

The Confessor's Tongue for September 19, A. D. 2021

14th Sunday After Pentecost: St. John the Theologian

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 Bishop's Ministry

When he visited St. Maximus in July 2016, Archbishop Alexander described the ministry of the bishop as threefold.

First, he shepherds the priests as the priests shepherd the flock. While the priest is on the frontline, the bishop is typically back behind the lines, supporting those under fire. The shepherds need support, instruction, direction, prayer, counsel, and correction—and this the bishop provides.

Second, the bishop serves as an icon of the glory of God when he serves the hierarchical liturgy. Some people react negatively to all the ritual and finery, objecting that such honor should not be paid to a man, especially in a (supposedly) democratic society. Yet they misunderstand the matter. The pomp and circumstance is not about the man who is bishop: it is honor paid ultimately to our one great High Priest, our Lord Jesus Christ. The bishop provides us with an image, albeit a pale one, of God's glory.

Third, the bishop connects the faithful and clergy of his diocese with the universal Church. Christ has but one body, not many, though the one body comprises many members. The parishes of a region under one bishop compose a diocese. The bishop of the diocese represents his diocese to the bishops of the other dioceses of a larger region (usually a nation-state). The bishops of that national church compose the Holy Synod headed by the primate (in our case, the Metropolitan) who chairs the Holy Synod and himself represents the national church to all the other national churches. All inter-church activity at this level requires his blessing. We may see this another way. The local parish priest commemorates the bishop of his diocese at services. The bishop commemorates the primate (Patriarch, Metropolitan, Archbishop), while the Primate commemorates the heads of all the autocephalous Orthodox Churches which compose the one Church.

Bishop Alexander also outlined his plan for the diocese. As it has grown too large, he will work to get approval to make Fr. Gerasim an auxiliary bishop as quickly as possible (possible was nearly five years). After a time, he envisions consecrating a second auxiliary bishop and eventually making two dioceses out of one, splitting it at the Mississippi River.

Pastoral Visit of the Bishop Some Things You'll Want to Know

Parish Protocol

There is a customary way of greeting the Bishop when he arrives to celebrate the Divine Liturgy. One or more young girls greet him outside the church with a bouquet of flowers. When he enters the church building itself, usually some lay "elder" holding bread and salt on a tray meets the Bishop inside the doors of

the Church (after the Bishop's mantya has been placed on him by his subdeacons), offering an appropriate greeting. The priest meets him with the hand cross on a tray. The procession then begins from the back of the church to the iconostasis as the choir sings "Meet it is in truth..." The deacon will read the entrance prayers for the bishop, who then will enter the altar through the royal doors and venerate the altar table. He will then come back to the center of the church to be vested by his subdeacons while the deacon reads the vesting prayers and the choir sings.

Individual Protocol

When the bishop is present, we take blessings from him instead of the priest in the same way we usually do: we bow, cross our hands with right over left, and say, "Your Grace, bless", or "Vladyka, bless." After he blesses us with the sign of the Cross, we kiss his hand. We stand when he enters the room and do not sit until he indicates. When taking leave of him, we ask his blessing as we did in greeting him. Everyone should make it a point personally to receive his blessing at least once in the course of his visit.

After the Liturgy and coffee hour, you will be given the opportunity to ask Bishop Gerasim questions and hear what he has to say. When you ask your questions, be sure to address him as "Your Grace" or "Vladyka".

Several times during the Liturgy, we'll sing "*eis polla eti despota*", which means "Many years, Master."

From Elder Epiphanius (+1989)

"Father, why do we do memorial services, since 'there is no repentance in Hades'?"

"Did you ever read the memorial service carefully at any time?" "No."

"Read it! It does not speak anywhere about repentance. It only mentions expressions like: 'Give rest to the sou of Thy servant . . . being a good and man-loving God, forgive. . . ' and others. What happens, my good child is the following: a person under trial is condemned to death (the sinner for hell). His relative and his other (the Church) make a petition to grace (a memorial petition) to the highest ruler (God). If He wishes, he waives the penalty to the person tried. If he does not want, the penalty is executed."

"All right, Elder, does the mercy of God extend to hell as well?"

Since, my little child, it is infinite, is there a place or condition which can prevent it from extending?"

