

The Confessor's Tongue for June 4, 2023

8th Sunday of Pascha; Holy Pentecost

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.

Prayer to the All-Holy Spirit

O Holy Spirit, Who fillest the whole universe with Thyself and givest life unto all, and Who withdrawest from defiled men, I humbly entreat Thee: D disdain not the impurity of my soul, but come and make thine abode within me, and cleanse me of all the defilement of sin; that with Thy help I may live out the remaining time of my life in repentance and the doing of good works, and thus may glorify Thee with the Father and the Son unto the ages of ages. Amen. *From the Akathist to the Holy Spirit*

Holy Pentecost—Holy Trinity

On the eight Sunday of Pascha, we celebrate the Feast of Pentecost, one of the Twelve Great Feasts, on which we celebrate the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Holy Apostles, as recorded in the second chapter of Acts. By this the Church is established and empowered to proclaim the Gospel to the world.

At Pentecost, each Christian is given the opportunity to renew his spiritual life by seeking a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit in his life. Among the Church Fathers, St. Symeon the New Theologian, who lived in the 11th century, was a zealous herald of new birth by the grace of the Spirit. According to St. Symeon, each Christian receives the Spirit like a divine fire at baptism but often covers up this inner spiritual treasure with the darkness of many sins by the time he is an adult. A Christian must turn to Christ, indeed must run to Him, for a new sealing of the Spirit through repentance, forgiveness, and faithful observance of God's commandments. A Christian can again experience consciously the new life of the Apostles. Such a Christian is "born from above," being granted the Holy Spirit anew and being baptized again by the Spirit as a child of God. St. Symeon writes, "Just as it is impossible for one to be saved who has not been baptized with water and the Spirit, neither is it for him who has sinned after baptism, unless he be baptized from on high and be born again. This the Savior confirmed when He said to Nicodemus, "Unless one is born from on high, he cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven" (*Catechetical Discourse 32.3*). Indeed, we need frequent renewals of the presence of the Spirit in our lives.

The week following Pentecost is a fast-free week. We resume kneeling and doing prostrations and saying the prayer "O Heavenly King." Pentecost is celebrated for seven days through its Leavetaking on Saturday. During the feast, we say or sing the troparion before meals and during our daily prayers.

Pentecost, Troparion, tone 8

Blessed art **Thou, O Christ** our God, / who hast revealed the fishermen as most wise / by sending down upon them the Holy Spirit; / through them Thou didst draw the world into Thy net. / O Lover of Man, glory to Thee!

Pentecost, Kontakion, tone 8

When the Most High came down and confused the tongues, He divided the nations; / but when He distributed tongues of fire, He called all to unity. / Therefore, with one voice, we glorify the All-holy Spirit!

The Icon of Pentecost

The Icon of Pentecost presents a cosmic image. The Apostles are seated in an arch, a proxy for the entire Church itself. The icon of Pentecost is one of those icons which though representing an event in the Bible, represents it in a manner that goes beyond the event and becomes a permanent image of how the Church exists in the world. The hint that this is the case is of course how, just as in the image of the Ascension, St. Paul is represented though he was not there in the Biblical account. St. Peter and St. Paul are there as they are in so many icons, as the pillars of the Church, the left and the right hand of Christ. Above the Apostles is the holy fire which descends on them; this fire separates into twelve, just as the Apostles themselves each acquired tongues of fire, tongues which speak in a manner that can reveal Christ through multiplicity and be heard by all men.

And then down in the bottom of the icon is the door which leads outside the upper room, the outer darkness in which the allegorical figure of the Cosmos holds the scrolls, the fully manifest form of the twelve traditions issued by the one fire, the one Church whose unity is preserved in its multiplicity. Of course the door of Pentecost is the door of the Church itself considered at all the levels of interpretation in which we can understand that statement, it the cosmic body of Christ, but it is also the actual church building, is the road that leads out of the nave into the chaotic outside. *Jonathan Pageau, Orthodox Arts Journal, 9/2017*

On Keeping the Lord's Day

St. John Chrysostom

I hear many say, "While we are here [at church], and enjoying the privilege of hearing, we are awed, but when we are gone out, we become altered men again, and the flame of zeal is quenched." What then may be done, that this may not come to pass? Let us observe whence it arises. Whence then doth so great a change in us arise?

