

The Confessor's Tongue for August 15, A. D. 2021

The Dormition (Falling Asleep) of the Most Holy Theotokos

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.

Dormition of the Most-Holy Theotokos

August 15

This feast, celebrated on August 15, is the last Great Feast of the liturgical year, which ends on August 31. The Dormition refers to the "falling asleep" or death of the Theotokos.

According to the ancient tradition of the Church, when it came time for the Theotokos to pass from this life to the Kingdom, an angel appeared to her three days before her death to inform her of this passage. The Virgin made preparations for her death, ascending the Mount of Olives to pray and give thanks to the Lord. Meanwhile, the Holy Apostles were miraculously carried away from where each had been to the house of the Theotokos. There, they prayed with her, and she committed her soul to her Son and God. The Apostles laid her body to rest in a tomb in the valley of Kedron near Gethsemane. By God's providence, Thomas arrived late, on the third day after her death. He was grieved that he had missed Mary's last moments, and so he wanted to see her one last time and venerate her body. The other Apostles took him to the tomb and had it opened. Inside, they discovered her body missing and the empty grave clothes. In this way, they realized she had already partaken of the Resurrection.

Elder Ephiphanius (+1989)

When you work, it is both allowed and imposed that you pray. But when you pray, you should not work!

Children's question: 'Elder, what should we do when we face reactions at our home in relation to the spiritual life fasting; i.e., confession, divine Communion, going to church etc?' "Learn to 'put your foot down!' I can't understand why the rascals, the Marxists, etc., pass on their line of thought in their homes and, furthermore, other matters which are many times contrary to God's law, while you, to avoid displeasing your families, do not lift up your voice for God's sake! How do you expect your character to be strengthened?"

To the question, "Where is God's love, since He allows even small children to die," he would respond: "God has appointed parents to bring up His children and not their children. The children are God's and not theirs. Many times, with the deaths of small children, God does what the shepherd does to a wayward ewe who does not wish to enter the fold: he grabs the little lamb to force it to come close to him, also." *Counsels for Life*

The focus of the Dormition Feast is the glorification of the Holy Theotokos in death and her participation in Christ's Resurrection before the day of the general resurrection. This shows her to have reached man's goal of perfect life in union with God. The feast is also eschatological in that it points to the victory over death that every faithful believer will gain.

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In commemorating the Theotokos' repose or death, Dormition is akin to the feast of any other saint. It differs, however, in that it affirms her bodily resurrection and her participation in the life of the age to come. Though affirmed in the hymnology and by many of the Fathers, this belief in Mary's "assumption" is not dogma in the Orthodox Church, though by papal decree in 1950, it is dogma for Roman Catholics.

We celebrate the Dormition for 8 days, from August 15 through the Leave-taking August 23. We add the festal troparion and kontakion to our regular morning and evening prayers, in place of our usual prayers before and after meals, and when setting out to travel.

It is customary to bless herbs and flowers on this feast.

Troparion, tone 1

In giving birth, thou didst preserve thy virginity, / in falling asleep thou didst not forsake the world, O Theotokos. / Thou wast translated to life, O thou who art the Mother of Life, // and by thy prayers thou dost deliver our souls from death.

Kontakion, tone 2

Neither the tomb nor death could hold the Theotokos, / who is constant in prayer and our firm hope in her intercessions. / For being the Mother of Life, she was translated to life / by the One who dwelt in her virginal womb.

The Prophet Daniel as a Model of Repentance

God is calling all who are called by His name to offer repentance for their own sins and the sins of their country. Daniel's prayer for Israel provides a model of repentance for us to study and follow. Some principles of repentance derived from the prayer follow.

In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of the seed of the Medes, which was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans; In the first year of his reign I Daniel understood by books the number of the years, whereof the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem. And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplication, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes:

And I prayed unto the LORD my God, and made my confession, and said, O Lord, the great and dreadful God, keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love him, and to them that keep his commandments; We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from thy precepts and from thy judgments: Neither have we hearkened unto thy servants the prophets, which spake in thy name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land. O Lord, righteousness belongeth unto thee, but unto us confusion of faces, as at this day; to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and unto all

