

The Confessor's Tongue for January 9, A. D. 2022

Sunday After Theophany; Martyr Polyeuctos, Met. Philip of Moscow

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 All-Night Vigil, Introduction

The Church's celebration of Sunday, the Lord's Day, the day of Resurrection, begins each week on Saturday evening with the celebration of the All-night Vigil. Though in the Church's mind, this service is an essential part of our worship of God and of our preparation to partake of Christ's Body and Blood, in the mind of many in the Church, judging from typical attendance, it is optional, an unnecessary bother and imposition one's busy schedule. To correct this mistaken view and to impart a better understanding to all about the meaning and importance of the Resurrectional All-night Vigil, we shall spend the next couple months examining the Resurrectional Vigil in detail so that we may be better prepared and motivated to make it a regular part of our worship, as it should be.

The All-Night Vigil comprises the daily services of Great Vespers, Matins, and First Hour. It is appointed by the *Typicon* to be served the evening before each Great Feast and every Sunday (which is, in effect, a Little Pascha). The feasts of certain saints also call for a Vigil. It is called "all-night" because in ancient times in Palestine where it first developed, it began at sunset and continued through the night until dawn. Later, as the service spread through the Church, out of condescension to the weakness of the faithful, it was abbreviated to begin late in the evening (but before midnight) and to last until morning. Now in normal parish use, it is abbreviated still further, beginning earlier in the evening and lasting but two or three hours. In our parish, it typically lasts two to two and a quarter hours.

Sunday for Christians is the day of the Lord's Resurrection, the day of the Eucharist, and the day of the Lord's Kingdom (the 8th day). The Sunday services communicate these themes. Note we said the Sunday *services*. The Divine Liturgy is not the only Sunday service. Since the Liturgical day begins at sunset, each Sunday has its Vespers and Matins before the Divine Liturgy. These services are essential, for they prepare us for the Liturgy. Indeed, the Liturgy may not be served with Vespers or Matins having been served, or at least read privately by the clergy. Holding fast to the Orthodox idea of preparation and fulfillment, we see that the preparation of the Vigil is fulfilled in the Eucharist of the Liturgy.

Though we may be tempted to think of the "All-Night" Vigil in terms of the quantity of time spent in the service, the primary concept of time contained in the term "vigil" is qualitative. In ancient times, "vigil" referred to time spent on guard duty, or 'keeping watch'. In the Church, it means time spent in attentive preparation and 'waiting on God'. Spiritual life needs time for development. No one can achieve

results in one's spiritual life without time. Modern man's spiritual life is in a state of collapse because of his impatience to achieve results. Vigil is taking time seriously. It relates all time to history, specifically to the history of salvation. When God became man, the Kingdom of God appeared in the time of this world. Vigil becomes the time of the proclamation of that kingdom. Vigil takes us back to the beginning of time and prepares us for the end of time, when all things will be fulfilled in the fullness of Christ's kingdom.

Moreover, Christ instructed His disciples to "watch and pray" so that, though they did not know the hour of His return, they might be ready for it. To keep vigil in the historical and ascetic sense is to deprive oneself of a measure of usual sleep to keep watch, waiting in readiness for the coming of the Son of Man at midnight, training oneself to live life in expectation of Christ's coming: first, in the Holy Mysteries at Every Liturgy, and second, in glory to judge the world and inaugurate His Kingdom. To this day in places like Mount Athos, the Vigil is served through the night (for up to eight hours and even more), preserving the ascetical effort and eschatological anticipation of the service.

In parish practice, the two to three-hour service still represents a significant ascetical effort for us, as we stand in readiness, waiting on the Lord and contemplating in the hymns and psalms all that He has done for us, especially His Incarnation, Death on the Cross, and Resurrection. Having stood through the Vigil, our bodies tell us clearly that we have been in church keeping watch, focused on the 'one thing needful' for our lives. Inconvenient and demanding it may be, but it also offers indispensable training in waiting on the Lord and making Him our priority above all else in life.

