

The Confessor's Tongue for March 21, A. D. 2021

1st Sunday of the Fast; The Sunday of Orthodoxy

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.

Sunday of Orthodoxy

This day the Holy Church commemorates the victory of Orthodoxy over heresies and is why this day is also called the "Sunday of Orthodoxy". The Synaxarion explains that the day celebrates "the restoration of the holy and venerable icons", which happened in first half of the 9th century (in 842) "by the Emperor Michael (the Byzantine Emperor), the holy and blessed Empress Theodora (see page 80) and the Holy Methodius (see page 206), Patriarch of Constantinople". This commemoration was established to celebrate the final victory of the Holy Church over the iconoclastic heresy.

In the hymns for this day the Holy Church, glorifying the holy icons, and also its iconodule adherents and inspiring in us the obligation of venerating icons, sings: "A feast of joy and gladness is revealed to us today. For the teachings of the true Faith shines in all their glory, and the Church of Christ is bright with splendor, adorned with the holy icons which now have been restored; and God has granted to the faithful unity of mind." "Now a pious brightness stretches over all, dispersing the flattery of the impious like a cloud, enlightening the hearts of the pious: come let us fall down with pious wisdom before the honorable icons of Christ worshipping in the Orthodox way", "and with due honor let us venerate the holy icons of Christ, of the all pure Virgin and the saints, whether depicted on walls, on wooden panels or on holy vessels, rejecting the impious teaching of the heretics". But in this way the Holy Church at the time of victory over the iconoclasts in the struggle against various heresies finally explained and defined in the canons of the Seventh Ecumenical Council the Orthodox Christian teaching that is now a celebrated event and is not called the celebration of iconolatry but the Triumph of Orthodoxy. It does not mean that after the 10th Century heresies would or could not appear any more; but it means that all following heresies, even though they were numerous and various, find their accusation and refutation in the definitions of the Seven Ecumenical Councils.

The victory of Orthodoxy in the Greek Church itself was first celebrated on the first Sunday of Great Lent, and thus the basis of the present Triumph of Orthodoxy is historical. Together with these things the Holy Church through the celebration of the present day means to grant great comfort to those who attend. This intention agrees with the rules of faith and piety and the ascetic effort of the fast. It sees in this action the proof of their living communion according to their faith and life, and finds in this the foundation for prayerful petition to God for them. After the end of the liturgy on this day it is necessary to serve the special Rite of Orthodoxy (see

below), composed by St. Methodius. Again the restoration of honoring and venerating the holy and venerable icons was annually prescribed "from that time these holy confessors appointed the annual commemoration of this solemnity, so that we might never again fall into a similar ignominy" (see the Synaxarion). S. V. Bulgakov, Handbook for Church Servers, 2nd ed., 1274 pp. (Kharkov, 1900) pp. 511-515. Translated by Archpriest Eugene D. Tarris © March 21, 2005. All rights reserved.

St. Theophan on Wandering Thoughts

Thoughts wander when one is reading spiritual works and during prayer. What should one do? No one is free from this. There is no sin in it, only vexation. Having wandering thoughts becomes a sin when one willingly allows flightiness of mind. But if thoughts scatter involuntarily, what fault can there be? There is fault, though, when one notices thoughts wandering and, taking no action, one wanders along with them. When we catch our thoughts wandering off, we must bring them back to their proper place at once.

Defending the Synodicon

Fr. Lawrence Farley

Recently, on the First Sunday of Great Lent, we read the *Synodikon* in church—well, actually just a tiny snippet of it dealing with the legitimacy of icons and that this faith had established the world, while offering a heartfelt "Memory Eternal" for those who had died defending it. We did not read the entire *Synodikon*, because it is quite long and lists a lot of heresies unrelated to the icons we were holding in procession at the time, and it contained a lot of very unfamiliar names of people who were being anathematized. Reading the names would have felt to my flock rather like reading pages out of the phone book, and since both those being commended with "Memory Eternal" as well as those being reproached with "Anathema!" were utter strangers to them, I just read the bit about the icons. Those wanting to peruse the entire text may find it at (<https://www.johnsanidopoulos.com/2010/02/synodicon-of-orthodoxy.html>).

Though I did not read the entire *Synodikon* liturgically last Sunday [but we at St. Maximus will], I am still glad that it exists and that we acknowledge its worth by at least reading *some* of it. The point of the *Synodikon* is to draw very thick lines in the doctrinal sand and say that if anybody in the Church crosses those lines and strays into heresy, he or she must either recant or get out, and it is precisely this approach to truth that is necessary and saving. It is also tremendously unpopular. I remember recently reading a modern scholar who was quoting a line from one of the Fathers who was denouncing heretics. The scholar put the word *heretics* in quotation marks—i.e.

