

The Confessor's Tongue for October 3, A. D. 2021

15th Sunday After Pentecost: St. Dionysius the Aereopagite

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 Molieben of Thanksgiving

In the Slavic Orthodox tradition, a Molieben is a special service of prayer offered for a particular need, often in honor of a particular saint for his intercessions on our behalf. Today as we with His Grace Bishop Gerasim of Fort Worth celebrate twenty years since the founding of our parish, we shall offer thanks to God for all His blessings at the end of the Divine Liturgy. Nothing good would be here at St. Maximus without God's grace. We, as faithful servants, wish to acknowledge God's gifts and return thanks in this special way given to us by the Holy Church. The Thanksgiving Molieben may be offered at any time in thanks to God for a blessing He has conferred on us.

Too often, we are like the nine lepers were healed as they went their way to the priest in obedience to Christ's command but who did not return to offer thanks. We would rather be as the one, the Samaritan outsider, who did. May God grant us a spirit of gratitude for all his blessings and the grace to give thanks always for everything under all circumstances.

Hymns for the Molieben of Thanksgiving

Here are the hymns for today's Molieben. Please do sing along with your offering of thanks. At the end, the Molieben gives the option of singing the Great Doxology or the Hymn of St. Ambrose, the Te Deum. We shall sing the latter today.

Tone 6 O Heavenly King, / Comforter, Spirit of Truth, / who art everywhere present and fillest all things, / Treasury of good things / and Giver of life: / Come and abide in us, / and cleanse us from every stain, / and save our souls, O Good One!

tone 4 The Lord is God and hath revealed Himself unto us; blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord.

Troparion, tone 4

We, Thine unworthy servants, O Lord, grateful for Thy great benefits which Thou hast showed upon us, glorifying Thee, do praise, bless, give thanks, sing, and magnify Thy lovingkindness, and with love do cry aloud unto Thee in humble submission:

O our Benefactor and our Savior, glory to Thee. (2x)
Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.

Troparion, tone 3

O Master, who hast vouchsafed freely thy benefits and gifts unto Thine unprofitable servants, zealously resorting unto Thee, we offer unto Thee thanksgiving according to our strength, and glorifying Thee as our Benefactor and our Creator, we cry aloud:

Glory to Thee, O God most bountiful.

Now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.

Troparion, tone 3

O Theotokos, the helper of Christians, having acquired thy protection, we thy servants gratefully do cry aloud unto thee: Rejoice, most pure Virgin Theotokos! And from all calamities deliver thou us always by thy prayers, O thou who alone art our speedy helper in trouble.

Hymn of St. Ambrose, Troparion Tone 3

We praise Thee O God, we acknowledge Thee to be the Lord. All the earth worshipeth Thee the Father everlasting. To Thee all angels cry aloud, the heavens and all the powers therein. To Thee cherubim and seraphim cry out with unceasing voice: Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Sabaoth. Both Heaven and earth are full of the majesty of Thy glory. The glorious chorus of the apostles praiseth Thee. The praise-worthy company of the prophets praiseth Thee. The white robed army of the martyrs praiseth Thee. The holy Church throughout the world acknowledgeth Thee the Father of an infinite majesty; Thine adorable true, and only Son; and the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete. Thou art the King of Glory, O Christ! Thou art the everlasting Son of the Father. When Thou tookest upon Thee to deliver the human race, Thou didst not disdain the Virgin's womb. When Thou hadst overcome the sting of death, Thou didst open the kingdom of heaven to all believers. Thou art seated at the right hand of God, in the glory of the Father. We believe that Thou wilt come to be our Judge. We therefore pray Thee to help Thy servants whom Thou hast redeemed with Thy precious blood. Make them to be numbered with Thy saints in glory everlasting. O Lord, save Thy people, and bless Thine inheritance. Govern us and lift us up forever. Day by day we bless Thee, and we praise Thy name forever, to the ages of ages. Vouchsafe, O Lord, to keep us this day without sin. Have mercy on us O Lord, have mercy on us. Let Thy mercy, O Lord be upon us, as we have put our hope in Thee. In Thee O Lord, have I hoped; let me never be confounded.

