

# The Confessor's Tongue for July 30, 2023

8<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost: Apostles of 70 Silas, Silvanus, Crescens, Epenetus, Andronicus  
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 Dormition Fast at St. Maximus**

The Dormition Fast offers an abundance of spiritual good packed into two weeks. Take advantage of this rich, concentrated liturgical season to worship, to confess, and to commune.

In some monasteries, the fasts are observed with a doubling of the cell rule, which would correspond to our prayer rule at home. If someone normally does a dozen prostrations, he would do twenty-four; if he normally says three ropes of the Jesus Prayer, he would say six; if he normally reads one kathisma from the Psalter a day, he would read two. This is a simple way to increase prayer during the Fast. Of course, if one is to do this, one must lay aside some of one's usual activities to make time, which is why Orthodox Christians cut back or cut out entertainments and unnecessary secular events during a fast. We are not obligated to double our rule, but we should make serious effort to increase it in both quantity and quality over the two weeks of the fast.

The essence of prayer, of course, cannot be reduced to quantity. Prayer should have quality, which means we pray with attention, with feeling, with faith, with love. Yet to achieve quality in prayer, quantity is needed. A person will master no skill or body of knowledge without a significant quantity of time spent occupied with it. "Practice makes perfect," it is said. So with prayer, our regular practice of it with attention and feeling will move us towards mastery.

The fast comes at a good time, right before the start of the new school year. May God grant us all increase in prayer and grace during this Dormition Fast. Below are the directions from the Typicon for the observance of the fast. This is the fullness of the fast envisioned by the Church for the restraint of passions and acquisition of grace; not everyone may be able to follow the fast fully, but each should engage it for his profit as he may. As always, ask your priest or confessor if you have any questions or concerns about the fast.

## **What Is Secularism?**

At the Assembly of the Diocese of the South in 2004, Archbishop Dmitri of blessed memory spoke about our task of proclaiming Jesus Christ in an evil time, taking as his text the Gospel reading of the day: "For this is eternal life, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent" (John 17:3). The Church is called to preach Christ as the only source of life in a world that resists Him. Indeed, the Church has always labored in evil times, but now, in our so-called "Post-Christian era" with secularism rampant, our task is even more difficult.

His Eminence defined "secularism" in a most perceptive way: "the treating of this world as an end in itself."

What does it mean to treat the world as an end in itself? It means essentially that we allow our goals, our vision, our aspirations to be limited to this life. We may believe in God and go to church, but the focus of our life is getting an education, securing a good job, buying a house, driving better cars, enjoying good food, having fun, deriving pleasure from relationships, seeing the next movie, playing the latest video game, storing up funds for retirement, building a business, advancing a career, promoting an ideology hoping to better the world, and so forth. Our thinking about things is defined by the conventional wisdom we acquire in school and in the media (if that can truly be called wisdom at all). We think about all these things without relation to God and His ultimate will for us. Rarely is our life guided by thoughts of the kingdom of God, death, judgment, or the life to come.

"Treating the world as an end in itself" is what we do when we live to eat rather than eating to live. We can make a god of food and the pleasure we derive from eating, and many do. St. Paul describes them: "For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things" (Phil 3:18-19).

"Treating the world as an end in itself" is what we do when we center our lives around pleasure, whether it be sex, entertainment, food, possessions, or the power to control others. St. Paul describes this as "worshipping the creature rather than the Creator" (Romans 1:25).

"Treating the world as an end" is what we do when we live to consume, thinking that by acquiring things we will be happy, especially when we go into debt to purchase things other than the necessities of life and then say we don't have the money to help someone in need. St. John Chrysostom refers to this frequently as "luxurious living."

"Treating the world as an end" is what we do when we labor to build our own kingdom—whether it be a business, an estate, a career, or a name—to the point of sacrificing faith, family, and friends to achieve our end. Jesus speaks of the lack of profit for one who gains "the whole world but loses his soul" (Matt 16:26).

"Treating the world as an end" is what we do when we devote ourselves to the hope of making the world a better place by political action, giving our time and energy to promoting the right ideology, passing the right laws, and electing the right candidates (do such actually exist?), placing our hope in man while forgetting God, His rule over the

nations, and His judgment. Christ did not establish this sort of kingdom.

