

The Confessor's Tongue for January 16, A. D. 2022

30th Sunday After Pentecost; The Chains of Peter

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 Sayings of St. Anthony the Great 2

When Abba Anthony thought about the depth of the judgments of God, he asked, 'Lord, how is it that some die when they are young, while others drag to extreme old age? Why are there those who are poor and those who are rich? Why do wicked men prosper, and why are the just in need?' He heard a voice answering him, 'Anthony, keep your attention on yourself; these things are according to the judgement of God, and it is not to your advantage to know anything about them.'

Anthony Saying 2 in the *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*

Questions of this sort often trouble us in this life, either concerning ourselves or others. Why does a good, all-powerful God allow innocent children to die young? Why tidal waves? wars? earthquakes? famines? Why is the world such a mess? Some people dwell on such questions and lose their faith in God, or murmur and complain against Him.

Jesus was asked such a question. When a tower in Siloam fell and killed eighteen people, Jesus responded, "Think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:4-5).

With this answer, Christ challenges a prevalent notion, that good people are rewarded in this life and evil people are punished. Such a thought would lead one to judge that those on whom the tower fell were more evil than others, and God had judged them accordingly. Jesus denies this, and from this we should learn that God's judgments are inscrutable. Why does He allow one person to live to ripe old age and to die peacefully in sleep, while permitting another to die young in a car accident, another to suffer horribly from cancer, or thousands to die suddenly in a terrorist attack or earthquake? We cannot say why, though we can say God's judgments are just. In this world, though, there is usually no connection clear to us between good and reward, evil and punishment. Often, the good suffer greatly while the wicked live in apparent peace.

Christ accordingly warns us, that we, too, will likewise (suddenly, unexpectedly) perish unless we repent. Because of our sins, we are all under condemnation of death. There is no "innocent" on the face of the earth past the age of accountability. When we speak of "innocent" victims, we mean "innocent" so far as we know before the law of the land that they die not having been convicted of any crime. But before God, no flesh is innocent, no flesh will be justified. All are guilty, all stand in jeopardy of death, and all need to repent. We have no guarantees that death will not find us before what we consider to be "our time" or before we are prepared for it.

We love to ask "why?", even to the point of subjecting God to our judgment. But as Anthony was told, so must we: it is most often not to our advantage to know why. We walk by faith, not by sight, and our faith is in the God who loves mankind so much that He became man and humbled Himself to an unjust, humiliating death at the hands of His rebellious people. We live by our faith in the Crucified One who demonstrates God's implacable love for man and His burning desire to save man. We may not understand the particular sufferings of the race of man, but we know

God loves us and is not indifferent to our suffering and will save us through them.

But if God's judgments are beyond us, what we may readily understand is the condition of our own soul. Rather than interrogating God as to why the world is so unfair, we ought rather to interrogate ourselves as to why, in consideration of all that God has made available to us in Christ, we fail to live worthy of our high calling. Why do we act unjustly towards God? Addressing this "why" will profit us when the other "whys" only distract us from what is essential for us. This matter lies in our power to amend, and to this we must attend. *Fr. Justin Frederick*

Liturgical Elements of the All-Night Vigil

Often we think of the meaning of a church service exclusively in terms of the service's text, but in an Orthodox service, many other elements work together with the text to convey meaning and to reinforce what the text has to say. The Vigil service uses these other elements extensively. Of these, we shall consider movement, singing, light and darkness, and bells, as well as the way in which several services are joined to form the Vigil and what that means.

Movement

Orthodox services always involve movement. The faithful move their bodies in response to what is happening in the service, usually in making the sign of the cross and bowing or prostrating. Beyond this, however, the Vigil involves other sorts of movement. First, there are more processions than occur in the daily forms of Vespers or Matins. Daily Vespers has no entrance at Gladsome Light, for example, while the Vigil does. The Vigil opens with a great censuring of the whole church, which is lacking at Daily Vespers. Matins also has the two great censurings of the church: during the Evlogitaria ('Blessed art Thou, O Lord, teach me Thy statutes...') and at the Magnificat during the canon. During Matins, the Gospel is brought out, and the faithful go to venerate it and receive the priest's blessing. If a Litia is served during Vespers, there is an additional procession of all the people and clergy to the narthex (or to the back of the church if there is no adequate narthex). Thus, Vigil is a dynamic service. The movement of people and clergy during it expresses the movement of the Body of Christ towards the Kingdom of God. It vividly recalls the history of salvation.

Singing

Whether a part of a service is sung or merely chanted is not a matter of convenience but an expression of a certain theological idea. Singing is always a festal act. This is most evident at the Feast of Feasts, Pascha, when the Matins and the Hours, along with the Paschal Vespers later in the day, are sung in their entirety—nothing is read by a reader. It is evident at the Divine Liturgy also, which is always festive in nature and is sung. The reader only reads the Hours before the Liturgy, the Prokiemenon and Epistle during it, and the Prayers of Thanksgiving afterwards. Other parts of the service that are normally read by a reader at Vespers, Compline, and Matins—"Holy God," the Lord's Prayer, the antiphons, the Creed—are sung by all instead of being read by a reader.