“heretics”—to stress that the term was the Father’s, and not hers. She didn’t quite add the term “(sic)” after it to indicate how foolish she thought the term was, but she might as well have. It was abundantly clear that she thought the term and the concept it represented to be archaic, harmful, and more than a little narrow-minded. It certainly flew in the face of current canons of political correctness.

Those canons are based on a form of pluralism that says I’m theologically okay and you’re theologically okay, regardless of what you assert. It says that there is not just a legitimate diversity of opinion (which of course there is), but also that the legitimate diversity is so broad that pretty much anything goes, at least in the towers of Academia in which our author was writing. The idea of saying to anyone, either in those towers or out on the street, “Your opinion is heretical,” strikes the average person as not only absurd, but in supremely bad taste. They want to know if you’re in favor of reviving the Inquisition and burning witches. You can’t use the h-word in civilized company any more than you could use other abusive labels.

Undergirding this attitude is the notion that heresy is just a simple mistake, akin to someone adding up a long column of figures and getting the sum wrong, or missing a question from the game “Jeopardy.” Those enforcing the new canons of political correctness view the work of theologians with their precise definitions (such as we find in abundance in the *Synodikon*) as the work of people with altogether too much time on their hands who have produced formulas that have nothing to do with actual life. Dogma, and the Church’s insistence upon correct dogma, they say, are irrelevant to Christian living. It is not so.

Here I remember the observations of Dorothy Sayers, famous as the creator of the detective Lord Peter Wimsey. In her address *Creed or Chaos?* she presents the case of John and Jane Doe who are considering junking Christ’s ethical teaching as impossible and impractical “because,” says John, “if He was God all the time, He must have known that His suffering and death and so on wouldn’t last, and He could have stopped them by a miracle if He had liked, so His pretending to be an ordinary man was nothing but playacting.” Adds Jane Doe: “It was easy enough for Him to be good, but it’s not at all the same thing for me. How about all that temptation stuff? Playacting again. It doesn’t help me to live what you call a Christian life.” Sayers points out that John and Jane have swallowed the heresy of Apollinarianism, which states that Christ had no soul like ours, but that the divine Logos took the place of a human soul in Him. As it turns out, heresy has practical effects on living the Christian life. That is why the theologians went to such lengths to refute it and declare it out of court for Christians. It was not just a mania for unnecessary exactitude, but pastoral care for souls like John and Jane Doe.

So it is that we Orthodox need to retain the category of “heresy,” whether or not we read large chunks of the *Synodikon*. The spirit that produced it is rare these pluralistic days in which every person does what is right in his or her own eyes. All the more reason to cling to that spirit when we find it. *oca.org*

The Anathemas From the Rite of Orthodoxy

And though there are enemies of Orthodoxy, and adversaries to the providential and salutary revelation of the Lord towards us, yet hath the Lord considered the reproaches of his servants; for he hath covered the blasphemers of his glory with shame, and shown the perverters and enemies of Orthodoxy as timorous and fugitives.

As therefore we bless and praise those who have submitted their reason to the obedience of Divine Revelation, and have contended for it; so following the sacred scriptures, and holding the traditions of the primitive Church, we reject and anathematize all those who oppose his truth, if while awaiting their conversion and repentance, they refuse to repent to the Lord.

To those who deny the existence of God, and assert that the world is self-existing, and that all things in it are made by chance, without the providence of God, *Anathema!*

To those who say that God is not a Spirit, but flesh: or that he is not just, merciful, wise, omniscient, and utter such like blasphemies, *Anathema!*

To those who dare to say that the Son of God and likewise the Holy Spirit are not one in essence and of equal honor with the Father; and confess that the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit are not one God, *Anathema!*

To those who foolishly say that the coming of the Son of God into the world in the Flesh, and his voluntary Passion, Death and Resurrection were not necessary for our salvation and the expiation of sin, *Anathema!*

To those who reject the grace of redemption preached by the Gospel as the only means of our justification before God, *Anathema!*

To those who dare to say that the all-pure Virgin Mary was not a Virgin before her childbirth, during her childbirth, and after her childbirth, *Anathema!*

To those who do not believe that the Holy Spirit inspired the Prophets and Apostles, and by them instructed us in the true way to eternal salvation, and confirmed the same by miracles, and now dwelleth in the hearts of all faithful and true Christians, and guideth them in all truth, *Anathema!*

To those who do not confess with heart and mouth that the Holy Spirit proceedeth from the Father alone, essentially and hypostatically, as Christ sayeth in the Gospel, *Anathema!*