If God is a part of this secular world view, it is merely as an addition to make life in the world better somehow. Faith in God is reduced to an ingredient to make our marriages stronger, our children to turn out better, our land more prosperous. God is a good luck charm, a way of securing blessing on our lives and avoiding a curse.

Secularism: "The treating of this world as an end in itself."

To counteract secularism, the Archbishop called upon us to deepen our faith and our bond of love with one another.

In contrast with a secular outlook that treats the world as an end in itself, the Orthodox Christian clearly sees Christ and His Kingdom as his true end, and this world and all it contains at best as a means to that end and at worst a deadly obstacle. He knows God made the world, that it reflects God's wisdom, power, and goodness, and that it is good. He knows that by studying the creature, he may come to know more of the Creator. He also knows that the world is fallen with man under a curse and is not transparent to God. He knows that the fallen world of man is defined by the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life, and that attachment to these things precludes attachment to the Kingdom.

To overcome our attachment to the world as an end in itself, Christ commands us to seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. He promises that if we do this, He will give us all the things we need to sustain our lives in this world that most people spend their whole lives and energy pursuing.

To overcome secularism, we are called to live in the Church, to live pious 'churchly' lives; the Russians use the term *tserkovny* to describe this, but the English 'churchly' doesn't quite have the same positive connotation. This means that we let the Church, where we participate in the Kingdom of God already, be the center of our lives. We live from Pascha to Pascha, from Sunday to Sunday; we always consider the Church calendar when planning other activities. We delight to come to the house of the Lord to present ourselves before Him and sing His praises.

But in order to overcome secularism, we also must live life in Christ outside of the Church's services. We cultivate the home church, bringing the family together to pray and study the things of God. Moreover, moving outside the family, we reject the false visions of community offered in the media and commit ourselves to building the only possible true community—the one in Christ—in the place we live. "What life have you if you have not life together?" asks T.S. Eliot. "There is no life that is not in community, and no community not lived in praise of God." The Church is the community that lives in praise of God. We build it by committing ourselves to

loving and serving the people of God in our parish in all the practical, inconvenient ways love calls us to serve that we may demonstrate to the world that we are Christ's disciples by our love for one another—and being ready to welcome into our midst the thirsty souls God sends our way.

To overcome secularism, we embrace fasting, almsgiving, and prayer. Fasting teaches us that man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God. It frees us from making a god of our stomach and from living to eat. It restores to us a proper relationship with food (along with drink and sex) which man misused when he fell. It helps provide the means by which all of us may give alms.

Almsgiving helps fulfill the command of Christ to love one another as He has loved us. Love requires practical action to meet the needs of those God puts in our lives. Love will not allow a brother to go hungry, or thirsty, or unsheltered or unclothed. The practice of almsgiving effectively limits our overconsumption that so often leads to enslaving debt. Recognizing our obligation to our brother, we will choose not to live extravagantly or carelessly.

Fasting and Almsgiving work to make our prayer more effective. Prayer to the living God in the name of Jesus Christ is an action by which we demonstrate daily that we do not believe that this world is our end. By it, we look beyond the creation to the Creator who made us for Himself. Our effective prayer unites us with God, our true end.

If we are to be Christians, if we are to be true disciples of Christ, we cannot allow ourselves to treat this world as an end in itself, even if everyone else around us seems to be doing so. As we enter the Dormition Fast for two weeks, the Church gives us an opportunity and the means to labor spiritually together at uprooting the secularism in ourselves and gives ourselves more fully to Christ our true God.

*Fr. Justin Frederick*

### **Dormition Fast from the Typicon**

*For those interested, the following text from the Typicon gives the full strictness of the Dormition Fast and provides us with something to aspire to. The Dormition Fast is the second strictest fast after Great Lent.*

Concerning the Fast of the Most Holy Theotokos it should be known:

In the fast of the Dormition of Our Holy Lady Theotokos, 14 days except the Transfiguration of Christ, we fast until the ninth hour in the day [3 p.m. M-F, i.e., one meal on those days]:

Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, to eat "dry."

On Tuesday and Thursday, cooked food without oil.

On Saturday and Sunday, cooked food with oil, and we drink wine: we don't eat fish, until the Dormition of the Most Holy Theotokos: but only on the Transfiguration of Christ, we eat fish, twice a day.

### **Upcoming Events 2023**

1-14 August Dormition Fast

6 August Transfiguration of Our Lord

14 August Dormition of the Theotokos

**GLORY BE TO GOD FOR ALL THINGS!**