The Vigil also gives us a much needed time for spiritual cleansing and renewal after all the cares, struggles, and sins of the week. It gives us time to get our mind back on God, to honor Him and render thanks, to prepare ourselves for worthy participation in the Holy Mysteries. It gives us time to soften and warm our hearts before God if they have cooled or hardened during the week. Living in the world, we feel the pressure the world puts on us to conform to its mold. Each week, the Vigil helps us decompress from that pressure to conform to the world and to again offer ourselves to Christ. It allows us to free our minds from the cares and temptations of the week, to wash the "dust of sin" that has dirtied our soul in our sojourn in the world, so that we may present ourselves at the morning Liturgy with cleansed hearts, eager and ready to receive the Lord.

Since the Vigil service comprises Matins and Vespers, the beginning and end of the daily services, Vigil becomes the service encompassing the whole of time. Vigil transforms all of time into a time of

preparation. Not only is Saturday night the solemn preparation for the Sunday morning Eucharist, it also is the solemn preparation of our lives for the coming of the Kingdom of God at the end of time. Vigil gives us time to increase our attention span for prayerful meditation on these matters of greatest importance to us, and to put aside all the cares and worries of life that would crowd out the growth of the kingdom in us. *Fr. Justin Frederick*

Introduction to the Sayings of St. Anthony

Fr. Thomas Hopko of blessed memory once said that the full teaching of Christian spiritual life is expressed in the thirty-eight sayings of St. Anthony the Great found in the classic work *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*. That comment inspired the forthcoming series of reflections on those sayings. It originally ran in the *Confessor's Tongue* 2006-7 shortly after the author heard the remark, but not every saying was covered then. It ran again beginning in January of 2010 in an expanded form, but the first saying was still not covered. We ran it a third time beginning in January of 2015, covering every saying and reworking some of them considerably, and a fourth time starting in November 2018. Given the growth of the parish and the foundational value of this material for all of us, we shall offer it again serially over the next thirty-eight weeks. I hope to continue to refine it that it may, perhaps, one day be published as a book. Your questions and comments are welcome as aids to achieving that end. *Fr. Justin Frederick*

The Sayings of St. Anthony the Great

When the holy Abba Anthony lived in the desert, he was beset by accidie, and attacked by many sinful thoughts. He said to God, "Lord, I want to be saved, but these thoughts do not leave me alone; what shall I do in my affliction? How can I be saved?" A short while afterwards, when he got up to go out, Anthony saw a man like himself sitting at his work, getting up from his work to pray, then sitting down and plaiting a rope, then getting up again to pray. It was an angel of the Lord sent to correct and reassure him. He heard the angel saying to him, "Do this, and you will be saved." At these words, Anthony was filled with joy and courage. He did this, and he was saved.

Saying 1 in The Sayings of Desert Fathers

Commentary: St. Anthony the Great (251-353) is considered the father of eremitical monasticism (i.e., those who live as hermits largely alone), thanks to the influence his living example and his *Life* written by St. Athanasius had on countless others. His first saying in *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers* expresses the basic formula he practiced in his Christian life. It is not esoteric or complicated, but simple: just "work and pray".

Acedia (see Nov 2, 2014 *Confessor's Tongue* for a detailed discussion) is one of the eight deadly thoughts, the "demon of noonday", which deprives a man of the energy and desire to work on his salvation. Boredom,

distraction, and sloth all are connected to *acedia*. Antony had committed himself to ascetical life in the desert, but he was tormented by thoughts of boredom, sloth, distraction, and discouragement, as, at some point, is everyone who seriously commits himself to the spiritual life. These thoughts would rob him of prayer, work, and Christian life if not countered.

Christian life is spiritual warfare, and that warfare persists until man's last breath. That warfare is not against one's fellow man politically, economically, or socially, but against the fallen spiritual powers who insinuate evil thoughts and lies into man's mind to lead him away from God and into sin. No sin is ever committed which is not conceived first in thought. To cut off sin in deed, the thoughts that come into one's mind must be watched, discerned, and dealt with. For this reason, the Savior commands His followers to "watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation".