On The Bishop

Timothy Ware

We have called the bishop a ruler and monarch, but these terms are not to be understood in a harsh

and impersonal sense; for in exercising his powers the bishop is guided by the Christian law of love. He is not a tyrant but a father to his flock. The Orthodox attitude to the episcopal office is well expressed in the prayer used at [the] consecration [of a bishop]:

O Lord our God, who, forasmuch as it is impossible for the nature of man to endure the Essence of the Godhead, in Thy providence hast instituted for us teach of like nature with ourselves, to maintain Thine Altar, that they may offer unto thee sacrifice and oblation for all Thy people: Do Thou, the same Lord, make this man also, who hath been proclaimed a steward of the episcopal grace, to be an imitator of thee, the true Shepherd, who didst lay down thy life for thy sheep; to be a leader of the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, a reprover of the unwise, a teacher of the young, a lamp to the world: that having perfected the souls entrusted to him in this present life, he may stand unashamed before Thy throne, and receive the great reward which thou hast prepared for those who have contended valiantly for the preaching of Thy Gospel.

The authority of the bishop is fundamentally the authority of the Church. However great the prerogatives of the bishop may be, he is not someone set up *over* the Church, but the holder of an office *in* the Church. Bishop and people are joined in an organic unity, and neither can properly be thought of apart from the other. Without bishops there can be no Orthodox people, but without Orthodox people, there can be no true bishop. "The Church," said St. Cyprian of Carthage, "is the people united to the bishop, the flock clinging to its shepherd. The bishop is in the Church, and the Church in the bishop."

The relation between the bishop and his flock is a mutual one. The bishop is the divinely appointed *teacher* of the faith, but the *guardian* of the faith is not the episcopate alone, but the whole people of God: bishops, clergy, and laity together. The proclamation of the truth is not the same as the stewardship of the truth: all the people are stewards of the truth, but it is the bishop's particular office to proclaim it. Infallibility belongs to the whole Church, not just to the episcopate in isolation. As the Orthodox Patriarchs said in their Letter of 1848 to Pope Pius IX:

Among us, neither Patriarchs nor Councils could ever introduce new teaching, for the guarding of religion is the very body of the Church, that is, the people (*laos*) itself.

Commenting on this statement, Khomiakov [a famous 19th century Russian lay theologian] wrote:

The Pope is greatly mistaken in supposing that we consider the ecclesiastical hierarchy to be the guardian of dogma. The case is quite differing. The unvarying constancy and the unerring truth of Christian dogma does not depend upon any hierarchical order; it is guarded by the totality, by the whole people of the Church, which is the Body of Christ.

This conception of the laity and their place in the Church must be kept in mind when considering the nature of an Ecumenical Council. The laity are guardians and not teachers; therefore, although they may attend a council and take an active part in the

proceedings (as Constantine and other Byzantine Emperors did), yet when the moment comes for the council to make a formal proclamation of the faith, it is the bishops alone who, in virtue of their teaching *charisma*, take the final decision.

from *The Orthodox Church*, pp. 250-251.

On the Episcopacy

Clergy Guidelines of the OCA

1. The hierarch determines the assignment of clergy in his own diocese.
2. The hierarch's official representative in a parish of his diocese is the assigned priest or rector.
3. The hierarch has direct supervision over all matters in his diocese involving canon law and the spiritual function, rights, and duties of the clergy.
4. The hierarch alone may judge the merits of the transfer of clergy from one assignment in his diocese to another. A clergyman who would like to transfer from the parish to which he has been assigned must submit a written petition to his hierarch.
5. The hierarch alone has the right to invite another hierarch to serve in one of his own parishes. Should a parish wish to have the presence of another hierarch for a particular occasion, that request must be made in writing to its own hierarch.

Soul-Profiting Instructions of the Elder Vicent of Secu Monastery, Romania (+1945)

About Putting Off Spiritual Things: This is the most sure snare of the devil. He says, "You'll have time later to pray and make prostrations, and to fast tonight or tomorrow!" And you put off everything spiritually profitable until death. Behold, in this way a man loses himself, by his own will, unrepentant. Whose fault is it?

Upcoming Events 2021

- 3 October, Sunday: 20-year Anniversary Celebration at St. Maximus and the Big White Barn in Decatur.
- October 4-8: Diocesan Assembly in Miami
- 31 October, Sunday: Oktoberfest & All Saints Party
- 14 November: Parish Thanksgiving Meal

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!