From the unbecoming employment of our time, and from the company of evil men. For we ought not as soon as we retire from the Communion, to plunge into business unsuited to the Communion, but as soon as ever we get home, to take our Bible into our hands, and call our wife and children to join us in putting together what we have heard, and then, not before, engage in the business of life.

For if after the bath you would not choose to hurry into the market place, lest by the business in the market you should destroy the refreshment

thence derived; much more ought we to act on this principle after the Communion. But as it is, we do the contrary, and in this very way throw away all. For while the profitable effect of what hath been said to us is not yet well fixed, the great force of the things that press upon us from without sweeps all entirely away.

That this then may not be the case, when you retire from the Communion, you must account nothing more necessary than that you should put together the things that have been said to you. Yes, for it were the utmost folly for us, while we give up five and even six days to the business of this life, not to bestow on things spiritual so much as one day, or rather not so much as a small part of one day. See ye not our own children, that whatever lessons are given them, those they study throughout the whole day? This then let us do likewise, since otherwise we shall derive no profit from coming here, drawing water daily into a vessel with holes, and not bestowing on the retaining of what we have heard even so much earnestness as we plainly show with respect to gold and silver. For any one who has received a few pence both puts them into a bag and sets a seal thereon; but we, having given us oracles more precious than either gold or costly stones, and receiving the treasures of the Spirit, do not put them away in the storehouses of our soul, but thoughtlessly and at random suffer them to escape from our minds. Who then will pity us after all this, plotting against our own interests, and casting ourselves into so deep poverty?

Therefore, that this may not be so, let us write it down an unalterable law for ourselves, for our wives, and for our children, to give up this one day of the week entire to hearing, and to the recollection of the things we have heard. For thus with greater aptness for learning shall we approach what is next to be said; and to us the labor will be less, and to you the profit greater, when, bearing in memory what hath been lately spoken, ye hearken accordingly to what comes afterwards. For no little doth this also contribute towards the understanding of what is said, when ye know accurately the connection of the thoughts, which we are busy in weaving together for you. For since it is not possible to set down all in one day, you must by continued remembrance make the things laid before you on many days into a kind of chain, and so wrap it about your soul: that the body of the Scriptures may appear entire. Therefore let us not either to-day go on to the subjects set before us, without first recalling what was lately said to our memory. *Homily 5, Commentary on Matthew*

The Virtues 4: Knowledge

Fr. Thomas Hopko

Faith and hope go together with knowledge. They are built on knowledge and lead to knowledge. For what is “not seen” is believed and hoped on the basis of what is seen. And the understanding of what is seen depends on belief and hope in what is not seen. One’s belief and hope in the ability to know, to trust

his senses, his mind and the revelation of his God, are the foundations of all knowledge.

Man was created to know God; not only to believe in Him and to hope in Him, but to know Him and so to love Him and to serve Him. Knowledge of God is the aim and goal of man’s life, the purpose of his creation by God.

And this is eternal life, that they know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent.

O Righteous Father, the world has not known Thee; and these know that Thou hast sent Me. I made known to them Thy name, and I will make it known, that the love with which Thou has loved Me may be in them, and I in them (Jn 17.3, 25–26).

Faith, given as a gift by God, results in the knowledge of God. The Lord desires that man would “know the truth,” and so become free from all blindness, ignorance and sin (Jn 8.32). This is the central teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ, of the law and the prophets of the Old Testament and of the apostles and teachers of the Church.

That men might know wisdom and instruction, understand words of insight, receive instruction in wise dealing, righteousness, justice and equity, that prudence may be given to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the youth . . . The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction (Prov 1.1–7).

In all of his letters, the Apostle Paul prays that the faithful would “be filled with the knowledge of Christ’s will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, to lead a life worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to Him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God” since “God our Savior desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (Col 1.8–9, 1 Tim 2.4).

In all of his writings, the apostle insists as well that the faithful have “all the riches of knowledge of God’s mystery of Christ in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge,” and that the “spiritual man” has “the mind of the Lord . . . the mind of Christ” (Col 2.2–3; 1 Cor 2.6–16).

The Apostle John gives the same doctrine as Saint Paul when he claims that the “Spirit of Truth” whom Christ has given in order to “teach you all things” and to “guide you into all the truth” (Jn 14.26, 16.13), is truly living in the midst of the believers.

. . . you have been anointed by the Holy One and you know all things. I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and know that no lie is of the truth. Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ?

