

The Confessor's Tongue for June 6, A. D. 2021

Sunday of the Blind Man; Venerable Bessarion and Hilarion

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 Our Life

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 or optional part of our Faith. 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 Chelye 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, cannot be bothered to come on time to church and do not prepare ourselves to partake, or simply don't bother to come. 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. It is for this reason that it is not celebrated on weekdays of Great Lent.

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 to what ails us, if we will come with faith and love to partake of our Master's good gifts.

The Eucharist is holy. It is to be approached with reverence, with fear, with faith, with love. The communicant is to come "discerning the Lord's body." To this end, the communicant prepares himself carefully and attentively to partake with discernment of what he is doing. Attentively reading the Precommunion Prayers, keeping the eucharistic fast (no eating or drinking from midnight until one has received Holy Communion), making a good Confession within the past month, and attending at least part of the preparatory services (Vigil on Saturdays and Feasts, Vespers/Matins for other days) is prescribed by our Mother the Church that we may receive the good we ask from the Eucharist and not partake unto our condemnation.

With this understanding of the Eucharist, how can we allow ourselves to be content with partaking infrequently? How can we permit ourselves to prepare carelessly, or neglect preparation? And how shall we answer Christ as to why we neglected the provision He made for us at great cost to Himself? *Fr. Justin*

The Mystery of Holy Unction

Fr. Thomas Hopko

Christ came to the world to "bear the infirmities" of men. One of the signs of his divine messiahship was to heal the sick. The power of healing remains in the Church since Christ himself remains in the Church through the Holy Spirit.

The sacrament of the unction of the sick is the Church's specific prayer for healing. If the faith of the believers is strong enough, and if it is the will of God,

there is every reason to believe that the Lord can heal those who are diseased.

The sacrament of anointing is a “sobornal” sacrament in the traditional Orthodox practice. This means that as many of the faithful as possible are gathered to participate in the prayers. The rite itself calls for seven priests, seven readings from the epistles and gospels, seven prayers and seven anointings with oil specifically blessed for the service. Although it is not always possible to perform the sacrament in this way, the normal procedure is still to gather together as many priests and people as possible.

The express purpose of the sacrament of holy unction is healing and forgiveness. Since it is not always the will of God that there should be physical healing, the prayer of Christ that God’s will be done always remains as the proper context of the sacrament. In addition, it is the clear intention of the sacrament that through the anointing of the sick body the sufferings of the person should be sanctified and united to the sufferings of Christ. In this way, the wounds of the flesh are consecrated, and strength is given that the suffering of the diseased person may not be unto the death of his soul, but for eternal salvation in the resurrection and life of the Kingdom of God.

It is indeed the case that death inevitably comes to man. All must die, even those who in this life are given a reprieve through healing in order to have more time on the earth. Thus, the healing of the sick is not itself a final goal, but is merely “instrumental” in that it is given by God as a sign of his mercy and as a grace for the further opportunity of man to live for him and for others in the life of this world.

In the case where a person is obviously in the final moments of his earthly life, the Church has special prayers for the “separation of soul and body.” Thus, it is clear that the sacrament of holy unction is for the sick—both the physically and mentally sick—and is not reserved for the moment of death. The sacrament of unction is not the “last rites” as is sometimes thought; the ritual of the anointing itself in no way indicates that it should be administered merely in “extreme” cases. Holy unction is the sacrament of the spiritual, physical, and mental healing of a sick person whatever the nature or the gravity of the illness may be.

The Lord Hath Become King

Archbishop Dmitri’s translation of the Saturday great prokeimenon at Vespers from Psalm 92 reads “The Lord hath become king, with beauty hath He clothed himself.” In contrast, the standard OCA translation (and those of other jurisdictions) based on the Revised Standard Version of the Old Testament read “The Lord IS king, He IS clothed with majesty”. Modern translations of the Psalm read “the Lord reigns.”

When I first moved to Texas after seminary, accustomed as I was to the standard translation, this wording grated on my ear. “How does the Lord become king?” I wondered. “Is He not king before all ages as God?” I asked Vladyka Dmitri about it. He insisted that this was the proper way to translate the text.

I acceded to him and over the years serving from his service book pondered these words every Saturday night. After several years, I began to think I could make sense of that reading. But did the Greek and Slavonic support the understanding to which I was coming?

If we trouble ourselves to examine the Greek and Slavonic texts of Psalm 92:1 (Psm 93:1), we find an immediate problem with the rendering it “the Lord reigns” or “the Lord is king”. The Greek verb in Psalm 92:1 is aorist in tense (past, *ebasileusen*) and the Slavonic verb *воцарися* is also past tense. We find the same verb in the aorist tense in Psalm 96:1, 98:1 (LXX), and Revelation 19:6 (made famous in Handel’s chorus: “Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.”) The Greek aorist verb indicates something that happened in the past, but it can be difficult to render. It does not mean an action completed in the past with enduring results in the present (perfect), or a progressive ongoing action or repeated action in the past (imperfect). The Slavonic verb indicates something that happened and was completed in the past. The Slavonic/Russian word literally means “to come to the throne”. Thus the translators of the Greek text rendered it in Slavonic, but is this a permissible way to render the Greek aorist *ebasileusen* in Slavonic?

The verb *basileuo* denotes the action of a *basileus* as *basileus*: what does a king do? He reigns. Why would the Greek text of the Psalm read literally “the Lord reigned”? Does He no longer reign?

God as God has reigned over His creation always. If these passages merely assert God’s kingship as God, the verbs would not be in the aorist tense. Theologically, there is another aspect to God’s kingship to consider. While God cosmically is king from eternity, in another sense, by taking human flesh, clothing himself in human nature and glorifying it, by facing temptation, the devil, and death and prevailing over these mortal enemies of man, he has won the right to be king of mankind. Revelation 19:6 celebrates Christ’s putting down all enemies and beginning to reign without opposition at His second coming. Psalm 92:1 then may be taken to speak prophetically about what the Son of God accomplishes by becoming incarnate and trampling down death by death: he becomes the rightful king of mankind by His service and victory. He comes to the throne, much as the rightful heir Aragorn comes to the throne of Gondor in *Lord of the Rings*—but only after winning the right and doing the service to his people of defeating the enemy. He does this in us personally at Baptism and universally at His Second Coming. So the dynamic rendering “the Lord hath become King”, “the Lord hath begun to reign”, or “the Lord hath come to the throne” captures the meaning better than the static “the Lord reigns” or “the Lord is king,” and thus it glorifies Christ for the accomplishments of His incarnation on our behalf. *Fr. Justin*

Upcoming Events 2021

- 16 June: Holy Unction, 6:30 p.m.
- 19 June: Chrismation, 4:00 p.m.
- 26 June: 2:00 p.m. Tarpley Lectures on Modernism and Postmodernism.
- 26 July: 20-year Anniversary Celebration

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!