassionate, we sing of God's gift to us of our enemy, the fallen Lucifer, otherwise known as the devil and Satan, and the hordes of demons he leads. In what way can we consider the demonic powers a gift? The hymn says that God uses them to scourge us. When we need it, they are a means God uses to correct us. Our sin has consequences, and the demons are often the bearers of those consequences to us. The pain that follows the temporary pleasure of sin works to teach us that sin is not in our best interest. God also tests us His children by means of the enemy's lies, whisperings, promptings, provocations, and temptations. Do we believe what God has said, or do we put our trust in

what the enemy says? Where is our heart, with God, or somewhere else? By means of Satan, God tests us.

We may think of God using the enemy as a trainer for us. He is leashed and bound and able only to do so much to Christians as God permits—and God does not permit him to test us beyond what we can bear. When we believe him, though, and act on his lies, we give him by our free choice greater scope to act in our lives. We are free to choose to serve him or God, even after Baptism. Service to God is never compelled, but Satan will gladly compel and subjugate us.

By suffering under the enemy's scourges and temptations, we learn what is good, for what the enemy brings us is always evil and bitter in the end. By his temptations, we learn that true good lies with Christ, not with him and the world he temporarily governs. We see God's great power to take what is wicked and evil and use it as a means of leading us to what is good. Thus, in a strange way, Satan appears as a minister of God indirectly leading us ultimately to God, though directly he would lead us to destruction. Hence, the final prayer: save me, O Lord, before I perish utterly. Satan would lead us to perdition. It is only God who saves us. But in the spiritual trail upon which hangs life and death, we cry out with thanksgiving that God will use even the evil one who seeks our destruction for our ultimate good. Glory to God! *Fr. Justin*

The Prayer of the Third Hour

O Lord who at the third hour didst send down Thine all-holy Spirit upon thine apostles, take not the Same from us, O Good One, but renew Him in us who pray unto Thee.

At the third hour, according to Acts 2, the Holy Spirit descended upon the waiting Apostles in the upper room in tongues of fire and with the noise of a rushing wind. His descent transformed them. No longer a cowardly, doubting, confused, fearful band of followers, they became bold, courageous, confident in faith and went out to turn the world upside down.

The service of the Third Hour recalls this descent of the Spirit at Pentecost. It does not however, permit us to dwell in the fond recollection of events long past but calls us to participate in the same actively. We remember the historical event that we might be aware of the same Spirit in us given at Baptism and to be renewed in Him.

Though we contain the heavenly treasure, we as earthly vessels leak. Through our sins and indifference and forgetfulness, we quench and grieve the Spirit so that He withdraws—not leaving us, but being still and quiet. He requires a holy and willingly submitted vessel in which to operate, and if we defile ourselves or resist, He withdraws. Hence, we have nearly a

constant need to be renewed in the Spirit, to have His presence and power renewed and made manifest afresh in us. That renewal requires our humility, our repentance, our desire, our choice. The Spirit will not use us unwilling and uncleansed.

Hence, we come to Confession, confessing ours in sins in humility. We come to Holy Communion to have Christ's blood which washes away our sins applied to us and thereby to be renewed. We seek to preserve that grace given until our next Communion (but how quickly in practice do we squander it, frequently before the day is out)

The prayer not only recognizes our need for renewal in the Spirit, but also the danger of so grieving the Spirit that He departs. When the temple in Jerusalem was completed and dedicated, the glory of God descended upon it as a cloud so that those gathered and ministering could not stand. God's presence had descended and He now dwelt among His people in the Holy Place. Centuries later, the Prophet Ezekiel saw a vision in which the Spirit progressively left the Holy of Holies, the Holy Place, the temple building, and finally the outer court and departed. So, too, we, grateful for the great gift given us, should conduct ourselves with fear lest we so grieve the Spirit by our incorrigibility and resistance and impurity that He be taken from us.

The preventative is not to dwell on exactly what this means and at what point it might happen. The point is that we abide in Christ, holding fast to His gift, seeking constantly to be renewed in the Spirit, praying this prayer and "O Heavenly King" with zeal and compunction that the Spirit would ever be with us and manifest His power and presence to us. "O Heavenly King, Comforter, Spirit of Truth, who art everywhere present and fillest all things, Treasury of good things and Giver of life: come and abide in us, cleanse us from every stain, and save our souls, O Good One."
Fr. Justin Frederick

Memorial Liturgies & Prayer for Departed

Of late we have been cultivating the practice of adding the commemoration of the departed to the weekday liturgies when a simple-class feast is celebrated. This means we intone the Litany for the Departed, and have a prokeimenon, Epistle, alleluia, Gospel, and communion verse for them as well as singing the Kontakion "With the Saints Give Rest". (Properly we should also offer kolivo in their memory, but we have yet to develop this practice.)

We also have a series of memorial Saturdays coming up on which we commemorate those who have gone before us in the Faith. The following words of St. John of Kronstadt help us understand the importance of this.

Some ask, what is the use of naming the departed, or of praying for them? God Himself knows the names and needs of all. But those who so speak forget, or do not know, the importance of prayer, do not realize the importance of every word uttered from a whole heart; they forget that the justice and mercy of

God are moved by your heartfelt prayer, which the Lord In His goodness imputes to the merit of the living or the departed themselves, as to the members of the one body of the Church. They do not know that the *Church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven*, in her love continually prays to God for us, and expressly names before God those who pray for them—equal for equal. We name them, and they name us. But he who does not lovingly remember his brethren in prayer will not himself be remembered, and does not deserve to be named. Even one word of faith and love means much in prayer: *The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.*

Pray to the Lord for the repose of the souls of your departed forebears and brethren each day, at morning and at evening, in order that the remembrance of death may live in you, and that hope of the life to come, after death, may not become extinct in you; and that your spirit may daily be humbled by the thought of the transitory nature of your life.

March Namedays, Birthdays Anniveraries

- 01 Rebecca Stevenson (St. Eudokia), ND
- 02 Ben and Lois Lyda, WA (2002)
- 04 Christina Heitzenrater, BD
- 04 Valorie Rogers, BD
- 05 Hannah Stokes, BD (2007)
- 08 Claire Terry, BD (2007)
- 09 Solomon Morris, BD (2008)
- 09 Kitara Van Hoose, BD
- 10 Frieda Gluschenko, ND (Martyr Galina of Corinth)
- 10 Brian Freas, BD
- 12 Anna Stokes, BD
- 13 Jonah Betz, BD (2012)
- 13 Mary Betz, BD (2012)
- 16 Katherine Colias, BD
- 16 Charity Wells (Emelia), BD (2002)
- 16 Isabella Heitzentrater (2009)
- 17 Patrick Neal, ND (St. Patrick of Ireland)
- 17 Alexey Sidorenko, ND (St. Alexei, Man of God)
- 17 Patrick St. Jean, ND (St. Patrick of Ireland)
- 17 Owen Terry, ND (St. Patrick of Ireland)
- 18 Nikolai Davis, ND (St. Nikolai of Zicha)
- 18 Robert Jackson, ND (St. Edward the Martyr)
- 19 Mark Jackson, BD
- 20 Holly Bellan, ND (Martyr Photini)
- 25 Ash Davis, BD
- 25 Lucy Rogers, ND (Mary, Mother of God)
- 26 Gabriel Wells, ND (Archangel Gabriel)
- 31 Joseph Terry, ND (St. Joseph the Patriarch)
- 31 Nicholas Dean, BD

Upcoming Events 2021

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

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!