I write this to you about those who would deceive you; but the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need that any one should teach you; as His anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie, just as it has taught you, abide in Him (1 Jn 2.20–29).

This teaching of Saint John is in fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah, quoted directly by Jesus Himself, that in the Messianic Age of the new covenant

church, "... they shall all be taught by God" (Jn 6.45; Is 54.13).

In the spiritual tradition of the Church, the knowledge of God and His truth is the main goal of life. "For what meaning would there be for creation," asks Saint Athanasius the Great (4th c.), "if man should not know God?" (*On the Incarnation*, Book 1). Knowledge of God, indeed knowledge itself, according to the scriptures and the saints, is not mere "knowledge about," the abstract knowledge of information and rational propositions, devoid of living experience. Knowledge is primarily and essentially an existential union, a cleaving together of the spiritual man and the object of his knowledge. Saint Gregory of Nyssa (4th c.) has said, "The Lord does not say that it is blessed to know something about God, but rather to possess God in oneself." (*On the Beatitudes*, Sermon 6) The possession of God within the mind and heart is the true knowledge of God. It comes through faith and repentance in the life of the Church. It comes essentially through the gracious purification from all sinful passions. Saint John of the Ladder (6th c.) has written:

The growth of fear is the beginning of love, but a complete state of purity is the foundation of all divine knowledge.

He who has perfectly united his feelings to God is mystically led by Him to an understanding of His words. But without union one cannot speak about God.

The engrafted Word (Jas 1.21) perfects purity . . . and the disciple of divine knowledge is illumined. . . . but he who has not come to know God merely speculates.

Purity makes a theologian [i.e. one who knows God], who of himself grasps the teachings of the Trinity (The Ladder of Divine Ascent, Step 30).

The listing of knowledge among the virtues of man is critically important because in the present time there exists the widespread conviction that man is condemned to ignorance in the areas of religion and spiritual life. While most people would grant that knowledge is possible in the realm of natural sciences, they would deny genuine knowledge in the realm of the Spirit. They would say that one can know the things of this physical world but cannot know the mysteries of God, and God Himself. Thus religion becomes a matter of personal choice and subjective taste, devoid of any pretension to objective truth and genuine knowledge. As we have seen, this is precisely not the teaching of the Scriptures and the saints.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth. For what can be known of God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world His invisible nature, namely His eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse; for although they knew God they did not honor Him as God or give thanks to Him, but they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and

exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man or birds or animals or reptiles. Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed for ever! Amen (Rom 1.18-25).

Elder Vitaly of Tbilisi, Georgia (+1992)

Elder Vitaly was a priest monk in the Soviet Union who suffered persecution, was something of a fool for Christ, was given the gift of clairvoyance, and served as spiritual father to many. Bishop Gerasim interviewed him sometime before his repose. A book on his life, Earthly Angel, Heavenly Man, has been published by the St. Herman Brotherhood. Here is a selection of his edifying instruction.

On Patience

"It's better to endure pains and be purified from sin that to be healthy and be doomed to fiery torments."

"If grace is not present, then a person cannot endure anything by himself."

One of the elder's spiritual daughters recalls: "I lived with an atheist husband, a blasphemer, for twenty-three years. Many times I thought about divorcing him, but Fr. Vitaly would not bless it. He would say, 'A crown is prepared for one who endures his cross until the end, and the reward from God in the heavens is such that a person cannot even imagine it.'"

On Not Condemning Anyone

One of Fr. Vitaly's spiritual daughter recalled, "Once Batushka said while doing something, as though incidentally, 'It would be better for you to overeat than to condemn someone.'"

One of his spiritual children when to Sochi (Georgia). In the church, she was scandalized that the candles on the altar were not burning and that they shortened the service, and because of this she did not commune. To this Batushka replied, "You need to commune, and you yourself need to burn like a candle. People can't find peace anywhere, because they've gotten used to condemning. Everyone should condemn himself. All the sins overcome us because we're proud."

"When you remember wrongs, when evil makes its nest without you, then say to yourself, 'God is Love, but I don't love, and that means God will reject me!' And with this thought, you will drive out remembrance of wrongs."

Don't condemn, but love, accuse yourself, and consider everyone to be angels, and you will have tears."

Batushka taught that when we are in company with others, we should continually think, "They're all like angels, but I'm worse than everyone."