In response to Antony's cry for help with his thoughts, the Lord answers through an angel: work and pray, work and pray, "do this, and you will be saved." The answer given to Antony is given to us too. All of us have to work, whether it is housework, chores, schoolwork, a profession, a job humble or exalted. That work, little though we may like it, if used properly, will help save us. If "idle hands are the devil's workshop" (and they are), work at the very least keeps man from idleness leading to temptation in thought and sin in deed. Having to work each day to make a living, or diligently embracing the responsibilities given at home or school, keeps man out of more trouble than he might think.

But work alone will not save man. Work as we know it is part of the fallen order of things: "you will eat bread by the sweat of your brow." Man's work must be redeemed by prayer, in which man offers himself, his work, his friends and family, and all his life to Christ and thereby wages war against thoughts. There is no spiritual life without prayer, and there will be no spiritual success without work. The desire to avoid work ("don't work too hard!") and to have abundant leisure and pleasure undermines spiritual life. But work without prayer, without God, deadens the soul and leaves it vulnerable to idolatry, covetousness, envy, pride, greed, and love of money. But to work diligently that one may eat (and pray while one works) and then to rise from work to pray regularly (one's private prayer rule and one's participation in public worship) provides man with the balance he needs to gain victory over evil thoughts. *Fr. Justin Frederick*

January 9: Hieromartyr Philip of Moscow

Saint Philip, Metropolitan of Moscow, in the world Theodore, was descended from the illustrious noble lineage of the Kolichevi, occupying a prominent place in the Boyar дума at the court of the Moscow sovereigns. He was born in the year 1507. His father, Stephen Ivanovich, "a man enlightened and filled with

military spirit," attentively prepared his son for government service. Theodore's pious mother Barbara, who ended her days as a nun with the name Barsanouphia, implanted in the soul of her son a sincere faith and deep piety. Young Theodore Kolichev applied himself diligently to the Holy Scripture and to the writings of the holy Fathers. The Moscow Great Prince Basil III, the father of Ivan the Terrible, brought young Theodore into the court, but he was not attracted to court life. Conscious of its vanity and sinfulness, Theodore all the more deeply immersed himself in the reading of books and visiting the churches of God. Life in Moscow repelled the young ascetic. The young Prince Ivan's sincere devotion to him, promising him a great future in government service, could not deter him from seeking the Heavenly City.

On Sunday, June 5, 1537, in church for Divine Liturgy, Theodore felt intensely in his soul the words of the Savior: "No man can serve two masters" (Mt.6:24), which determined his ultimate destiny. Praying fervently to the Moscow wonderworkers, and without bidding farewell to his relatives, he secretly left Moscow in the attire of a peasant, and for a while he hid himself away from the world in the village of Khizna, near Lake Onega, earning his livelihood as a shepherd.

His thirst for ascetic deeds led him to the renowned Solovki monastery on the White Sea. There he fulfilled very difficult obediences: he chopped firewood, dug the ground, and worked in the mill. After a year and a half of testing, the igumen Alexis tonsured him, giving him the monastic name Philip and entrusting him in obedience to the Elder Jonah Shamina, a converser with Saint Alexander of Svir (August 30).

Under the guidance of experienced elders Philip grew spiritually, and progressed in fasting and prayer. Igumen Alexis sent him to work at the monastery forge, where Saint Philip combined the activity of unceasing prayer with his work with a heavy hammer.

He was always the first one in church for the services, and was the last to leave. He toiled also in the bakery, where the humble ascetic was comforted with a heavenly sign. In the monastery afterwards they displayed the "Bakery" image of the Mother of God, through which the heavenly Mediatrix bestowed Her blessing upon the humble baker Philip. With the blessing of the igumen, Saint Philip spent a certain while in wilderness solitude, attending to himself and to God.

In 1546 at Novgorod the Great, Archbishop Theodosius made Philip igumen of the Solovki monastery. The new igumen strove with all his might to exalt the spiritual significance of the monastery and its founders, Saints Sabbatius and Zosimus of Solovki (September 27, April 17). He searched for the Hodēgētria icon of the Mother of God brought to the island by the first head of Solovki, Saint Sabbatius. He located the stone cross which once stood before the saint's cell. The Psalter belonging to Saint Zosimus

(+1478), the first igumen of Solovki, was also found. His robe, in which igumens would vest during the service on the days when Saint Zosimus was commemorated, was also discovered.

