

The Confessor's Tongue for November 27, A. D. 2022

24th Sunday After Pentecost; Great Martyr James of Persia

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 Commandments of Christ

“If ye love Me, keep My commandments.” (John 14:15)
Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, 'Let me pull the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye. Thou hypocrite! First cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye. Matthew 7:1-5

Nearly everyone struggles with judging others: passing judgment on their actions, motives, and character without having all the facts. Indeed, the life of another person is like an iceberg: ten percent is seen, ninety percent is hidden from us. No human can know another fully, and we certainly do not completely know even ourselves. Thus to pass a harsh judgment on another is fraught with the peril of serious error to the hurt of others and oneself.

Notice that by keeping the command not to judge, we avoid judgment ourselves. St. Nikolai of Zicha recounts the story of a monk in this vein.

This monk was lazy, careless, and lacking in his prayer life; but throughout all of his life, he did not judge anyone. While dying, he was happy. When the brethren asked how it is that with so many sins, you die happy? He replied, “I now see angels who are showing me a letter with my numerous sins. I said to them, ‘Our Lord said: “Judge not, and you will not be judged.” I have never judged anyone, and I hope in the mercy of God that He will not judge me.’ And the angels tore up the paper.” Upon hearing this, the monks were astonished and learned from it.”

What power for our salvation lies in not judging others!

When we judge others, we appropriate something that is not properly ours, or, to put it more pointedly, we commit a theft. The Scripture tells us, “The Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son” (John 5:22). By the Father's will, judgment belongs to Christ alone, and we do well to remember that so that we take not for ourselves what is His, sin against Him, and burden ourselves with matters to weighty for us to bear. A saying of Isaac the Theban in The Sayings of the Desert Fathers reveals how weighty judgment is:

One day Abba Isaac went to a monastery. He saw a brother committing a sin and he condemned him. When he returned to the desert, an angel of the Lord came and stood in front of the door of his cell, and said, ‘I will not let you enter.’ But he persisted saying, ‘What is the matter?’ and the angel replied, ‘God has sent me to ask you where you want to throw the guilty brother whom you have condemned.’ Immediately he repented and said, ‘I have sinned, forgive me.’ Then the angel said, ‘Get up, God has forgiven you. But from now on, be careful not to judge someone before God

has done so.’

When we realize that God's judgment of man is inescapable and that every man will stand before Christ's judgment seat, the need to judge, to condemn, and to demand justice now dissipates. We think, “If God sees this man's sin and does not judge him now, who am I to do so?”

All along, we have assumed we know what it means “to judge”, but perhaps the concept bears reflection. If we think of what a judge does, especially in the inquisitorial legal system of Continental Europe, we may grasp it. A judge hears testimony, questions witnesses and the accused, gathers the pertinent data, determines guilt or innocence, and passes sentence. (In the adversarial common law system such as we have, the jury determines guilt or innocence and the judge passes sentence.) Christ is such a judge and reserves the judgment for Himself. Indeed, He alone knows full the heart and circumstances of each man. He alone has all the relevant data and the ability to judge righteously without error.

Notice, however, that the command not to judge does not preclude us from addressing sin in one another—if only we have first taken the beam out of our own eye. It is hypocrisy when we presume to help a brother by calling his attention to his sin when the same sin is present and unattended to in us. But if we have dealt with the sin in us, we may then address it (with love) in someone else. If it is present in us, then our repentant attention to ourselves will be more helpful to others than many words of correction.

Thus, we see in Jude reference to the Archangel Michael disputing with the devil over the body of Moses that even the great Archangel did not speak an accusing judgment against the devil but said rather, “The Lord rebuke thee” in contrast certain evil men who speak evil about things they know not.

Speaking of Moses, Abbot Moses of Optina sets a good example in avoiding passing judgment. When a brother came to him with a complaint about another brother, he would listen carefully as the brother spoke his mind. Occasionally he would say something like, “How could he say such a thing!” or “Wait a minute—now one cannot approve of that!” Then when the brother was done, he would send him to make up with his brother. If he as abbot needed to correct, he never did it in response to complaints from others. When he judged that someone needed correction or a scolding, his rule was first to pray to God in his heart for the one needing correction. He found that when he did this, even a brother who might be supposed to be closed to correction would receive it and seek to correct himself.