Israel, that are near, and that are far off, through all the countries whither thou hast driven them, because of their trespass that they have trespassed against thee. O Lord, to us belongeth confusion of face, to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against thee. To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against him; Neither have we obeyed the voice of the LORD our God, to walk in his laws, which he set before us by his servants the prophets. Yea, all Israel have transgressed thy law, even by departing, that they might not obey thy voice; therefore the curse is poured upon us, and the oath that is written in the law of Moses the servant of God, because we have sinned against him. And he hath confirmed his words, which he spake against us, and against our judges that judged us, by bringing upon us a great evil: for under the whole heaven hath not been done as hath been done upon Jerusalem. As it is written in the law of Moses, all this evil is come upon us: yet made we not our prayer before the LORD our God, that we might turn from our iniquities, and understand thy truth. Therefore hath the LORD watched upon the evil, and brought it upon us: for the LORD our God is righteous in all his works which he doeth: for we obeyed not his voice. And now, O Lord our God, that hast brought thy people forth out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand, and hast gotten thee renown, as at this day; we have sinned, we have done wickedly. O Lord, according to all thy righteousness, I beseech thee, let thine anger and thy fury be turned away from thy city Jerusalem, thy holy mountain: because for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and thy people are become a reproach to all that are about us. Now therefore, O our God, hear the prayer of thy servant, and his supplications, and cause thy face to shine upon thy sanctuary that is desolate, for the Lord's sake. O my God, incline thine ear, and hear; open thine eyes, and behold our desolations, and the city which is called by thy name: for we do not present our supplications before thee for our righteousnesses, but for thy great mercies. O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, hearken and do; defer not, for thine own sake, O my God: for thy city and thy people are called by thy name. *Daniel 9:1-19*

Some Lessons

1. Daniel's repentance was prompted by God's Word delivered through the prophet Jeremiah. In this case, it was God's promise to restore Israel to the land after seventy years of exile in judgment for their many sins. God's Word moves us to repentance when we see written there the warnings of the terrible sufferings God's judgment brings upon sinners. It gives us hope through the many examples of God's judgment delayed or averted when His people humble themselves, confess their sins, and turn away from them. God explains things clearly to His people in Deuteronomy 28 and Leviticus 26. If God's people are faithful, He will bless them. If they defile the land He has given them by sin, he will bring trouble upon them to move them to repentance. If they do not repent, troubles will increase. If they still do not repent, troubles will multiply, those who survive will be removed from the land into exile. If at any time along the way, the people humble themselves in repentance, God will withdraw His hand of judgment.

2. Daniel provides us with a concrete example of what to do to offer repentance. He sought the Lord

with prayer, supplications, sackcloth, ashes, and fasting. In the Old Testament, donning sackcloth and ashes was an outward sign of repentance. A person humbled himself by not wearing his normal clothing and by not looking his best. Rather he cultivated repentance in his heart by disfiguring his head and face with ashes and wearing the coarsest and humblest of clothing. To this, he joined prayer and fasting.

Our offering of repentance today makes use of these things with the difference that we do not make an outward show of it with sackcloth and ashes to avoid doing it to impress others, as Christ commanded (Mt. 6). To prayers, supplications, and fasting we may add prostrations, keeping vigil, reading the Psalter, praying akathists, canons, and the Jesus Prayer. St. John Chrysostom instructs us helpfully too, in five different means of repentance. Though they most readily apply to the general cultivation of repentance rather than focused repentance in time of judgment and distress, they nevertheless offer us help.

Would you like me to list also the paths of repentance? They are numerous and quite varied, and all lead to heaven.

A first path of repentance is the condemnation of your own sins: "Be the first to admit your sins and you will be justified." For this reason, too, the prophet wrote: "I said, I will accuse myself of my sins to the Lord, and Thou forgavest the wickedness of my heart." Therefore, you too should condemn your own sins; that will be enough reason for the Lord to forgive you, for a man who condemns his own sins is slower to commit them again. Rouse your conscience to accuse yourself within your own house, lest it become your accuser before the judgment seat of the Lord.

That, then, is one very good path of repentance. Another and less valuable one is to put out of our minds the harm done us by our enemies, in order to master our anger, and to forgive our fellow servants' sins against us. Then our own sins against the Lord will be forgiven us. Thus you have another way to atone for sin: "For if you forgive your debtors, your heavenly Father will forgive you."

Do you want to know of a third path? It consists of prayer that is fervent and careful and comes from the heart.

If you want to hear of a fourth, I will mention almsgiving, whose power is great and far-reaching.

If, moreover, a man lives a modest, humble life, that, no less than the other things I have mentioned, takes sin away. Proof of this is the tax collector who had no good deeds to mention, but offered his humility instead and was relieved of a heavy burden of sins.

Thus I have shown you five paths of repentance: condemnation of your own sins, forgiveness of our neighbor's sins against us, prayer, almsgiving, and humility.