The monastery experienced a spiritual revival. A new monastic Rule was adopted to regulate life at the monastery. Saint Philip built majestic temples: a church of the Dormition of the Mother of God, consecrated in the year 1557, and a church of the Transfiguration of the Lord. The igumen himself worked as a simple laborer, helping to build the walls of the Transfiguration church. Beneath the north portico he dug himself a grave beside that of his guide, the Elder Jonah. Spiritual life in these years flourished at the monastery: struggling with the brethren with the disciples of Igumen Philip were Saints John and Longinus of Yarenga (July 3) and Bassian and Jonah of Pertominsk (July 12).

Saint Philip often withdrew to a desolate wilderness spot for quiet prayer, two versts from the monastery, which was later known as the Philippov wilderness.

But the Lord was preparing the saint for other work. In Moscow, Tsar Ivan the Terrible fondly remembered the Solovki hermit from his childhood. The Tsar hoped to find in Saint Philip a true companion, confessor and counsellor, who in his exalted monastic life had nothing in common with the sedition of the nobles. The Metropolitan of Moscow, in Ivan's opinion, ought to have a certain spiritual meekness to quell the treachery and malice within the Boyar soul. The choice of Saint Philip as archpastor of the Russian Church seemed to him the best possible.

For a long time the saint refused to assume the great burden of the primacy of the Russian Church. He did not sense any spiritual affinity with Ivan. He attempted to get the Tsar to abolish the Oprichniki [secret police]. Ivan the Terrible attempted to argue its civil necessity. Finally, the dread Tsar and the holy Metropolitan came to an agreement: Saint Philip would not meddle in the affairs of the Oprichniki and the running of the government, he would resign as Metropolitan in case the Tsar could not fulfill his wishes, and that he would be a support and counsellor of the Tsar, just as former Metropolitans supported the Moscow sovereigns. On July 25, 1566 Saint Philip was consecrated for the cathedra of Moscow's hierarch saints, whose number he was soon to join.

Ivan the Terrible, one of the greatest and most contradictory figures in Russian history, lived an intensely busy life. He was a talented writer and bibliophile, he was involved in compiling the Chronicles (and himself suddenly cut the thread of the Moscow chronicle writing), he examined the intricacies of the monastic Rule, and more than once he thought about abdicating the throne for the monastic life.

Every aspect of governmental service, all the measures undertaken to restructure civil and social life, Ivan the Terrible tried to rationalize as a

manifestation of Divine Providence, as God acting in history. His beloved spiritual heroes were Saint Michael of Chernigov (September 20) and Saint Theodore the Black (September 19), military men active with complex contradictory destinies, moving toward their ends through whatever the obstacles before them, and fulfilling their duties to the nation and to the Church.

The more the darkness thickened around Ivan, the more resolutely he demanded cleansing and redemption of his soul. Journeying on pilgrimage to the Saint Cyril of White Lake monastery, he declared his wish to become a monk to the igumen and the brethren. The haughty autocrat fell on his knees before the igumen, who blessed his intent. Ivan wrote, "it seems to me, an accursed sinner, that I am already robed in black."

Ivan imagined the Oprichnina in the form of a monastic brotherhood, serving God with weapons and military deeds. The Oprichniki were required to dress in monastic garb and attend long and tiring church services, lasting from 4 to 10 o'clock in the morning. "Brethren" not in church at 4 o'clock in the morning, were given a penance by the Tsar. Ivan and his sons fervently wished to pray and sing in the church choir. From church they went to the trapeza, and while the Oprichniki ate, the Tsar stood beside them. The Oprichniki gathered leftover food from the table and distributed it to the poor at the doorway of the trapeza.

Ivan, with tears of repentance and wanting to be an esteemer of the holy ascetics, the teachers of repentance, wanted to wash and burn away his own sins and those of his companions, cherishing the assurance that even his terribly cruel actions would prove to be for the welfare of Russia and the triumph of Orthodoxy. The most clearly spiritual action and monastic sobriety of Ivan the Terrible is revealed in his "Synodikon." Shortly before his death, he ordered full lists compiled of the people murdered by him and his Oprichniki. These were then distributed to all the Russian monasteries. Ivan acknowledged all his sins against the nation, and besought the holy monks to pray to God for the forgiveness of his tormented soul.