Here is one more aspect of Christ's command to consider:

One day, Abba Pachomius asked Abba Macarius:

"When brothers do not submit to the rule, is it right to correct them?" Abba Macarius said to him, "Correct and judge justly those who are subject to you, but judge no one else. For truly it is written, 'Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside.'"

We are to be subject to one another and open to correction from one another, with Bishop and Priest, fathers and mothers, teachers and employers having special responsibility 'to correct and judge' among those entrusted to them. As a civil judge has only limited jurisdiction and may not try every case he might wish, so, too, in these cases is the jurisdiction to judge and correct limited. As St. Paul remarks to the Corinthians, Christians have no business, no jurisdiction for judging those outside the Church, but they must exercise judgment in matters within the Church where all are united by one Faith and a common way of life. In the case of the man who took his father's wife, Paul writes, "For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within? But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person" (I Cor. 5:12-13). All judgment and correction in such cases must be done prayerfully in humility in remembrance that the one in authority has a Master in heaven to whom he must one day give account.

We may now, perhaps, also grasp the meaning of Christ's command to judge that is rarely cited: "Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment" (John 7:24). Man in passing judgment most often judges only by the little that appears on the outside without all the facts. This prevents him from judging justly. Christians are not to judge this way, but are to judge righteous judgment. Having an inkling of how difficult judging righteously is will motivate us in most cases to refrain from judgment at all. *Fr. Justin Frederick*

The Preciousness of Time

Bishop Jeremiah the Recluse

What is the most valuable thing on earth? Time. Because it is in time that all is acquired and in time that all the works of humans are accomplished. If you have food, clothing, enormous houses, glory, and knowledge—if you have absolutely everything—and yet do not have time, you have nothing. What is worst of all for men on earth? The loss of time. For having lost our time, we can no longer acquire anything nor have anything; by wasting time we lose everything, we lose even ourselves.

Another question: what do people treasure the least? What do they randomly squander the most? It is time as well. The majority live carelessly, according to accepted tradition, from day to day, year to year, not concerning themselves with how they have wasted their days and years, how they have spent their lives. We often lament the loss of frivolous things, yet we have neither regret nor sorrow when we waste not some small change, but precious minutes of time.

That is why the Holy Apostle Paul, in warning us against the vain waste of time, commands us wisely to dispose of every minute of our lives: *See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil.* By saying 'redeeming the time,' the Apostle shows that it is with time that true good is purchased, just as all things needed for physical life are bought with money and that, likewise, the proper use of time is very similar to the use of money in expert hands. The wise householder does not waste a single penny. He properly budgets the entire sum he has, and allots a goal for every penny. He properly budgets the entire sum he has, and allots a goal for every penny. This is exactly how we should manage our time. We must properly budget it; every hour and minute should be assigned for some good goal. Each day should be spent in good deeds that benefit our neighbor and us. For it is not for idleness, nor for frivolous activity, that the Lord has assigned each minute of our life, even if it were to last a thousand years on this earth.

There is a story that has been told that can be beneficial for us to consider here:

The story holds that some time ago Satan called together the entire host of the lower realm because he wished to send another of his diabolical assistants to earth.

When they had all assembled, he asked them: "Who is willing to go to earth to assist me with the destruction of souls?"

A certain demon volunteer to go. "And what is your plan for assisting me with the destruction of souls?" asked Satan/

"I will tell them that there is no hell," replied the demon.

"No, we have tried that, it will never do," Satan said. "For it turns out that within the heart of every human there is a sense of justice; consequently, no matter how much they try to deny it, or are otherwise taught, humanity still senses that there must be a state of existence in opposition to God. They will never be convinced beyond question that there is not hell. Your plan will surely fail."