Do not be idle, then, but walk daily in all these paths; they are easy, and you cannot plead your poverty. For, though you live out your life amid great need, you can always set aside your wrath, be humble, pray diligently, and condemn your own sins; poverty is no hindrance. Poverty is not an obstacle to our carrying out the Lord's bidding, even when it comes to that path of repentance which involves giving money (almsgiving, I

mean). The widow proved that when she put her two mites into the box!

Now that we have learned how to heal those wounds of our, let us apply the cures. Then, when we have regained genuine health, we can approach the Holy Table with confidence, go gloriously to meet Christ, the King of Glory, and attain the eternal blessings through the grace, mercy, and kindness of Jesus Christ our Lord.

3. When Daniel prays, he identifies himself with his people and confesses their sins as his, even though he was a righteous man. Instead of saying, "Thy people, Lord, they have sinned" he says "we have sinned." He identifies with the people and their sins as his own. In short, he prays, "We have sinned, we have done evil, we have rebelled, we have broken Thy commandments and not kept faith with Thee. Moreover, we have not listened to those Thou hast sent to warn us an call us to repentance. Hence, these evils have come up us. We deserve it. We have not kept the covenant, but Thou hast kept Thy word and brought the curse on us for our sins and lack of repentance as Thou saidst Thou wouldst. hear Lord, have mercy, forgive, restore."

We Americans are in desperate need of repentance. Our sins and the blood shed in our land and by our arms overseas unjustly cries out to God. We have defiled our land not only with blood but with adulteries, fornication, pride, blasphemies, and blatant disregard for God's commands. We deserve judgment; indeed, we are in the foyer of judgment now. If we do not offer heartfelt prayer and repentance, worse will inevitably come.

Daniel provides us with a model for repentance. The Burning Bush Lamp which has been offered to the parish via email also provides a structured way for us to join in corporate repentance. May God grant it to us in His great mercy.

Prayer for Our Land

At every service, we pray "For this God-protected land, its president, all civil authorities, and for those who serve in the armed forces." A form of this petition used in some augmented litanies and in Moliens adds the Biblical reason: "that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty."

Our land needs our prayers more than ever. Our American people are spiritually sick in many ways. Our sins are many, and our repentance, if any, is weak. There is little fear of God or of His just judgment, which will indeed come if we do not repent, and which has fallen increasingly upon us in the past eighteen months. God's desire is always that people should repent, but if they do not, their sin attracts yet greater judgment and, eventually, destruction.

In the book of *Lamentations*, the great Prophet Jeremiah expresses his deep sorrow over the destruction of Jerusalem and the captivity of God's people in a foreign land. The people had rebelled against God's word and worshipped other Gods, had rejected the true prophets and solaced themselves

with the lies of false prophets, and had refused to repent. The siege and sack brought horrors on the people: starvation, death by the sword, mothers eating their children, rape, captivity, and slavery. The majority died. Only a remnant only remained.

Yet in the midst of this great distress, Jeremiah looks to God in hope, asserting that His mercy never fails, that His faithfulness is great, and that He is good to those who wait for Him. The Lord will not cast off forever; He will have compassion, for He does not willingly afflict or grieve the children of men. But men bring judgment upon themselves for their own chosen sins: "Why should a living man complain, a man about the punishment of his sins?"

God's goodness provides the ground to support the Prophet's call to repentance: "Let us test and examine our ways, and return to the Lord! Let us lift up our hearts and hands to God in heaven: We have transgressed and rebelled."

We first wrote this reflection in 2013. Then, we said, "I dare say that our country is already under relatively mild judgment with our debt, economic problems, the loss of faith in institutions, and our poisonous politics, but I fear that things will get worse for everyone if we do not repent for our own sins and pray in repentance and intercession for our land." Things are now considerably worse than then. The Lord still says now as He said then and long ago: "If My people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land" (2 Chronicles 7:14). Remember that Christians, the members of Christ's body, are salt and light in this corrupt world, salt to preserve what would otherwise rot and light to dispel the darkness of sin. Sodom, wicked as she was, had been spared would only ten righteous persons have been found in her.

Our contrite repentance for our sins and fervent intercessions for our sinful land may well turn away the worse judgment our sins attract. It is not too late! We delude ourselves if we think we can live in complacency without repentance saying "peace and safety" when there is none but by God's blessing. Let us pray fervently to the Lord now and in this coming Church year (starting September 1), and may our merciful Lord have mercy on us and on our land!