The pseudo-monasticism of Ivan the Terrible, a dark most grievous oppression over Russia, tormented Saint Philip, who considered it impossible to mix the earthly and the heavenly, serving the Cross and serving the sword. Saint Philip saw how much unrepentant malice and envy was concealed beneath the black cowls of the Oprichniki. There were outright murderers among them, hardened in lawless bloodletting, and profiteers seeking gain, rooted in sin and transgressions. By the sufferance of God, history is often made by the hands of the impious, and Ivan the Terrible wanted to whiten his black brotherhood before God. The blood spilled by its thugs and fanatics cried out to Heaven.

Saint Philip decided to oppose Ivan. This was prompted by a new wave of executions in the years 1567-1568. In the autumn of 1567, just as the Tsar was

setting out on a campaign against Livonia, he learned about a boyar conspiracy. The plotters intended to seize the Tsar and deliver him to the Polish king, who already was on the move with an army towards Russian territory.

Ivan dealt severely with the conspirators, and again he shed much blood. It was bitter for Saint Philip, and the conscience of the saint compelled him boldly to enter into defense of the executed. The final rift occurred in the spring of 1568. On the Sunday of the Veneration of the Cross, March 2, 1568, when the Tsar with his Oprichniki entered the Dormition cathedral in monastic garb, as was their custom, Saint Philip refused to bless him, and began openly to denounce the lawless acts committed by the Oprichniki. The accusations of the hierarch shattered the harmony of the church service. In a rage Ivan retorted, "Would you oppose us? We shall see your firmness! I have been too soft on you."

The Tsar began to show ever greater cruelty in persecuting all those who opposed him. Executions followed one after the other. The fate of the saintly confessor was sealed. But Ivan wanted to preserve a semblance of canonical propriety. The Boyar Duma obediently carried out his decision to place the Primate of the Russian Church on trial. A cathedral court was set up to try Metropolitan Philip in the presence of a diminished Boyar Duma, and false witnesses were found. To the deep sorrow of the saint, these were monks of the Solovki monastery, his former disciples and novices whom he loved. They accused Saint Philip of a multitude of transgressions, including sorcery.

"Like all my ancestors," the saint declared, "I came into this world prepared to suffer for truth." Having refuted all the accusations, the holy sufferer attempted to halt the trial by volunteering to resign his office. His resignation was not accepted, however, and new abuse awaited the martyr.

Even after a sentence of life imprisonment had been handed down, they compelled Saint Philip to serve Liturgy in the Dormition cathedral. This was on November 8, 1568. In the middle of the service, the Oprichniki burst into the temple, they publicly read the council's sentence of condemnation, and then abused the saint. Tearing his vestments off, they dressed him in rags, dragged him out of the church and drove him off to the Theophany monastery on a simple peasant's sledge.

For a long while they held the martyr in the cellars of the Moscow monasteries. They placed his feet into stocks, they held him in chains, and put a heavy chain around his neck. Finally, they drove him off to the Tver Otroch monastery. And there a year later, on December 23, 1569, the saint was strangled to death at the hands of Maliuta Skuratov. Only three days before this the saint foresaw the end of his earthly life and received the Holy Mysteries. At first, his relics were committed to earth there at the monastery, beyond the church altar. Later, they were

transferred to the Solovki monastery (August 11, 1591) and from there to Moscow (July 3, 1652).

Initially, the memory of Saint Philip was celebrated by the Russian Church on December 23, the day of his martyric death. In 1660, the celebration was transferred to January 9. [oca.org](https://www.oca.org)

<https://www.oca.org/saints/lives/2022/01/09/100135-hieromartyr-philip-metropolitan-of-moscow-and-all-russia>

Christian Community

God never intended for His people to live alone. He called Abraham to make of him a people, a peculiar people distinct from all the peoples of the earth. In the Church, He creates a new people called from every nation, tongue, and tribe united in His Son. They share a common faith, a common goal, and a common way of life directed towards attaining that goal. As the ancient patristic saying has it: "One Christian [alone, isolated] is no Christian" (*unus Christianus, nullus Christianus est*). We do not live the live alone, but in community. The hermit may appear to show otherwise, but he is always formed in the community, and he remains in communion with it.