A second demon said, "I will go."

Again Satan asked, "What is your plan for assisting me with the destruction of souls?"

"I will tell humans that there is no heaven."

"No," Satan replied again. "We have tried that also, and it is no better. For as we know all too well, every human retains within himself something of the image of God his Creator; hence, while they often wish they could deny it, they will never fully be convinced that there is no heaven. No, your plan will not work."

A third demon came forward.

Satan asked this one as well, "What is your plan for assisting me with the destruction of souls?"

"I will tell them," said the demon, "that there is no hurry, that they have all the time in the world."

"Go!" shouted Satan, "for your plan will surely succeed. Every human has a sense of both heaven and

hell, but if we can keep them from considering their eternal destiny, then hell will certainly grab them before they take hold of heaven.”

Present-Day Martyrdom

Modern culture does not regard anything that involves denying oneself as virtuous. The ultimate act of self-denial is martyrdom—sacrificing one's life for another person, a cause, a belief, or for one's country. We cannot offer anyone or any cause more than our life.

The Church calendar is full of commemorations of martyrs. The Church was literally built upon the blood of the martyrs, both those of the early centuries as well as those who died for Christ under Ottoman and communist rules. Presently, there are few places where this kind of martyrdom is carried out, but our lives as Orthodox Christians are to be lives of martyrdom in other ways.

The Church recognizes [or blesses] two ways, two paths, to the Kingdom of Heaven: monasticism and marriage. Both of these are a form of martyrdom. Monastic martyrdom is reflected in the black habit which the monks and nuns wear, symbolizing being “dead” to the things of this world, forsaking the pleasures of married life and having children, and absolute obedience to the superior. Husbands and wives are to sacrifice everything for the sake of the other.

This “martyrdom” for both monastics and those who are married is reflected in the Epistle readings for the rite of monastic tonsure and also for the marriage service. While they are different readings, they are both taken from St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians.

The Epistle for monastic tonsure, taken from chapter six, refers to the monastic “arming” him/herself for battle. Interestingly, this is the same Epistle that is read on the feasts of women martyrs. A battle lies ahead. *For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places* (Eph 6:12).

The Epistle for the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony refers to the obedience of the wife and that the husband is to love his wife as Christ loved the Church and *died* for it. A martyrdom of will and a martyrdom of life! In fact, at the marriage service, the bride and groom are led around the table which holds the Holy Gospel while “O holy martyrs, who have fought the good fight and received your crowns...” is sung. This is not coincidental.

All of us are called to a life of martyrdom. This living martyrdom for both monastic and the wedded—not having possessions, obedience, giving in to the desires of a spouse, etc.—is just the beginning. The Church gives us specific days and seasons in which we deny ourselves even more through fasting, extra prostrations, forsaking forms of entertainment, longer vigils. All this is in accordance with St. Paul

who said *I treat my body hard and bring it into subjection* (I Cor. 9:27).

The soul is superior to the body, for it is immortal. In the Lord's Prayer, our Savior Jesus Christ teaches us first to seek what is eternal: “Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done” and only after that to ask from God that which is the most basic element to our earthly existence: “Give us this day our daily bread.”

We have inverted the order of things for which we yearn. Simple bread is not enough—we want the most, the best, the highest quality of food, housing, transportation, entertainment, and all our other transitory, earthly things. Where is the yearning for eternity? We do love the longer Lenten services, but how long are they compared to the time wasted in front of a computer screen daily?

Do we “treat our bodies hard” as St. Paul says? Perhaps a bit more during Great Lent, but we are called to treat our egos harder. We can “die” a thousand times a day for Christ—and He will bless us for it—if we accept the hardships, the insults, being overlooked or underappreciated, all without complaining.

The martyrs endured unimaginable tortures for the sake of Christ, and never, not in one single martyric account, do we read that they complained, whined, griped, whimpered, accused others, or felt that they suffered unjustly. No. They accepted insults and fleshly tortures in the same way that our Lord did—willingly and without complaint.