Elder Epiphanius on Obedience

Once, an Abbess called him on the phone to seek his advice on the following topic: A certain pious girl, who desired to become a nun at the Abbess's monastery, had a problem with her Spiritual Father. He possessed an anti-monastic spirit and would not give her a blessing to realize her holy longing.

"Elder, what should I do? Should I advise her to obey her Spiritual Father and choke her longing for monastic life, or should I urge her to ignore his opinion and come to the monastery without a blessing?"

"Listen, Abbess. Her desire is in everything holy and venerable. However, if she comes to the monastery without a blessing and for one or another reason meets difficulty in

her new life, she will blame her disobedience. If again she makes progress in monastic life, she will have inside her the thorn, that what she is doing is being done without a blessing.

"For this reason, I advise you to urge her to be obedient and pray that, if God wishes her longing to be fulfilled, to change the position of her Spiritual Father."

And that is what happened.

After about six months, in rejoicing to the Elder, the Abbess announced that the aforesaid girl had secured the much longed-for blessing from her Spiritual Father who, yielding in agreement, told her:

"My child, since after such a long time of my own denial you continue to long for the monastic life, it means that your desire is from God. So go, with my prayer and my blessing."

And Father Epiphanius:

"Abbess, God rewarded her obedience!"

From the Arena on Christ's Commandments *St. Ignatius Brianchaninov*

[From his very entry into the Church, a Christian] should occupy himself with all possible care and attention with the reading of the Holy Gospel. He should make such a study of the Gospel that it may always be present in his memory, and at every moral step he takes, for every act, for every thought, he may always have ready in his memory the teaching of the Gospel. Such is the injunction of the Savior Himself. This injunction is linked with a promise and a threat. In sending His disciples to preach Christianity, the Lord said to them: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20).

The promise consists in the fact that the person who fulfills the commandments of the Gospel will not only be saved but will also enter into the most intimate union with God and become a divinely built temple of God. The Lord said: "He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me; and he who love Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will reveal Myself to him" (John 14:21).

From these words of the Lord, it is evident that the commandments of the Gospel must be so studied that they become the possession, the property of the mind; only then is the exact, constant fulfillment of them possible such as the Lord requires. The Lord reveals Himself to the doer of the commandments spiritually, and He is seen with the spiritual eye, with the mind. The person sees the Lord in himself, in his thoughts and feelings transfigured by the Holy Spirit. On no account must the Lord be expected to appear to the eyes of sense. This is clear from the words of the Gospel that follow those we have just quoted: "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode in him" (John 14:23).

The threat to a person remiss in the fulfillment of the commandments of the Gospel is contained in the

predication for him of unfruitfulness, estrangement from God, perdition. The Lord said: "Without Me, you can do nothing, if anyone does not remain in Me, he is lopped off like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire and burned. Remain in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will remain in My love" (John 15:5-6, 9-10). "Not everyone who calls Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only those who do the will of My Father in heaven. On that day [the day of judgment] many will say to Me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Thy name, and expel demons in Thy name, and do many miracles in Thy name?' And then I will confess to them, 'I have never known you. Depart from Me, you whose work is sin'" (Matthew 7:21-23).

The giver, teacher, and model of humility, our Lord Jesus Christ, called His all-holy, almighty, divine commandments 'the least' on account of the very simple form in which they are expressed and which makes them easy to understand and easy to carry out for every type of person, even the most uneducated. But at the same time the Lord added that a deliberate and constant breaker of even one commandment 'will be called least in the Kingdom of Heaven,' or, according to the explanation of the holy Fathers, will be deprived of the heavenly Kingdom and will be cast into the fire of gehenna.

The Lord's commandments are "Spirit and life." They save the doer of them. They restore a dead soul to life. They make a carnal and worldly person spiritual. On the other hand, a person who neglects the commandments ruins himself and remains in a carnal and worldly state, in a fallen condition, and develops the fall in himself. "The carnal man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him" (I Corinthians 2:14). And therefore it is indispensable for salvation to be changed from a carnal man into a spiritual, from the old man into the new. "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God." And therefore it is essential for salvation to be freed not only from the influence of the flesh or coarse passions, but also from the influence of the blood by means of which the passions act on the soul. "Those who go far from Thee [not by position of body but by disposition of soul which dodges from doing the will of God] will perish. Thou destroyest all who go awhoring from Thee" by following their own will and their own understanding by refusing the commandments of the Gospel or the will of God. The latter necessarily accompanies the former. "But it is good for me," as a true [Christian], "to cling to God, to put my trust in the Lord" (Psalm 72:27-28).

The Arena, Chapter 1

Upcoming Events 2021

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!