

The Confessor's Tongue for August 1, A. D. 2021

Procession of the Holy Cross; Holy Macabbees; Martyr Elesa

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 Dormition Fast at St. Maximus

The Dormition Fast offers an abundance of spiritual good packed into two weeks. Besides daily services and the usual Saturday Vigil and Sunday Liturgy, between August 1 and 15 there will be a total of eight Liturgies, six Vigils, daily services, Paraclesis at Vespers (when there is no Vigil), and Baptisms. Take advantage of this rich, concentrated liturgical season to worship, to confess, and to commune.

In some monasteries, the fasts are observed with a doubling of the cell rule, which would correspond to our prayer rule at home. If someone normally does a dozen prostrations, he would do twenty-four; if he normally says three ropes of the Jesus Prayer, he would say six; if he normally reads one kathisma from the Psalter a day, he would read two. This is a simple way to increase prayer during the Fast. Of course, if one is to do this, one must lay aside some of one's usual activities to make time, which is why Orthodox Christians cut back or cut out entertainments and unnecessary secular events during a fast. We are not obligated to double our rule, but we should make serious effort to increase it in both quantity and quality over the two weeks of the fast.

The essence of prayer, of course, cannot be reduced to quantity. Prayer should have quality, which means we pray with attention, with feeling, with faith, with love. Yet to achieve quality in prayer, quantity is needed. A person will master no skill or body of knowledge without a significant quantity of time spent occupied with it. "Practice makes perfect," it is said, or as the Scripture the Fathers love to quote says, "He gives prayer to those who pray." Our regular practice of prayer with attention and feeling will move us towards mastery.

The fast comes at a good time, right before the start of the new school year. May God grant us all increase in prayer and grace during this Dormition Fast. Below are the directions from the Typicon for the observance of the fast. This is the fullness of the fast envisioned by the Church for the restraint of passions and acquisition of grace; not everyone may be able to follow the fast fully, but each should engage it for his profit as he may. As always, ask your priest or confessor if you have any questions or concerns about the fast.

Concerning the Fast of the Most Holy Theotokos it should be known:

In the fast of the Dormition of Our Holy Lady Theotokos, 14 days except the Transfiguration of Christ, we fast until the ninth hour in the day [3 p.m. M-F, i.e., one meal on those days]:

Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, to eat "dry" [which means that we eat only vegetables cooked with water and salt, and also such things as fruit, nuts, bread, and honey. In

practice, octopus and shellfish are also allowed on days of xerophagy; likewise vegetable margarine and corn or other vegetable oil not made from olives.]

On Tuesday and Thursday, cooked food without oil.

On Saturday and Sunday, cooked food with oil, and we drink wine: we don't eat fish, until the Dormition of the Most Holy Theotokos: but only on the Transfiguration of Christ, we eat fish, twice a day.

Elder Ephiphanius on Children (+1989)

Speak more to God about your children, rather than to your children about God.

For the correct, Christian upbringing of your children: Few words, much example, and more prayer are necessary.

"Elder, the parents of this child are in much distress because of the life he is leading." "Tell them, my child: 'Much prayer! God will help. There do not exist people for whom hands are lifted up in prayer or knees are bloodied who are not led to repentance.'"

The soul of the adolescent, he used to say, is in an explosion of freedom. For this reason, it receives various counsels with difficulty. So, instead of advising him constantly and scolding him every so often, throw the weight of your effort to the following: Present the problem to Christ, to the Panaghia, and to the Saints and ask them to wise him up.

Deal with children as with the colts, Sometimes tightening and sometimes loosening the bid. When the colt kicks, we loosen the reins without letting go; otherwise, they will break. When, however, the colt is calm, then we can pull the reins and take it wherever we wish.

Parents must love their children as their children and not as their idols. That is, they should love the child as he is and not as they would wish he is, that is—resembling them.

August 6: Holy Transfiguration

One of the Twelve Great Feasts, the Transfiguration of Our Lord primarily proclaims and glorifies Christ's Divinity. On the mountain with Peter, James, and John, Christ was transfigured before them, shining brighter than the sun and revealing His divinity so far as His disciples could bear it without being consumed. Because Christ's Divinity is made manifest, the feast has also been called "the second Theophany."

Traditionally, the Transfiguration is considered to have taken place forty days before the Crucifixion. The feast was originally appointed for February, falling during the Great Fast, but since the joyfulness of feast was not in keeping with the lenten spirit of penitence and fasting, it was transferred to August 6 to be observed forty days before the Feast of the Elevation of the Holy Cross.