A Short History of St. Maximus Orthodox Church

On June 2, 2001, Archbishop Dmitri of blessed memory asked Fr. Justin and Matushka Michelle Frederick to start a new parish in Flower Mound or Denton Texas, 30 to 40 miles up the Interstate 35 corridor from Dallas. Vladyka had long desired a

mission started in the town of his *alma mater*, then North Texas State Teachers' College, now University of North Texas. On June 10, Fr. Justin served an Akathist to St. Innocent for the new mission and then met with an Orthodox family living in Denton who were eager to have a mission established. The Menard family did much work, placing advertisements in the newspaper, getting a storage unit for liturgical articles, and finding a place to meet in the chapel of St. David's Episcopal Church (whose rector was an former mentor of Fr. John Reeves, a well-known priest in the OCA).

Archbishop Dmitri appointed the weekend of July 28-29 for the first services of the nascent mission. So far, we had identified the four members of the Menard family, Fr. Justin and Matushka Michelle (and Katherine in the womb), two retirees Jerry Bradshaw and Nina Johnston, a young couple in graduate school, Dax and Amy Stokes to begin the Mission, and two or three people called in response to our newspaper advertisement.

On Saturday July 28, we served our first Vespers. We had no choir. Dax and Amy were musicians, but Dax had grown up in the Greek Archdiocese and knew no Russian tones while Amy, his wife, was not yet Orthodox. Dax gamely took on the choir from the start, which was filled out by the Morrison family from the cathedral in Dallas. Then-Reader Matthew Holliday from St. Seraphim's came to read and served for a number of months as our regular reader. We shall never forget starting off the mission on a week calling for tone seven. As I recall, we had about fourteen people present, and several confessions afterwards.

Our first Divine Liturgy, Sunday, June 29, 2001, saw 27 in attendance—half of them from the Cathedral in Dallas. It was an encouraging beginning, but the second week brought us quickly to earth: six people showed up for Vespers, and only eight for Liturgy. We were joined from the beginning by a family we had not identified—the Biberdorfs, who were recent converts living in Carrollton and attending the Cathedral. They proved to be pillars, along with the Menards for our early years.

Our second week, on the counsel of his mentor, Fr. Justin added Little Compline to Vespers as a placeholder for Matins, having the Resurrectional canon in the tone of the week and the Precommunion canon read during it. That practice continued until Great Lent in 2002, when, on February 23, for the Sunday of the Publican and Pharisee, we served Vigil, and have done so ever since. Dax (now Subdeacon Anthony) applied himself diligently to learning Russian-style music and made great strides both as a reader and choir director, always teachable, ever faithful to his duties.

Wanting a patron for the mission from the start, Fr. Justin had gone to Archbishop Dmitri on June 12 to consult with him about what the procedure was for choosing a patron. He brought a list of six possibilities, which he showed to the Archbishop

when Vladyka asked him if he had any suggestions. St. Maximus was on the list, and Vladyka immediately picked him, saying that he had long wanted a parish dedicated to the memory of St. Maximus. Vladyka's choice of patron was announced to the mission on August 26, 2001. Thus we became the only parish in North America having St. Maximus as a patron. (An Old Calendarist Greek parish formed in NY in 2003 dedicated to St. Maximus).

