

The Confessor's Tongue for September 4, A. D. 2022

12th Sunday After Pentecost; Martyr Babylas, Prophet Moses

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.

September 8: Nativity of the Theotokos

On the eighth day of the Church's new year, She celebrates the Great Feast of the Nativity of the Theotokos. The Feast has a pre-feast of one day and a post-feast of four days.

This feast marks the birth of Mary to her parents Joachim and Anna in their old age. The Church attributes great importance to the birth of Mary, the Mother of God, because it was through her and her acceptance of God's will that our Lord became man. This Feast occurs at the beginning of the Church year because Mary's birth marks the beginning of the process that led to our salvation. Without her cooperation and freely-given assent, the eternal Word of God would not have become man. The following hymn from Vespers of the Feast expresses much of the Feast's meaning:

Today is the beginning of joy for all the world; today the winds blow that bring tidings of salvation. The barrenness of our nature hath been loosed: for the barren woman is revealed as the mother of her, who, after bearing the Maker, still remained virgin. From her He who is God by nature taketh what is alien and maketh it His own; through her Christ worketh salvation for those gone astray in the flesh, He who loveth mankind and is the Deliverer of our souls.

The Feast marks the "beginning of joy," for through the godly inheritance of many generations, the way had been prepared for the birth of the woman who would be fitting to give birth to God in the flesh. God's plan awaited the coming of the suitable vessel who could bring His Son into the world, giving Him human flesh.

Man's nature, rendered barren by the curse, unable to fulfill his potential for achieving God's likeness, enslaved to sin, death, and the devil, is ended; for Anna, long barren, gives birth to the perfect flowering and offering of the human race, her pure daughter Mary, and Mary, through her purity and willing submission to God, permits "He who is God by nature" to take "what is alien" (i.e. human nature) and to make that created human nature His own. Through her, Christ comes to work salvation for man whom He loves.

The Troparion of the Feast, which expresses the external meaning of the Feast, gives the reason for the claim that Mary's birth is "the beginning of joy for all the world" which "hath brought joy to all the inhabited earth." Through her, Christ is born who delivers us from the curse and from death and pours out upon us blessing and eternal life.

The Kontakion of the Feast, which expresses the internal, or hidden, meaning of the Feast, describes the cosmic effects of Mary's birth: Adam and Eve are set free from death and corruption, and God's people are delivered from sin. A barren woman, Anna, bears a

woman, Mary, who sustains our lives, and she does this because of whom she bore: Christ our God.

As usual, we sing or say the troparion and kontakion of the feast at meals and as part of our daily prayers from the Vigil of the Feast through the Leavetaking on September 12th.

Troparion, tone 4

Thy Nativity, O Virgin, / hath proclaimed joy to the whole universe! / The Sun of Righteousness, Christ our God, / hath shone from thee, O Theotokos! / By annulling the curse, / He bestowed a blessing. / By destroying, death He hath granted us eternal life.

Kontakion, tone 4

By thy Nativity, O most pure Virgin, / Joachim and Anna are freed from barrenness; / Adam and Eve, from the corruption of death. / And we, thy people, freed from the guilt of sin, / celebrate and sing to thee: / the barren woman giveth birth to the Theotokos, / the Nourisher of our Life.

The Sayings of St. Anthony the Great 30

Some say of St. Anthony that he was 'Spirit-borne', that is, carried along by the Holy Spirit, but he would never speak of this to men. Such men see what is happening in the world, as well as knowing what is going to happen.

Saying 30 Sayings of the Desert Fathers

Commentary: As St. Seraphim of Sarov expressed it, the goal of the Christian life is to acquire the Holy Spirit. Though all receive the Holy Spirit at Baptism, here we speak of something else: one who has submitted himself to God, who has become a clean temple where the Holy Spirit may dwell fully without being offended by one's life. Here is one who does not quench the Spirit by carelessness and inattention or grieve the Spirit by sins. We read in the Scriptures of revelations given to John when he was "in the Spirit" and of prophets and apostles being caught up by the Spirit and taken to another place. Christ says of the Spirit: "The wind bloweth where it listeth [desires], and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit." There are many things we have yet to experience in God. "Mind hath not seen nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man the things the Lord hath in store for those who love Him." Those who enter deeply into the life of God experience great and wonderful things that most of us cannot imagine—and they are reticent to speak of it. A sign of a true saint is that there is no self-promotion, no calling of attention to himself. And one normally never speaks of the treasures one has received from God lest one lose them.