To those who reject the immortality of the soul, the world's end, the future judgment, and eternal reward for virtues in heaven, and condemnation for sins, *Anathema!*

To those who reject all the Holy Mysteries held by the Church of Christ, *Anathema!*

To those who renounce the Councils of the holy fathers, and their Traditions which are agreeable to Divine Revelation, and piously preserved by the Orthodox Catholic Church, *Anathema!*

To those who reason that Orthodox sovereigns are elevated to their thrones not by God's special good will for them, and that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are not poured out upon them during the anointing for the fulfillment of this great calling; and who likewise dare to rise up against them in revolt and betrayal, *Anathema!*

To those who insult and blaspheme the Holy Icons which the Holy Church receives, in remembrance of the works of God and of those pleasing to him, to inspire their beholders with piety, and to incite them to imitate their examples, and to those who say that they are idols, *Anathema!*

To the Theosophists and other heretics who dare to say and teach mindlessly that our Lord Jesus Christ did not descend to the earth and become incarnate only once, but hath been incarnate many times; and who likewise deny that the true Wisdom of the Father is His Only-begotten Son, and, contrary to the divine Scriptures and the teaching of the Holy Fathers, seek other wisdoms, *Anathema!*

To the Masons, the occultists, spiritualists, sorcerers, and all who do not believe in one God, but honor the demons, who do not humbly surrender their life to God, but strive to learn the future through the sorcerous invocation of demons, *Anathema!*

To the blasphemers of the Christian Faith, the ecumenists who say that they do not confess the Orthodox Eastern Church to be One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic, but madly say that the true Church seems to be a combination of various heresies, *Anathema!*

To those apostatize from the Orthodox Faith and accept other beliefs, to the scandal of our brethren, and fall into schism, *Anathema!*

To the persecutors of the Church of Christ, the impious apostates who have lifted their hands against the anointed of God, who slay the sacred ministers, who trample the holy things underfoot, who destroy the temples of God, who subject our brethren to inquisition and have defiled our homeland, *Anathema!*

Preparation for Holy Communion

Fr. Justin Frederick

We are reminded each week before Communion that only "Orthodox Christians who have prepared themselves with prayer, fasting, and a recent confession" should receive Christ's Body and Blood. What does this mean practically?

i. Prayer. Prayer is our spiritual breathing; not to pray suffocates our spiritual life. We are not ready for Communion if we have not been praying throughout the preceding week. Though we are to

pray "at all times" and "without ceasing," Christians from the beginning, fulfilling the ancient Jewish practice of offering the morning and evening sacrifices, have prayed upon rising in the morning and before retiring in the evening. These set times of prayer are anchors for our spiritual lives, and to be ready to receive communion requires that we are praying regularly at them. The number of prayers or amount of time spent is part of each Christian's prayer rule which should be determined in consultation with his confessor or spiritual father. Keeping one's prayer rule perfectly is not required to commune; but not praying at all or praying little during the week does not constitute adequate preparation.

Prayer also includes the particular "Prayers in Preparation for Holy Communion" which should be prayed either the evening before or morning of Communion. These are found in the standard prayer books. The strict Russian practice involves praying three canons and an akathist the night before: the Canons of Repentance, to the Theotokos, and to the Guardian Angel. Then in the morning, one prays the Order of Preparation for Holy Communion, which includes a canon for Communion. This is an excellent practice to follow, but if one is a regular communicant (which presupposes regular Confession, prayer, and fasting), one may simply pray the ten or so pre-communion prayers found in the standard prayer book and the canon for Communion (also found in the St. Tikhon's and the Jordanville books). One should not normally pray less than this in preparation for Communion except in unusual circumstances or when so guided by one's Priest or spiritual father.

Attendance at the Saturday night "All-Night" Vigil (or at least a portion of it) is also part of the normal preparation for the Eucharist. The whole liturgical cycle manifests a pattern of expectation and fulfillment. Thus the fast of Great Lent is kept in expectation of the Paschal feast. Each week, the Vigil provides the proper liturgical expectation for the Sunday feast, for the "Little Pascha" that every Sunday is. Orthodox liturgical life cannot and should not be reduced to the Divine Liturgy. In the Divine Liturgy, we are given a foretaste of the Kingdom of God, but we do not live in the Kingdom as yet: we still live in the world, and our whole life in the world is preparation for Christ's eternal Kingdom. We need the Vigil to prepare ourselves for Liturgy just as we need this life to prepare for the next. During the week, we grow very scattered, concerned about many things, and distracted from the things of God. The two hours of the Vigil helps us become recollected and refocused spiritually in preparation for receiving Communion with spiritual profit. Naturally, the time following the Vigil should be kept quiet as quiet and peaceful as possible, free from elective social engagements and secular entertainment as one prepares for the Eucharist the next morning.