By Divine Providence, just six weeks after our first service (September 16), the Menards took a wrong turn home after Liturgy on Sunday at St. David's and drove down West Oak Street where they spotted a large house with an acre of land and a parking lot for sale. They called Fr. Justin, and he called the realtor and asked to see it. He came up the next day to teach a catechism class for Amy Stokes and to see the property. When he arrived at the property, the agent told him that there were already two contracts on the property, and perhaps he wouldn't care to see it, but she would show him anyway if he wished. "How likely is it that they will fall through?" Fr. Justin asked. "Not likely," said the agent. He went ahead and looked at it. It was an old 3800 square-foot home (built in 1909) in the Greek Revival Style. By one account, it had been built by a local cattle baron and then become the home of the president of North Texas State Teachers' College (now UNT), only to be purchased by a fraternity, which had long occupied it. It had then been purchased by a lawyer who was trying to renovate it while using it as his home and office. It was he who was selling it, asking \$224,900.

Seeing the property, Fr. Justin judged that it would be an ideal location for establishing a mission, and the building would convert nicely into a church downstairs and a rectory upstairs. But there were those two contracts in the way. The real estate agent showed him a couple more properties for sale, but they did not come close to approaching 2026 West Oak for suitability. Fr. Justin asked the real estate agent to call if the property should come back on the market and returned to Dallas, praying to commend the matter to God.

At the end of October, the priest received a call from the agent, telling him with some surprise that both contracts had fallen through and the property was back on the market. (The seller had sabotaged them for some reason.) So, on November 5, Fr. Justin brought Vladyka Dmitri, Milos Konjevich, and Fr. John Anderson to see the property and get their assessment. They agreed that it should be pursued. So with the mission less than three months old, the parishioners found themselves doing something they had not even contemplated this early: making an offer on a property, having no money. Archbishop Dmitri, upon being asked by Fr. Justin, who in his own name and that of his wife was making the purchase, told him to offer \$170,000. On November 14, the offer was made, contingent upon finding financing. The agent told us that the seller was very difficult to work

with, and we might not hear back for several days. Yet Fr. Justin had no sooner returned to Dallas after making the offer in Denton when the phone rang. It was the agent, who was quite in wonder over it, saying that the owner had already made a counteroffer at \$177,500. We accepted and had a contract. Now, to get money.

On November 16 (Friday), we had the property inspected, and Hugh Cole, warden at the Cathedral came to have a look at it. On December 3, Father and Matushka were pre-approved for a loan from their credit union, and donations for the purchase were received in the amounts of \$10,000 and \$2,500. Smaller donations came in. But then came a set back. On December 20, the credit union denied Father and Matushka's request for a loan. Closing was to be in a week. The priest and his wife found themselves scrambling during a holiday week to find another loan. Graciously, the seller granted an extension to the contract. A lender was found, and on January 4, 2002, Father and Matushka signed the closing papers and on January 8, they took possession of the property. Some \$30,000 had come to make the down payment of 20%; the cathedral/diocese provided another \$8,000 to complete the down payment and cover closing costs. So five months after its beginning, St. Maximus Orthodox Mission had its home.

The original founders were Kevin and Connie Menard and their two sons, Daryl (now Fr. Basil) and Dea Biberdorf, Dax (now Deacon Anthony) and Amy Stokes, Jerry Bradshaw, Nina Johnston, and Fr. Justin and Matushka Michelle, who was expecting their first child.

January 11 was a cleaning day. How the building needed it! On Saturday, the 12th, a Thanksgiving Moleben and Building Blessing were served. On Sunday, January 13th, the first Liturgy was served in the building at 9:00 a.m. On January 14th, Fr. Michael Storozuk and Fr. Justin began renovations, first working on the sanctuary, to convert a bedroom into an altar. Several layers of old flooring were torn up.

On January 20th, we served Vespers with Lita for the first time in honor of St. Maximus, but Father Justin was not able to serve—as early that morning, Matushka had gone into labor. Fr. John Anderson served the Sunday Liturgy and the Vespers in his place, while the Fredericks were at the hospital awaiting the birth of their first child. She was born the morning of the twenty-first, the first Feast of St. Maximus observed in the parish, and the first child born in the parish.