We call ourselves “Christians” which one spiritual father defines as “little Christs”. Do we behave in that way? No one wants to hear us always complaining or whining. Think about it: the people you want to be near the most are those who do not always complain, but rather are more positive. It is so easy to notice that others “gripe and complain all the time,” but we need to recognize it in ourselves.

This griping, complaining, whining, and negativity is a sin. One thing that is heard in monastic settings is older monastics saying to younger ones, “Don't gripe!” Why? Because this sinful griping shows and voices our ingratitude to God for all He has bestowed upon us. How can we imitate the martyrs; how can we imitate the Lord Himself, who suffered tortures, insults, and death, if we cannot accept the least slight against us? We complain about the weather, our jobs, our friends or coworkers, politics, drivers on the road, bills, and everything else imaginable, instead of being thankful: thankful for the warmth and sunlight and moisture; thankful for the ability to work; thankful for friends and family; thankful for freedom; thankful for having means of transportation; thankful for goods and services that enable us to live from day to day.

Yes, hardships befall all of us. Some we bring upon ourselves; some the Lord allows us to suffer to make us stronger spiritually; and some are temptations which the devil assails us with as he sees us striving toward Christ. But the devil does not hear our confessions, nor does he know our thoughts. How

then does he always manage to strike us where we are most vulnerable? How? He hears it from our own mouths when we complain. Then he not only rejoices at our ingratitude to God, but he strikes us there even more!

These struggles, these attacks from the devil, are temporal if we constantly give thanks to the Lord *for He is good, for His mercy endureth forever* (Psm 135:1). If we can change our attitudes and accept all which comes upon us—however difficult or unbearable it may seem—we may find that those trials were a path for our salvation. The martyrs knew that their bodily sufferings would end in physical death, and they endured. That physical death was the doorway to eternal life. Their love for God was so great that many of them did not even feel the tortures, for we read in the accounts of their martyrdoms that they “suffered as though not in the body.”

Love, which is the greatest of the virtues, overcomes all things. Love for Christ, longing for Him, willing to sacrifice all for Him, overcomes even physical or emotional suffering.

As we find ourselves in the holy time of the Great Fast, let us extend our lenten efforts to die daily, willingly for Christ, *without* complaining. We can answer rebukes with kind remarks or gratitude; we can compliment someone whom we normally try to avoid; when we open our mouths to complain, let us instead utter encouraging or loving remarks. St. James tells us clearly that *the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity; so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell* (James 3:6).

If we fix our eyes on Christ, we will hold our tongues. The martyrs were aware that the Lord is everywhere present. We declare it every time we say the beginning prayer “O Heavenly King...” but we need to be more aware of this great reality by giving thanks instead of complaining, by bowing our heads to hardships and insults, giving thanks to the Lord always, for this is what plants in us a pure heart. *From “The Veil”, volume 20, number 1, Great Lent 2013; a publication of the Protection of the Holy Virgin Monastery, Lake George, Colorado.*

The Innocent Infants

St. Nephon: An Ascetic Bishop (4th century)

At that time, there were a lot of deaths on earth. People were snatched unexpectedly and abandoned this life miserably. Then Gregory, a friend of the saint, asked him: “Tell me, Father, where did this evil come from? Please explain it to me.”

“As you know, the saint answered, “we commit many sins, and we embitter our God, the Lover of man, by not doing His will. That’s why He sent us this sickle and which cuts us down. For it is written that ‘disobedience breeds death.’ Yesterday I saw a dreadful man threatening the earth and saying to her: ‘I shall destroy all the immoral who walk on you, all

the drunkards, gluttons, the greedy, usurers, and especially those wallowing in sodomistic sins.’

“And he said a lot even more serious that you cannot bear to hear! He threatened to destroy us with sickle and sword, because we show no repentance nor any trace of improvement. His glorious Mother and a bald bishop ardently pleaded with Him, but He refused to put it off. ‘Are you more compassionate than I am?’ He said to them. ‘Or do you feel more pain than I? Yet you see almost all of them ignore My divine law and no one observes it!’”