One might occasionally miss the Vigil and still receive Communion, but we should know that the

Vigil is part of our normal preparation for the Divine Liturgy and an essential part of living liturgically. If Vigil is not served, we should attend whatever is offered of Vespers and/or Matins, if we possibly can.

Lastly, having received Communion, our preparation for the following week begins with the "Prayers of Thanksgiving after Communion." If we do not stay in church after the Liturgy and attentively hear the prayers read there, we must read them on our own the same day, the sooner after Communion the better.

None of this should be construed as a rigid legalism, but as a general guide to regular, consistent, healthy practice.

2. Fasting. Every Wednesday and Friday, the Church calls us to fast: on Wednesday in memory of Christ's betrayal, and on Friday in memory of His suffering and death. These fasts are not optional for Orthodox Christians but are necessary and beneficial. If we have willfully broken the fast, we should go the Confession before receiving Communion again.

Additionally, we fast from midnight the night before receiving Communion until we have received the Mystery. We abstain entirely from food and drink (from midnight), and marital relations (start no later than Vespers the night before). If we have not kept these fasts the previous week through willful disregard, we should not commune without Confession. Regarding children, the eucharistic fast is not mandatory for children under three years of age. According to tradition, beginning with the age of three years, Orthodox families gradually teach the child to abstain from food and drink before the communion of the Holy Mysteries. By the age of seven years, a child must be firmly accustomed to receive on an empty stomach. From this time, the child should be instructed to read the prayers before holy communion, the content and length of which is determined by the parents in accordance with the child's age, as well as his spiritual and intellectual development."¹

3. A Recent Confession. The Holy Synod has directed that regular communicants (receiving the Holy Mysteries more than once a month) should receive the Mystery of Confession not less than once a month, even if they have nothing particularly "serious" or unusual to confess. Regular confession is part of the rhythm of a healthy spiritual, liturgical life.

If you do not receive Communion at least once a month and do not live liturgically, you must receive the Mystery of Confession each time you commune. Moreover, the preparation for Communion the preceding week may be stricter. At the least, no Orthodox Christian should go without Confession and Communion during each of the year's four fasts: the Nativity Fast (Nov-Dec), Great Lent, the Apostles' Fast (June), and the Dormition Fast

(August). There is no formal obligation to do this, but it is difficult to imagine one seriously claiming to be a faithful Orthodox Christian without making this minimal effort.

Children normally begin making confessions at the age of seven depending on their maturity. By the age of ten or so, they should be making regular confessions with their parents.

Concluding Considerations: In reading this, you may think it too much for you to do. Remember three things.

First, Orthodoxy is maximalistic Christianity. Christ gave His all for us; we give our all to Him. Our attitude is not "what is the minimum I must do to get by" but "how can I most fully appropriate for myself the abundance of God's gift to me in Christ".

Second, this is the **norm** of preparation for Communion. We should always strive to achieve the Church's maximalistic norm, but due to our weakness and circumstances, we may not be able to achieve it regularly or even at all. In such a case we confess our weakness and talk to our Priest or Confessor about what would be appropriate for us in our situation.

Third, the norm should not be seen as legalistic, but as therapeutic. This is what the Church in her long experience has found to bring the greatest spiritual help with the least spiritual danger to her members. If we receive the normal practice and expectation of the Church in faith as for our good and attempt to implement it by God's grace, we shall reap great spiritual benefit for the salvation of our souls. If we truly discerned what we are doing at the Divine Liturgy and what is being given to us in Holy Communion, we would fear and think that the required preparation too little! God offers His boundless, holy, life to us in exchange for our limited, tattered, soiled lives. Our failure to prepare diligently and attentively hinders our perception of what takes place at Communion, and so we are deprived of much joy and grace, while God, in His compassion, keeps the Mysteries from doing us harm in our careless state. But we must not presume on His mercy! So, with prayer, fasting, and a recent confession, let us draw near to Christ in the Holy Mysteries in the fear of God, with faith and love and hearts full of gratitude as we more clearly perceive the greatness of God's gift.

Upcoming Events 2021

25 March: Annunciation
28 March: Young Adult Gathering and Talk by Mark Tarpley on Stillness, 4:00 p.m.
26-30 April: Great & Holy Week
2 May: Holy Pascha

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!

¹ Article "On the Participation of the Faithful in the Eucharist" of the Russian Orthodox Church, 2015.