

The Confessor's Tongue for May 28, 2023

7th Sunday of Pascha; Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council

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.

Pentecost Sunday

Next Sunday, we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit and the revelation of the Holy Trinity at Pentecost. One of the Twelve Great Feasts, we do well to keep the feast by attending the cycle of services celebrating it, Vigil Saturday night and the Hours and Divine Liturgy Sunday morning. The Afterfeast lasts through the following Saturday.

This year, due to the Peterson-Haugh wedding in the afternoon, we shall pray the kneeling prayers of Pentecost right after Liturgy. It is with these prayers that we resume prostrations in church; it is at Pentecost we resume saying the Prayer to the Holy Spirit, "O Heavenly King".

Building Christian Community

The word "community" is much used and abused in our time. You may decide for yourself whether such usages as "the business community", "the homosexual community", "the gamer community", "the hunting community", "the educational community", "the online community", etc., are valid, but I contend they abuse language and trivialize the meaning of the word. They represent a phenomenon I have often observed: the less the real thing is present, the more it is talked about.

It was this way at Princeton Seminary in the 1990s where there was much talk about "community". That fact was, that although all there were ostensibly Christians of one sort or another gathered for theological study, there was very little that all shared in common, particularly in the essential matters of faith and way of life. All the talk of community rang hollow and failed to compensate for the missing essence.

Fundamentally, a community is "a social group of any size whose members reside in a specific locality, share government, and often have a common cultural and historical heritage." The groups above, to the degree that they are groups at all, are ostensibly united by a common interest and perhaps some common experiences. But there is no common life together in a locality, no shared government or way of life, and often no personal knowledge of one another.

The Christian Church from the beginning was an authentic community of those called out of the world to follow Jesus Christ as Master and Lord. While the Church submitted to the local authorities, it largely governed its own life, its members urged to settle their disputes in the Church rather than to go to secular law. It was Christ's commands that guided them in a common way of life. They were united by sharing the one Faith in the One Risen Lord, having received the one Baptism and partaking regularly of the one loaf and one cup. They were urged to love one another as Christ had loved them, and this love was not

a mere feeling but a willingness and commitment to take care of one another.

True community has largely been destroyed in the modern Western world for many reasons. Modernity has ruthlessly waged war against traditional ways of life founded in communities, for real community provides a point of resistance against those who would centralize authority and rule. People are no longer rooted in one place where they know others and are known. They rather float rootlessly free to respond to the demands of the economy. We leave family, friends, and place of birth to pursue worldly dreams, cutting ourselves off from natural community.

If we are not to be lost in the crowd as atomistic individuals with no meaningful connections to anyone and nothing to unite us other than living under a common national government, we need community. And if we are to survive whatever hard times may be ahead of us, it is through community and God's mercy that it will be accomplished. And if society as we know it collapses, it will be through strong, local communities that it will be rebuilt.

To be the member of the Church is to be the member of a local community, where, united by our common faith and worship, we learn to love one another, even when we do not find one another particularly lovable. (We must always remember that we ourselves are not always particularly lovable.) Such community does not happen automatically. It takes an effort on the part of each. We choose to come to church regularly, and not just Sunday morning. We partake regularly of Confession and Holy Communion. We embrace the path of Christ's commandments and seek to live by them in all our relations. We make the effort to get to know others at coffee hour, picnics, classes as well as outside formal parish gatherings. We gather in one another's homes. We help with one another's projects. We pray for one another. We look out for one another. If someone is absent, we care enough to inquire. If someone is ill or in need, we make it our business to render whatever aid we can. If we have differences with someone, we humble ourselves and in love seek to be reconciled rather than running away or shunning him. And if necessary, in times of turmoil or violence, we band together to protect each other.

Community of this sort is truly community, and such a community will sustain its members through all manner of hardships. Consider the existence of Christian communities in the Middle East that survived for 1400 years under alien Muslim rule. Without community, though, we are weak in the face of a world which would conform us to its own image—and cares not a whit for us as persons. *Fr. Justin Frederick*

The Virtues 3: Hope

Fr. Thomas Hopko

The virtue of hope goes together with the power of faith. The patriarch Abraham “in hope believed against hope that he should be the father of many nations” (Rom 4.18). And hope, like faith, is in that which is not seen.

For in this hope we are saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience (Rom 8.24–25).

Hope is the assurance of the good outcome of our lives lived by faith in God. Hope is the power of certain conviction that the life built on faith will produce its fruits. Hope is the confidence that, despite all darkness and sin, the light of the loving forgiveness of God is upon us to do with us and for us what we ourselves cannot do.