We see examples of Anthony's being "Spirit-borne" in his sayings and life. In the spirit, he perceived the fall of the young monk who had worked a great miracle (Saying 14). When asked by the brethren about the meaning of a passage in Leviticus, he went out into the desert and asked God to send

Moses to explain it to him. Abba Ammonas, who had followed him, heard Moses speaking to him (Saying 26). In the spirit, he saw two brethren who were coming to see him but had run out of water in the desert. One had died, the other was near death, and he sent two monks to him with water (*Life*, ¶59). If we are tempted to think that such things were possible only long ago and no longer happen, we have only to read contemporary accounts of St. Porphyrius of Mt. Athos, who was reported to visit regularly other holy men of his day such as St. Sophronius of Essex in spirit and converse with them, without leaving his cell. *Fr. Justin Frederick*

The Commandments of Christ

“If ye love Me, keep My commandments.” (John 14:15)

Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.
Matthew 5:23-24

Our relationships with others is the proving ground that demonstrates our faith. As St. John says in his first epistle, “If anyone says he loves God but hates his brother, he is a liar.” The proof of our love for God and our faith in Him is demonstrated in how we treat others. In this commandment from the Sermon on the Mount, Christ makes being reconciled with our brother to be of greater importance than even our worship of God!

What is the gift we bring to the altar? We bring ourselves as living sacrifices, as well as our tithes and offerings, our sacrifice of praise, and our giving of thanks.

Who is our brother here? Any relative, friend, acquaintance.

What is the ‘aught’ our brother has against us? Any offense we have given in word or deed that has negatively affected our relationship. This is not the time to assess blame: he is 60% responsible, or 75% to blame, or 90% at fault; we must admit the fact that we ourselves have fallen short of love for our brother and take responsibility for our part, however small it may seem to us.

When are we to address the offense and make it right? Immediately, really. Jesus makes this point by giving reconciliation primacy over something that comes first in almost every other case: our worship of God. Normally we do not let anything come between our bringing our gift to the altar in worship, but here is something that takes precedence, so important it is. Even if we have come to church to the Divine Liturgy to worship God and to receive the Holy Mysteries, we are to put that aside for the sake of being reconciled with someone who has something against us.

Of course, normally we search our hearts and address these matters before we come to church. But if one should slip by us and we remember only then, our Christ-given priority is clear: leave our gift at the

altar, go be reconciled to our brother, and then complete the offering of our gift. To presume to offer worship to God standing in the same building with a brother with whom we will not speak or who will not speak with us out of some offense in incongruous, to say the least.

Breaks in relationships that are not quickly healed can fester and do us and others great harm. They can create relational fires that burn quickly and grow ever bigger and spreading harm to many. Friendships of long standing can end, marriages can be ruined, parishes can be divided. As disciples of Jesus Christ, Orthodox Christians, we are to put out these fires and heal these wounds quickly. *Fr. Justin Frederick*

From Elder Paisios of Sihla, Romania (+1990)

Q. “What is humility, Fr. Paisius?” a disciple once asked him.

A. “Humility is the thought of our heart that assures us that we’re more sinful than all men and unworthy of the mercy of God. Disparaging ourselves doesn’t mean that we have humility. But when someone else condemns and defames us, especially in public, and we endure it and say, ‘God commanded the brother to condemn me for my sins,’ this is true humility. Thus we should receive all things as from the hand and the will of God. When someone reproaches you, God commands him to reproach you. When someone takes something away from you, it is God who ordered him to take it, so that you’re trained as a monk. When our superior moves you from one place to the other, God is the one who moves you, to make you lose your bad habits and practices. Such is true humility. While pride is the opposite. When you trust in yourself, in your mind, in your strength; when you think of yourself as more capable than another, better than another, more handsome than another, more advanced in good deeds and more pleasing to God than another, then you are ruled by the ugly sin of pride. May God who humbled Himself for our salvation, preserve us! Let us humble ourselves, brothers, because the proud cannot be saved! Let us weep for our sins here, so that we may have joy on the other side for all eternity, for after we leave this body, no one will remember us. Let us not put our hope in men, but rather in the Lord, for man is changeable. Today he gives to you, and tomorrow he asks for it back. Today he praises you, and tomorrow he speaks ill of you. But let us put our hope in God’s mercy, and we shall never fail. May God help you with His grace to use the remainder of your life well, to advance in good deeds, most of all in humility and love, to save your souls, and to be of use to others, leading them to Christ.”

A Little Corner of Paradise, p. 181 Fr. Paisius of Sihla

Upcoming Events 2022

1 September: Church New Year
25 September: Annual Meeting

GLORY BE TO GOD FOR ALL THINGS!