On February 1, 2002, the Fredericks deeded the property, which they had purchased in their name, to the Diocese of the South. The new altar was now useable, and the first Liturgy was served there February 3. Work continued both downstairs and upstairs, and Fr. Michael and Fr. Justin labored to make the building habitable. On April 1, the Fredericks moved into the rectory, though much work remained to be done.

The first Holy Week (April 28—May 4) saw daily services and our first Chrismation (Amy Stokes) on Holy Saturday. The first Pascha saw 55 to 60 in attendance. Tax-exempt status was granted to the property in May, and the first parish meeting was held the twenty-sixth of that month. Our first annual Memorial Day picnic was held the next day despite the rain. July 12 saw the first baptism in the mission, of Sophia Biberdorf. Archbishop Herman was elected Metropolitan ten days later. On September 1, a Palestinian Muslim woman was received as a catechumen, and the next day we held our first annual Labor Day Picnic.

Our first Mission Council was appointed and met in January of 2003. The first adult baptism, of the Palestinian woman who suddenly had to go home to care for an ailing parent, was held February 7. Our second Pascha saw 60 present. We surpassed thirty in attendance for the first time (except at Pascha) on June 15, 2003.

Our first full year, 2002, we averaged 12 in attendance at Sunday Liturgy. Vladyka Dmitri repeatedly encouraged Fr. Justin by recollecting that the first year of St. Seraphim's Cathedral (1954), Sunday attendance averaged 6. In 2003, attendance nearly doubled to 22. The following years have seen steady growth by God's grace: 2004, 30; 2005, 35; 2006, 41; 2007 45; 2008 47; 2009 57; 2010 64; 2011 74; 2012, 82; 2013, 86.

On April 16, 2009, we used our right-side transept for the first time, having converted the old galley kitchen into more church space, adding 120 square feet. We received our altar table, built by Fr. Michael Storozuk on June 17 of that year. Metropolitan Jonah visited us February 28, 2010; we had a wonderful question and answer session with him. On May 22, 2010 on the Eve of Pentecost, we began using the transept on the left side, which was formerly a hall, adding another 96 square feet. On June 19, 2011, we surpassed 100 in attendance for the first time (101); at our ten-year anniversary, attended by Metropolitan Jonah and Archbishop Nikon, 125 came to celebrate.

Our first parishioner to repose in the Lord was Nicholas Gluschenko on August 4, 2009. We lost our beloved Archbishop Dmitri August 28, 2011. The death of founding member Nina Johnston on October 7, 2012 marked the first burial carried out by our new Myrrhbearer ministry.

Needing a hall, we began raising money to build a 1000 square-foot addition in March of 2011. Construction started in 2012; Metropolitan Johan visited us on Bright Friday. We began using the new hall at Pascha in 2013. Metropolitan Jonah joined us that year for Pentecost.

In February 2014, we hosted the Diocesan Pastoral Conference in our new hall. In 2015, we hosted our one and only DFW Lenten Pan-Orthodox Vespers.

We celebrate our fiftenn-year anniversary July 30-31, 2016 with Archbishop Alexander, just after he was appointed to be our ruling bishop. Earlier that year,

Bishop Maxim of the Western Serbian Diocese of North America celebrated our patron feast with us in January and gave us some talks on St. Maximus.

The Myrrhbearer Ministry was called in 2018 to bury Joel Cassian Brown, and in 2020 to bury Sandra Pascale and Olga Fincher.

It took us a while to grow beyond the 80s on Sunday. We first averaged over 80 in 2012 (82); in 2013, we grew to 86, in 2014, we fell back to 83. In 2015, we averaged 88. Only in 2016, did we break 90 (91). Growth was rapid after that: 109 in 2017, 136 in 2018, 147 in 2019. Attendance took a hit in 2020 with restrictions due to the virus. In 2021, average attendance is hovering in the 130s, though we had 173 on Palm Sunday and more than 200 at Pascha. The parish today includes some 200 active members.

Vigil attendance has followed a similar trajectory. Mired in the 30s from 2013 to 2017, it broke upwards to 54 in 2018, 65 in 2019, and now it hovers around 50.