Our soul waits for the Lord; He is our help and shield. Yea our hearts are glad in Him, because we trust in His holy name. Let Thy steadfast love, O Lord be upon us, even as we hope in Thee (Ps 33.20–22).

The opposite of hope is despondency and despair. According to the spiritual tradition of the Church, the state of despondency and despair is the most grievous and horrible condition that a person can be in. It is the worst and most harmful of the sinful states possible for the soul.

The loss of hope is the worst possible state because without hope, nothing else is possible; certainly not faith. If a person is faithless, he can be chastised and convinced. If a person is proud, he can be humbled; impure, he can be cleansed; weak, he can be strengthened; wicked, he can be made righteous. But if a person is despondent and despairing, the very condition of his sickness is such that his heart and soul are dead and unresponsive to the grace of God and the support of his brothers.

... the force of despondence ... overwhelms him and oppresses his soul; and this is a taste of hell because it produces a thousand temptations: confusion, irritation, protesting and bewailing one's lot, wrong thoughts, wandering from place to place, and so on (Saint Isaac of Syria, 6th c., Directions on Spiritual Training).

The demon of despondency, which is called the “noon-day demon” (Ps 91.6) is more grievous than all others. ... It arouses in him vexation against the place and mode of life itself and his work, adding that there is no more love among the brethren, and no one to comfort him. ... Then it provokes in him a longing for other places ... (Evagrius of Pontus, 4th c., To Anatolius: On Eight Thoughts).

The only remedy for despair is humility and patience, the steadfast holding to the life of faith, even without conviction or feeling. It is the simplification of life by going through each day, one day at a time, with the continual observances, however external, of scriptural reading, liturgical worship, fasting, prayer, and work. In the advice of Saint Benedict (6th c), it is to remain stable in one's place, and to “do what you are doing” as well as you

can, with all possible attention. In the advice of Saint Seraphim (19th c.), it is to visit with spiritual friends, with those who are hopeful, merciful, joyful and strong. It is to stand fast to the end while passing through aridity and darkness, until the light of blessed hope and comfort are found. There is no other way, and “those who find it are few” (Mt 7.14). But when one “fights and conquers against despondency and despair, this struggle is followed by a peaceful state and the soul becomes filled with ineffable joy” (Evagrius, *To Anatolius: On Eight Thoughts*).

*When we are attacked by the demon of despondency—the most grievous of all, but who more than all makes the soul experienced—let us divide our soul in two, and making one part the comforter and the other part the comforted, let us sow seeds of good hope in ourselves, singing with David the psalmist: “Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I will again praise Him, my help and my God” (Ps 42.5; Evagrius of Pontus, *To Anatolius: Texts on Active Life*).*

Sometimes people think that a certain “lack of hope” is a Christian virtue. They think that by proclaiming that “all is lost” they please God by their humility and sorrow over sins, their own and those of the world. They think that the more they concentrate on the evils of men, the more they exalt the strength of the wicked, the more they sigh and say, “There is no help for us in God!”, the more righteous and pious they become. But this is all wrong. It has nothing to do with the patient suffering at the hands of the wicked, and the patient struggle against the powers of evil that the righteous must endure, being absolutely certain of their ultimate and total victory in God, the source of their strength and their hope.

It is no virtue to feel weak and helpless in the presence of the wicked. It is no virtue to consider oneself totally at the mercy of evil and sin. It is a virtue rather to be always “rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation” knowing and believing that the final victory is God's (Rom 12.12).

From Revelation: The Seven Angels

Fr. Athanasios Mitilinaios

The Church of Rome was glorious. She produced many saints and illumined the celestial mansions with millions of martyrs. The epistle of St. Paul to the Romans—called by many the gospel according to St. Paul—is his best epistle. Unfortunately and most tragically, however, Rome betrayed her great past. She betrayed her mission. She forgot the apostolic constitutions and she once again began to follow in the footsteps of the ancient Rome of idolatry. Her downfall progressed after her possession by the Franks and Charlemagne, and today, she portrays a typical secularized church, a church following the whims of the world. The purpose of the church is to sanctify the world, to have the world enter the life of the Church, not to have the Church espouse the life of the world. p. 206

Upcoming Events 2023

29 May Memorial Day Picnic
4 June Holy Pentecost
4 June Haugh-Peterson Wedding, 3:00 p.m.

GLORY BE TO GOD FOR ALL THINGS!