“Gregory, my son,” the saint added, “that’s how the awful sickness afflicted many. For it is written: ‘Thou hast cast them down in their exaltation.’ While for the healthy virtuous it says: ‘He healeth the broken-hearted.’ For if God did not have pity on Paul, the great luminary, but permitted a ‘messenger of Satan to harass him, to keep him from being too elated,’ due to the abundance of revelations that he had, why wouldn’t He permit the devil to crush us sinners with sickness, until we learn to be humble? It’s not enough that we are sinners, we’re proud as well! Besides, the Scripture says that ‘what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God.’”

Then Gregory asked again: “But what about this, Father? I saw a great number of infants bed-ridden, tormented a long time with awful illnesses. What pride did the innocent infants have, that they ‘were cast down in their exaltation’? How can one conceive of pride in infants?”

“The children are tormented, because the iniquities of the parents have multiplied, so that in this way they may become conscious of their sins and repent.”

“Yes,” Gregory retorted, “but what about the saying that one will not receive the other’s condemnation or justification?”

“Listen, my son. While the infants may be tormented here because of their parents, in the future life they will win crowns and eternal glory. The present punishment will not harm them at all, because God’s Judgment will be according to each one’s deeds. Besides, you see that people sin and God destroys their vineyards and their fields and, if they don’t repent, He annihilates their animals. If in this way they do not come to themselves either, He afflicts their servants, if they have any. And if they still do not realize their error, He puts to death their children who weren’t to blame for anything. This is like a prodding of the people who sleep absorbed in their worldly cares. Maybe in this way they will realize that they are sinners and take refuge in repentance. Because there are many immersed in sin and, nevertheless, due to their many cares, they are not aware of their faults. They worry only about the earthly and do not look after their souls. Thus, God strikes many who are innocent (yet crowning them for the blow) in order to awaken the rest. If they do not repent in this way either, they will remain unpardoned on Judgment Day.”

Gregory marvelled at the wise answer the saint gave him. "I heard many," he said later, "speculating about this subject. However, no one was able to clarify it and give a logical interpretation."

"Truly, honorable Father," he said to the saint, "The Spirit of God spoke through your mouth."

And the saint answered him humbly: "My son, God, not wanting to sadden you for your good intention, enlightened me to say these things, not because of my own insignificance, but for the sake of your virtuous life."

"Rightly you are named 'Nephton', beloved of God," Gregory said enthusiastically. Because, like a truly sober and lofty mind, you receive the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit and offer it to those who grope in the darkness of ignorance. But, please tell me this also: how is it that the saints of the whole world have increased so much in our time? Many shine like the sun lately. And first of all Anthony, Hilary, Symeon, Paul the Simple, and many others, whom the Lord knows and His eye rests on them. How did they become so great?"

"My son, the prophets of the Lord God will not disappear till the end of the world, just as the workers of Satan will never be absent. In the last days, however, all that work truly for Christ will hide from the people wisely. And if they don't perform signs and wonders like today, nevertheless, they will always walk on the narrow path in all humility. In the Kingdom of God they will be greater than the wonderworkers, because in their time there will not be anyone performing miracles, to incite them to spiritual struggles, since those who will occupy priestly offices throughout the world will be completely unsuitable and will have no trace of virtue. But the leaders of the monks will also be the same. They will have surrendered to gluttony and vainglory; consequently, they will constitute more of a stumbling block than a model. That's why virtue will be neglected. Avarice will reign everywhere. But woe to the monks who will prosper with gold, because they will be disgraced in the eyes of the Lord and will not see the face of God.

"Monastics and laymen will lend money with interest. They will not prefer that God multiply it for them through alms to the poor. For this reason also, if they do not withdraw from this greed, they will sink to the abyss. Then, as I said before, the majority will be misled by ignorance into the chaos of the broad and wide road of perdition. You see, my son, like the chatterbox that I am, I told you a lot of things. But, forgive me, the miserable sinner, and do not cease to pray for me, the profane, who wasted both my youth and old age in a multitude of sins."