The economic, political, and spiritual forces at work in the world have long been dissolving real communities where people live and work face to face, supporting one another. Instead, "community" becomes either "virtual" or simply a euphemistic word to describe a group coalesced around a special interest: the ecological community, the homosexual community, the gun community. In the latter case, it is a special interest that defines a group that otherwise lacks common purpose, goals, or way of life. Authentic, robust community is an obstacle for those who wish to subjugate man to the state or simply wish to displace local production to peddle their mass-produced products. Exported "Western Civilization" exported over the past two hundred years has worked as a powerful acid to dissolve traditional communities all over the world.

Jesus Christ creates and unites Christian community. As people come to faith in Him as the Son of God made man and desire to enter His kingdom, they are incorporated into His community, the Church, by holy Baptism. There, they are united with others by one faith, one baptism, one Holy Spirit, one loaf, one chalice, one hope. They have one goal: to enter Christ's kingdom. Their way of life is ordered to help them achieve this goal. Achieving this goal requires that they learn to love others as Christ loves them, which means they need community: the family, the parish, the Church, the school, the workplace.

The challenges of the past two years and the likely difficulties in years to come should confirm for us the importance of Christian community. It is precious. It is powerful. We do well to work to build it and protect it. We build it by participating in it and by offering ourselves in service to others in it. We look out for each other. We take care of one another, even if it means sacrifice for us. Increasingly, we may need to do more things that support life among ourselves,

for we know that a time will come when men will not be able to buy or sell without taking the mark of the beast. When that time will come, we do not know; but given the state of things now, there do not appear to be any technical barriers to the creation of such a system.

The essence of Christian community is our common life in Christ delineated by the Creed, our common worship and participation in the Mysteries, and our obedience to Christ's commandments in the Gospel. The Church is the center of its life. We live from Sunday to Sunday, from Pascha to Pascha. We keep the feasts and the fasts. We keep our domestic altars warm with prayer. We keep our hearts warm through almsgiving and service. We pray. We read the Scriptures. We live the faith, modelling it for our children in confirmation of our explicit teaching it to them. All these things manifest our love for God and for one another.

Recognizing the growing hostility of the world to the Christian faith, our love for God and others may motivate us to go farther towards become a semi-self-sufficient community. Not wanting to serve huge, godless, anti-Christian corporations or to be completely dependent upon an increasingly anti-Christian State, we may decide to develop our own businesses, our own agriculture, our own schools, our own economy, in effect. The Amish provide a good and accessible model of this.

However we live, we must consciously live dependent upon our Lord and His provision for us, not on the State, not on "the system", not on the "normal life" to which we have been accustomed. We live by God's mercy and grace. We walk by faith, not by sight. We are aliens and strangers in this world passing through to our true homeland. However we live, it is difficult to see how we might live abiding in Christ without a close connection to Christian community.

As we push deeper into a new year, may we push deeper into Christ and participate more fully in the Christian community He has given us and be careful to defend and protect it from anything that would sow discord or cause division. *Fr. Justin Frederick*

The Great Blessing of Water

Fr. Alexander Schmemmann

To bless water, making it "holy water," may have two entirely different meanings. It may mean, on the one hand, the transformation of something *profane*, and thus religiously void or neutral, into something *sacred*, in which case the main religious meaning of "holy Water" is precisely that it is no longer "mere" water, and is in fact opposed to it—as the sacred is to the profane. Here the act of blessing reveals nothing about water, and thus about matter or world, but on the contrary makes them irrelevant to the new function of water as "holy water." The sacred posits the profane as precisely profane, i.e., religiously meaningless.

On the other hand, the same act of blessing may

mean the revelation of the true “nature” and “destiny” of water, and thus of the world—it may be the epiphany and the fulfillment of their “sacramentality.” By being restored through the blessing to its proper function, the “holy water” is revealed as the true, full, adequate water, and matter becomes again means of communion with and knowledge of God.