In accordance with this principle, singing also makes up an important part of the All-night Vigil. The opening psalm of Vespers, the Psalm of Creation (103), the kathisma Psalms (1-8) Blessed is the Man, and St. Symeon's Prayer, all of which are read by the reader at daily Vespers are sung at the Vigil. Ten hymns for Sunday rather than the typical six of a weekday are inserted and sung at Lord, I Have Cried. At Matins, the Polyeleos and Evlogitaria, not a part of Daily Matins, are inserted and sung, as is the hymn Having Beheld the Resurrection of Christ at resurrectional Vigils, and the Magnification is sung on Great Feasts and for important saints. The Great Doxology is sung, replacing the read Lesser Doxology of Daily Matins, and the Praises are sung with eight hymns inserted.

The restored man, the new Adam doesn't speak to God. He sings to God, joining with the choirs of angels in heaven. As St. Paul writes, "Be not drunk with wine...but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ..." (Ephesians 5:18-20). Singing is a liturgical expression of the feast and its joy: as St. James puts it, "Is any among you merry? Let him sing psalms" (James 5:13). Singing musically transforms the language of the service. The Lord's Day is the new song, and the singing at the Vigil is the beginning of that day and preparation for the fulfillment of it at the Liturgy. Since Vigils are celebrated only for Sundays, the twelve Great Feasts, and the feasts of certain important saints, it is reserved for particularly festive occasions, and the amount of singing at the Vigil in contrast with the daily services conveys that festivity.

Light & Darkness

The symbolism of light and darkness is one of the earliest and most central Christian ideas. Light represents the new time ushered in by Christ, the Kingdom, fulfillment, the New Testament, and, of course, Christ Himself—the Light of the world. Darkness, on the other hand, represents the old time, this world, penitence, expectation, and the Old Testament. At the Vigil service, the light is normally increased and decreased at certain times during the service to indicate whether the coming action represents the Kingdom of God or this world, the New Testament or the Old. Thus, the light in the church is always increased for a reading of the Gospel, which represents the Kingdom of God, the New Testament, and Christ Himself who is the Light and the Truth. On the other hand, nearly all the light is extinguished during the Six Psalms of Matins, which are penitential in nature.

The Bells of the Church

Theologically, the bell is the sound of time. The bells summon the faithful to services (the fifteen-minute 'early bell'). They express the triumphal joy of the Church and Her Divine services. They also announce to those not present in the Church the times of especially important moments in the services, so that those at home "for a cause worthy of a blessing" may be united in prayer with those at the Divine services.

At the Vigil, the bells are rung several different times. Besides the "early bell" common to most services, the "Good News Peal" or *blagovest*, the measured striking of one bell, is rung just as the service begins. It is followed immediately by the "Treble Peal" or *trezvon* which is the ringing of all the bells of the church simultaneously three times. The "second bell" of the Vigil occurs at the start of the Six Psalms of Matins, indicating the beginning of Matins. As the reader chants the angels' doxology before

the shepherds at Bethlehem "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, good will to men," all the bells are simultaneously rung twice, in two refrains, called the *druzvon*, announcing here the joy of the Incarnation. The "third bell" of Vigil, a *trezvon*, is rung at the during the Polyeleon ("Praise ye the name of the Lord...") and is also known as the bell before the Gospel. It expresses the joy and festivity of Christ's resurrection. The "fourth bell" of Vigil is rung at the beginning of the Magnificat ("My soul doth magnify the Lord"). This is a short "good news peal" of nine strokes of the large bell. Alternatively, another tradition has a single small bell rung thrice at the end of each refrain ("verily, Theotokos, we magnify thee"). Lastly, the *trezvon* is sounded again at the end of a festal (but not resurrectional) Vigil.

Parts of the Whole

The Vigil is a combination of certain daily services, but in a more elaborate form than they take by themselves. In order to include within the Vigil the idea that the Vigil represents all of time, the services consist of the beginning service of the liturgical day (Vespers) and the concluding service of the day (Matins). In this way, the Church sanctifies all of time.

The Vigil properly includes Vespers, Matins, and the First Hour. The reading of the Third and Sixth Hours before the Divine Liturgy may be thought of as a continuation of the Vigil. This means that all of Saturday night, the first part of the new week, is considered holy and sanctified. Indeed, in the fullest Saturday evening celebration, the Vigil would last through the night until first light, sanctifying the whole night, the time of darkness, death, sleep, and evil, and keeping watch for the return of the bridegroom and the light He brings.

The Vigil after the Vigil

After the Saturday "All-Night Vigil" ends, we depart in peace to our homes. Having broken with the cares of our week in the world, we have entered into the blessed and holy Lord's Day. Time has been sanctified through our offering of the first part of the new week to the Lord in keeping Vigil, and we have begun preparing ourselves for the sanctification to come through the Holy Eucharist. Vigil is Preparation. Liturgy is Fulfillment.

Returning home, we continue to keep a vigilant atmosphere. Entertainment, television, parties, movies, etc., while not necessarily wrong in themselves, are incompatible with the activity of preparing for the Divine Liturgy and especially Holy Communion. This is why our church discipline forbids weddings on Saturdays and socials on the eve of the Lord's Day. Likewise, we abstain from marital relations to prepare ourselves for Holy Communion.

At home, we keep a quiet evening of preparation. This is the time for reading the Scriptures and the Lives of the Saints, especially if we have not done so during the week. This is the time to call or write someone who is hurting, in need, or with whom we need to be reconciled. This is the time to examine our consciences and make the resolve to begin the "New Day," the "New Week," with the Lord in all things.

Upcoming Events 2021

21 January Feast of St. Maximus
26-27 February: Archbishop Alexander visits
6 March Forgiveness Sunday

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!