Numbers tell a part of the story, but not all. Christ has called his Church to make disciples of all nations and calls all men to repentance and to union with His Body. This necessarily involves numbers. But discipleship requires a new quality of life. In the Church, we live in Christ, participating in corporate worship, partaking regularly of the Holy Mysteries of Confession and Communion, cultivating repentance, prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, and striving to live our lives in accordance with Christ's commandments. In the Church, we experience that our life is not of this world, but is hidden with Christ in His kingdom, which we strive to enter. As pilgrims passing through, we hold this life loosely, looking for the life to come. If we lose this savor of eternity, numbers mean nothing.

Several priests have come out of our parish: Fr. Basil Biberdoff, Fr. Christopher Allen, and Fr. Joseph Birthisel. Recently, we have seen Michael Rehment, Anthony Stokes, and Maximus Gibson ordained to the Diaconate. One of our members, so far, has become a nun—Sister Susannah at Nativity of Our Lord Monastery in Kemp. We thank God for all of them, and we pray that God will raise up more clergy, monks, and nuns, as well as faithful married couples and parents from our parish.

A number of elements have contributed to the growth of the mission, now in 2021 a parish, over the years. Frequent services fulfill the essential ministry of the Church of being salt and light in the world by praying for the world and confessing the Lord by singing His praises. This also provides frequent face-to-face contact with people and opportunity for them to experience the Church through the week and not just on Sunday. Regular classes, both for inquirers/and catechumens and for the faithful help form hearts and minds in Christ. Our decision to serve Vigil almost from the beginning has played an important part in the growth and character of the parish. In earlier years, Moliebens with special petitions for the parish and its growth in numbers and love saw the Lord respond. Holding our annual picnics on

Memorial Day, Pascha afternoon, and Labor Day, and now Octoberfest (est. 2017) in place of Labor Day and our newer parish Thanksgiving meal (est. 2016) has done much to unite us in fellowship and love.

Ultimately, St. Maximus Orthodox Church is a work of God by His mercy and grace. We have simply tried to love and serve the people God has brought to us. We have planted, others have watered, and God has given the increase. Glory to God!

The Aim of the Christian Life

St. Seraphim of Sarov (+1833)

Prayer, fasting, vigil, and all other Christian practices, however good they may be in themselves, do not constitute the aim of our Christian life, although they serve as the indispensable means of reaching this end. The true aim of our Christian life consists in the acquisition of the Holy Spirit of God. As for fasts, and vigils, and prayer, and almsgiving, and every good deed done for Christ's sake, they are only means of acquiring the Holy Spirit of God. But mark, my dear, only the good deed done for Christ's sake brings us the fruits of the Holy Spirit. All that is not done for Christ's sake, even though it be good, brings neither reward in the future life nor the grace of God in this life. That is why our Lord Jesus Christ said: "He who gathers not with Me scatters".

What does it mean "to acquire"? Acquiring is the same as obtaining. You understand, of course, what acquiring money means. Acquiring the Spirit of God is exactly the same. You know well what it means in a worldly sense to acquire. The aim in life of ordinary worldly people is to acquire or make money, and for the nobility it is in addition to receive honors, distinctions, and other rewards for their services to the state. The acquisition of God's Spirit is also capital, but grace-giving and eternal; and it is obtained in very similar ways, almost the same ways as monetary, social, and temporal capital.

God the Word, the God-man, our Lord Jesus Christ, compares our life with a market, and the work of our life on earth He calls trading, as says to us all: "Trade till I come" (Luke 19:13), "redeeming the time, because the days are evil" (Eph 5:16), that is to say, make the most of your time for getting heavenly blessings through earthly goods. Earthly goods are good works done for Christ's sake and conferring on us the grace of the All-Holy Spirit.

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: Octoberfest & All Saints Party
14 November: Parish Thanksgiving Meal

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!