Now anyone who is acquainted with the content and text of the great prayer of blessing of water—at Baptism and Theophany—knows without any doubt that they belong to the second of the two meanings mentioned above, that their term of reference is not the dichotomy of the sacred and the profane, but the “sacramental” potentiality of creation in its totality, as well as in each of its elements. *For the Life of the World, “Worship in a Secular Age”*

On The Holy Water

Let all be aware concerning the Holy Water: those who abstain from drinking the Holy Water because they have eaten are not acting correctly; for the Holy Water has been provided by the grace of God for the sanctification of the world and all creation. Wherefore, it is sprinkled in all places, even dishonorable ones, and even in places where it may be trodden underfoot. Where, then, is the logic in abstaining from it? But be aware that impurity comes upon us not because of eating, but because of our abominable acts; and that we may be cleansed from them, we drink this Holy Water without doubting.

Christ through His Baptism has sanctified the nature of water. For this reason, on the Eve of the Feast, after the blessing of the water, we take some home and keep it throughout the year, making regular use of it. The day of sanctifying the waters becomes a clear sign of God’s grace, for the nature of these waters is not spoiled for a long time, but it endures for a whole year or two, or three, or many years. Today the waters that are drawn remain fresh and new and after an extended time is as on the day in which it was drawn.

By pious custom, the blessed waters of Theophany are taken home after the Great Blessing of Waters for the spiritual refreshment of soul and body and the sanctification of our dwellings. The water is drunk every day from the Feast (Jan 6) through its leavetaking (Jan 14). At other times, when we cannot come to church, or when we feel ill, are embarking upon a journey, are especially tempted, etc., we should resort to these blessed waters, partaking of them with prayer and deep faith.

Holy Water is kept in the church throughout the year for the faithful to take home as needed.

Old Holy Water may be disposed of by pouring it out on plants. It should not be poured down the drain.

The Blessing of Homes

Homes are customarily blessed after the Great Blessing of Waters at Theophany. This is a brief service in the home of prayer and sanctifying the house through the sprinkling of holy water. A longer

order of blessing is often used for the first blessing and cleansing of a new home.

With the house cleaned and ready, we dress as we would for a church service. When the priest arrives, we turn off the television, radio, stereo, etc.—if they were on. Pets that may interfere are placed out of the way. A small table may be set up before the Icon Corner, upon which a wide-mouthed but small bowl full of newly blessed water is placed. A lit candle, censer (if you have one), and icon are placed on the table. These things should be arranged before the priest arrives.

Family members and any guests gather and stand before the small table. The first names of those residing in the home are printed on a piece of paper and placed on the table. Proper baptismal names should be used.

One family member may carry the lit candle, going before the priest and leading him through the house, turning on lights, opening doors, etc. The other family members may accompany the priest or may stay at the table (children, though, usually want to see their rooms blessed).

After the service, some of the faithful will make an offering to the church or give a gift to the priest. There is no obligation to do this, but if done, it is done following the service.

Take advantage of having the priest in your home for the house blessing to ask questions or to voice any concerns you may have. Some parishioners desire a more extended visit or to have a meal with the priest. This should be arranged beforehand.

On the Profit of Spiritual Teachings— Even When One Does Not Recall Them

A brother said to an old man, “See, abba, I frequently ask the Fathers to give me an earnest reminder for the salvation of my soul, and I do not remember a thing of what they tell me.” Now the old man had two empty vessels, and he said to the brother, “Go, bring one of the vessels and pour water in it: rinse it, pour it out, and put it back in its place, all shiny.” The brother did this several times, and the old man said to him, “Bring both vessels at once.” And when he had brought them, the old man said, “Of the two, which is cleaner?” The brother answered, “The one I put water in and cleaned.” Then the old man said to him, “Son, thus it is with the soul that frequently hears the word of God; though the soul remembers nothing of what she asked, she is nonetheless cleansed more than the soul that did not inquire.”

Upcoming Events 2021

21 January Feast of St. Maximus
26-27 February: Archbishop Alexander visits
6 March Forgiveness Sunday
7-12 March: Clean Week
18-23 April Holy Week
24 April Pascha

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!