Gregory, however, marvelling at the humility of the elder, fell at his feet asking himself for his prayers. For he, too, was a pious man, merciful, with a lot of love, wise, and especially monastic minded. He loved the elder very much and was excessively devoted to him. He imitated him in silence and meekness, in abstinence, sleeping on the ground, in hospitality and humility, and generally in everything. Struggling thus

sensibly, he advanced in truth and in the grace of Christ "from glory to glory."

Singing at St. Maximus Deacon Anthony Stokes

Note: Some of the points in this article are specific to St. Maximus Parish, while some are more broadly applied to congregational singing in general.

There are many different traditions in Orthodox Church music with regards to who sings during the services. They can be broadly summed up in three ways:

1. A trained choir or group of chanters does all of the singing, sometimes almost giving a concert feel to the services. This is a typical style of Greek parishes.
2. Everyone in the church sings everything. There may not even be a choir director, just a chanter that begins the pieces. This is the traditional method found in Old Believer parishes and somewhat in the Carpatho-Russian tradition.
3. A Mixture of 1 & 2. A choir or chanter leads the congregation in much of the singing, while there may be parts of the service only sung by the choir or chanter.

In the Orthodox Church in America, and somewhat in the Antiochian Archdiocese in America, you will find that most churches fall into category 3. That includes us here at St. Maximus. Our choir is there to lead the congregation in singing, not to perform a concert or to be the only people singing. Notice that I underlined the word lead. The choir should do the leading, not the congregation. We will see why throughout this article.

In addition to falling into category 3, we are also a multi-cultural Church when it comes to our music. Even though the OCA has Russian roots, we use music from the Byzantine, modern Greek, Serbian, Romanian, Georgian, Arab traditions, as well as newly written music by Orthodox American composers. If there is ever a specific piece of music or type that you would like us to sing, please see me.

When starting to talk about Orthodox Liturgical Music, the most important thing to learn is this: *The text is the most aspect of the musical setting.* That is worth repeating: *The text is the most aspect of the musical setting.* The text should be understandable by everyone. What does this mean for the congregation member that likes to sing along with the choir? Well, a few items should be taken into account, and they all impact whether the text is understood or not.

1. If you do not know the words to a hymn, or do not have them in front of you, it is best to not try and make them up or sing notes without words. It is more important for the words to be understood than for extra parts to be sung. There are books available that contain the texts to the non-changing parts of our services. If you like to sing during the services please use one of the books to follow along. If the text is not in the books or in a supplement that is available, then it is best to not sing at all during that part of the service. This is especially true if you know the piece from another parish. We often use different translations and settings of well-known pieces (this also applies to no. 2 below). In fact, the Church Canons dictate that those leading the services (clergy, readers, choir) should never do so by memory, but must always use the service book. Of course there are exceptions to this, but the Church Fathers must have thought that this was an important topic.

2. If you do not know the actual harmony parts to the hymns, it is better to sing melody. Actually, anyone that has not actually seen the music or spent enough time

memorizing the actual harmony parts should always sing melody. In the churches that rely only on congregational singing, everyone sings the melody. The reason that this is important is that it can negatively impact what the choir is singing and often it can throw the choir off completely if congregation members are not singing the correct harmonies or words (see No. 1).

3. Probably one of the most important aspects of singing in a church with a choir is what I earlier mentioned about the *choir leading the singing*. That means if you cannot hear the choir then you are probably singing too loud. This is a common occurrence here at St. Maximus. It is great to be enthusiastic about our worship, but just as everything else in the church (iconography, vestments, etc.), our singing should be as beautiful as we can make it. This is why we have trained singers in the first place: to lead the singing in as beautiful a manner as possible.