St. Basil On the Holy Spirit

Now the Spirit is not brought into intimate association with the soul by local approximation. How indeed could there be a corporeal approach to the incorporeal? This association results from the withdrawal of the passions which, coming afterwards gradually on the soul from its friendship to the flesh, have alienated it from its close relationship with God. Only then after a man is purified from the shame whose stain he took through his wickedness, and has come back again to his natural beauty, and as it were cleaning the Royal Image and restoring its ancient form, only thus is it possible for him to draw near to the Paraclete. And He, like the sun, will by the aid of thy purified eye show thee in Himself the image of the invisible, and in the blessed spectacle of the image though shalt behold the unspeakable beauty of the archetype. Through his aid, hearts are lifted up, the weak are held by the hand, and they who are advancing are brought to perfection. Shining upon those that are cleansed from every spot, He makes them spiritual by fellowship with Himself. Just as when a sunbeam falls on bright and transparent bodies, they themselves become brilliant too, and shed forth a fresh brightness from themselves, so souls where in the Spirit dwells, illuminated by the Spirit, themselves become spiritual, and send forth their grace to others. Hence comes foreknowledge of the future, understanding of mysteries, apprehension of what is hidden, distribution of good gifts, the heavenly citizenship, a place in the chorus of angels, joy without end, abiding in God, the being made like to God, and, highest of all, the being made God. Such, then, to instance a few out of many, are the conceptions concerning the Holy Spirit, which we have been taught to hold concerning his greatness, His dignity, and His operations, by the oracles of the Spirit themselves." *St. Basil, On the Holy Spirit* ¶23

On the Holy Spirit, the Comforter Homily by St. Nicholas of Zicha (+1956)

But the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He shall teach you all things and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." John 14:26

What practical meaning have these words other than that we must pray every day that the Holy Spirit be sent to us, just as we pray every day for our daily bread? God is willing every day to send us the Holy Spirit, but He seeks from us that we pray every day for Him to be sent to us. For as, with regard to bread, there is sometimes abundance and sometimes dearth, so it is with regard to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit comes to us and leaves us according to our good works and our patience. Therefore, the Church has ordained that the first morning service in church begin with the invocation of the Holy Spirit: "O heavenly King, the Comforter, the Spirit of Truth--come!", and after that comes the prayer: "give us this day our daily bread." Why? Because, without the Holy Spirit, we cannot even make use of bread in the way that we must for our salvation.

"He shall teach you all things." That is: every day and every night, according to the situation in which

you find yourself, He will instruct you, advise you, and direct you in what you must think, say, and do. Therefore, ask God only for the Holy Spirit, and He will Himself bring all that you need in any given moment. When He has descended upon you, you will know all things and be capable of all that is needful.

"And bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." That is: do not fear that you will forget My teaching and My words. The Holy Spirit knows all that I know; so, when He is present with you, then all My teaching will be present in you together with Him.

O Lord, the Holy Spirit, be pleased to descend upon us, not according to our merit but according to the merit of the Lord Jesus and according to Thine endless goodness. To Thee be glory and praise!

From the Akathist to the All-Holy Spirit

Kontakion II

In the form of tongues of fire, amid light and a rushing, storming wind, the Holy Spirit descended upon the apostles. Wherefore, enveloped in His flames, the fishermen summoned the whole world to the Church of Christ; and, joyfully enduring tribulations on dry land and on the waters, they were undaunted by cruel depths. And all throughout the world went forth the proclamation of their divinely beauteous hymn: Alleluia!

Ikos II

O Holy Spirit of God, Thou Cup giving rise to dew and emitting fire, poured forth upon the apostles in the upper chamber on Sion: we hymn Thee, we bless Thee, and we give thanks unto Thee.

Come, Thou Who dost sanctify and preserve the Church;

Come and grant one heart and one soul to Thy faithful!

Come and enflame our cold and barren piety;
Come and dispel the darkness of ungodliness and impiety which doth thicken over all the earth!

Come and lead us to the path of correction of life;

Come and guide us to every truth!

Come, unapproachable Wisdom, and by thy judgments which Thou knowest save us;

Come Thou, O Comforter, Holy Spirit, and make Thine abode within us!

Upcoming Events 2023

4 June Haugh-Peterson Wedding, 3:00 p.m.
10 June Baptisms, 8:00 a.m. Sims, Van Der Schans

GLORY BE TO GOD FOR ALL THINGS!