Jesus Christ was fully God and fully man in one person, but He appeared to men who looked only on the external appearance to be only a man, for His

Divinity was veiled except to the eye of faith. On Mt. Tabor, the veil was removed, and His Divine glory shone forth. It is the same at the weekly Eucharist at which Christ comes to us in the transformed bread and wine. We see bread and wine, just as the disciples and the people of Israel saw a man; but an infinitely greater reality is present to be perceived by the eyes of faith, the very Body and Blood of our Lord, which is our true food and our healing, and for us constitutes "the sacrament of transfiguration." By this mystery, we ourselves are transformed to become partakers of the Divine Nature.

Thus this Feast not only reveals Christ's Divinity, wrapped in humanity, it also reveals divinized human nature. Christ took our full human nature to transform it, to make us by grace what He is by nature. The Transfiguration reveals what we shall be when we no longer fall short of the glory of God, when we are glorified, or as St. John says, "When we see Him, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is."

The Kontakion of the Feast makes another point: by seeing Christ for who He truly was, the disciples would have no doubt when Jesus was crucified that He died voluntarily, not by compulsion. He chose to lay down His life; it was not taken from Him by force. Without this revelation, they and we might be tempted to think of Jesus as a weak man whose life was unjustly taken from Him by a corrupt state. Jesus Himself is emphatic on this point: "I lay My life down for the sheep . . . I lay down My life that I might take it again. No man taketh it from Me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again." (John 10: 15-18)

It is customary to bless summer fruits at the feast. You are encouraged to bring fresh fruits to be blessed at the end of Vigil and Liturgy.

The Feast is celebrated for eight days through its Leavetaking August 13. We sing or say the Troparion and Kontakion at meals and during our usual prayers during this time.

Troparion, Tone 7

Thou wast transfigured upon the mountain, O Christ God, / showing Thy glory to Thy disciples as far as they could bear it. / Through the prayers of the Theotokos, / make Thine everlasting light shine also upon us sinners. / O Giver of Light, glory to Thee!

Kontakion, Tone 7

Upon the mountain wast Thou transfigured, O Christ God, / and Thy disciples beheld Thy glory as far as they could see it; / so that when they would behold Thee crucified, / they would understand that Thy suffering was voluntary, / and would proclaim to the world / that Thou art truly the Radiance of the Father.

Prayers After Communion

The prayers before and after Holy Communion teach us much about the Mystery, how we should approach it, and what we should expect from it. We'll offer commentary on

some of the prayers to help us be more aware of what we are doing when we partake.

"O Master, Christ God, King of the ages and Author of all things, I thank Thee for all the good things which Thou hast granted me, and for the communion of Thine immaculate and life-creating Mysteries. I pray Thee, therefore, O Good One, Lover of man, keep me under Thy shelter and in the shadow of Thy wings, and grant me worthily to partake of Thy Holy Things with a clean conscience until my last breath, unto forgiveness of sins and unto life eternal. For Thou art the Bread of life, the Fountain of holiness, the Giver of good things, and unto Thee do we send up glory, with the Father, and the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen."

The second prayer of thanksgiving after Holy Communion is a compact one by St. Basil the Great. It offers thanks for two things: first, for "all the good things" God has given the communicant, and second, for Holy Communion itself. As the Church prays in the Prayer Before the Ambon, quoting the Apostle James, "every good gift and every perfect gift is from above." That truth is affirmed here, too, where God is called "the Giver of good things." It is meet to acknowledge the Giver of those good gifts with an offering of thanks. God has given us all an abundance of good things that we do not deserve, have not earned, and cannot claim by right. We acknowledge that and return thanks. Among those good things is the greatest and best gift, the Holy Mysteries themselves. Christ God deigns to offer Himself to us as food and medicine for our soul, means of grace and impartation of Divine life. Beginning to comprehend this great gift given us, we cannot but offer thanks.

After offering due thanks, the prayer then turns to request that God would keep us under the shelter of His wings (Psalm 90) and grant us to partake of Holy Communion worthily with a clean conscience until our last breath. The latter request teaches us that we need Holy Communion regularly throughout our lives. It also reveals our need to partake worthily with a clean conscience. We should not partake, carelessly, inattentively, unworthily, or with a defiled conscience out of carelessness, sloth, or hardheartedness. To prevent this, we make this request and apply ourselves to the regular use of Holy Communion and attentive preparation each time for Holy Communion. *Fr. Justin*

Upcoming Events 2021

1 August: Procession of the Holy Cross
1-14 August: Dormition Fast
10 August, Tuesday, 6:30 p.m. Holy Unction
19 September, Sunday: Annual Meeting
3 October, Sunday: 20-year Anniversary Celebration at St. Maximus and the Big White Barn in Decatur.

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!