It may seem that all of these guidelines are designed for the benefit of the choir, and, in a way, they are, but they have a more general theme of making our worship as beautiful as possible. At the same time, it is important to help the choir stay on focus and undistracted so that they can lead the singing as best they can. Besides observing the points above, other ways that congregation members can help the choir is to look over our current Choir Guidelines. There are currently some nineteen people blessed to be members of the St. Maximus Choir. That means that no more than nineteen people should be in the choir area and reading from the choir stands. There are occasions where people from the congregation, with the best of intentions, make their way into the choir area whether it be to read or sing along or just to find a place to sit. This can be distracting to the choir members, especially with the singing aspect. Our choir is balanced with a certain number of voices and it can make it difficult to disturb that balance by adding voices that are not regularly part of the mix. This is one reason that we generally do not allow children in the choir. Actually, anyone that cannot read music is generally discouraged from joining the choir. To expand on this issue, I will close with some of the guidelines for becoming a member of the choir here at St. Maximus. Please feel free to discuss any questions about singing in general, or about the choir at our church with me or with Fr. Justin. Our main purpose is not to keep anyone from singing, but to make sure that we offer the most beautiful singing that we can in our services to God.

Qualifications for Choir Members at St. Maximus the Confessor Orthodox Church

- 1) You need permission from the choir director and the blessing of the priest to join the choir.
- 2) Choir members should be Orthodox Christians in good standing, meaning someone who makes regular confessions and communes regularly. The priest reserves the right to bless committed catechumens to sing on a case by case basis.
- 3) You must be able to read music. This includes any children. Generally, children that are younger than Middle School Age (11-12) should not sing in the adult choir. A children's choir could be formed if there is enough interest.
- 4) You should be able to sing a voice part other than the melody (except sopranos) by yourself, without the other parts.
- 5) You should know at least your part to all 8 tones (all parts would be preferred).
- 6) You must attend at least 4 choir rehearsals before joining the choir at a service (at the discretion of the director).

7) You must regularly attend choir rehearsals. The Choir is a ministry of the Church, just as reading, serving in the altar, or any other liturgical service. This requires a commitment on the part of the choir members, that we may offer our best to the Lord to His glory.

On Sufferings and Temptations *St. Ignaty Brianchaninov; St. Isaac of Syria*

The way of God from the beginning of time and from the creation of the human race has been the way of the cross and death. How did you get your idea that everything is just the opposite? You must realize that you are outside the way of God, that you are far from Him, that you do not wish to walk in the steps of the Saints, but want to make some special way for yourself and travel by it without sufferings. The way of God is a daily cross. No one has climbed to heaven by living a life of pleasure.

The innocent and all-holy Lord...has provided suffering as the way of salvation for all His followers... At the same time, He infuses into the sufferings of His servants from His own sufferings unspeakable spiritual consolation in proof positive of the truth of salvation, and of the truth of the way of suffering which leads to salvation. The innocent and all-holy Lord spent His earthly life in sufferings; still more should the guilty suffer, fully aware that they deserve to suffer. They should rejoice that by means of brief sufferings they are delivered from eternal sufferings and join the ranks of the followers and friends of the God-man. He who refuses sufferings and does not consider that he deserves them, does not acknowledge his fall and perdition. He who has used his earthly life merely for earthly success, foolishly mistakes this briefest spell for eternity and regards eternity as non-existent—and he prepares himself for eternal misery! *From The Arena*

Confessions During the Fast

All faithful Orthodox Christians must make a Confession during the Nativity Fast. All of us who commune regularly should be confessing once a month in any case, including children and teenagers. Normally children begin confessing about age seven.

Open confession (anyone can show up without notice) is held after Vespers on Wednesday and after Vigil on Saturday and after some Matins during the week. Confession is available after Vespers Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday, but your priest asks that you let him know ahead of time that you intend to come, if possible. You may still show up without notice and take a chance that the spaces are full. Some spaces for confession are available Saturday afternoon before Vigil by appointment. Other arrangements may be made during the week as necessary.

Upcoming Events 2022

15 November – 24 December Nativity Fast
6 December St. Nicholas
15 December, Thursday, 6:30 p.m. Holy Unction (*changed*)

GLORY BE TO GOD FOR ALL THINGS!