

The Confessor's Tongue for January 10, 2010

Sunday After Theophany; St. Gregory of Nyssa, St. Theophan the Recluse

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.

January 10: St. Gregory of Nyssa

The younger brother of St. Basil the Great, rather similar to him in appearance, he received a fine education. He was an eloquent preacher and interpreter of the Word of God at first in the rank of presbyter, and then (about the year 372) in the rank of Bishop of Nyssa in Cappadocia. He was present at the Second Ecumenical Council and the addition to the Nicene Creed concerning the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is attributed to him. Like "a sickle cutting down the assaults of the heretics" and as "fire consuming the brushwood of heresy", he wrote much against the intrigues of the Arians, for which he was deposed and spent eight years in exile. Emperor Gratian returned him to the rank of bishop. "Herald of truth, foundation of piety, source of higher dogma, torrent of teachings sweet as honey", St. Gregory was distinguished by fervent zealotry for the right faith, with co-suffering with the poor, by patience, with love of peace, directness and with rare respect for his spiritual children. He died after the year 394. He left a few studies and books in defense of Orthodoxy and on the intrigues of the Arians and Macedonians.

S. V. Bulgakov, Handbook for Church Servers, 2nd ed., 1274 pp. (Kharkov, 1900) pp. 0023-25. Translated by Archpriest Eugene D Tarris © December 31, 2005. All rights reserved.

On the Purification of the Soul

St. Gregory of Nyssa

For it is not out of hatred or vengeance for an evil life (in my opinion) that God brings painful conditions upon sinners when He seeks after and draws to Himself whatever has come to birth for His sake; but for a better purpose He draws the souls to Himself, who is the fountain of all blessedness.

The painful condition necessarily happens as an incidental consequence to the one who is drawn [by God]. When goldsmiths purify gold by fire from the matter which is mixed with it, they do not only melt the adulterant in the fire, but inevitably the pure metal is melted along with the base admixture. When the latter is consumed the former remains. In the same way, when evil is consumed by the purifying fire, the soul which is united to evil must necessarily also be in the fire until the base adulterant material is removed, consumed by the fire.

Or if particularly sticky mud is plastered thickly around a rope, then the end of the rope is led through some small space, and some one pulls forcibly on the end of the rope towards the inside, necessarily the rope must follow the one who pulls, but the plastered mud must remain outside the hole scraped off the rope by the forcible pulling. Because of the mud the rope does not move forward easily, but has to be pulled hard.

Something like this I think we should imagine for the state of the soul. Wrapped up as it is in material and earthly attachments, it struggles and is stretched,

as God draws His own to Himself. What is alien to God has to be scraped off forcibly because it has somehow grown onto the soul. This is the cause of the sharp and unendurable pains which the souls must endure.

From The Soul and the Resurrection, SVS Press, pp. 83-4

On the Baptismal Garment: the Robe of Light

Fr. Alexander Schmemmann, Of Water & the Spirit

We know already that the unvesting of the catechumen before Baptism signified the rejection of him of the "old man" and the "old life," that of sin and corruption. It is indeed *sin* that revealed their nakedness to Adam and Eve and made them conceal it with vestments. But why were they not ashamed of their nakedness before sin? Because they were vested in divine glory and light, in the "ineffable beauty" which is the true nature of man. It is this first garment that they lost, and they "knew that they were naked". But then the post-baptismal vesting in the "robe of light" signifies above all the return of man to the integrity and innocence he had in Paradise, the recovery by him of his true nature obscured and mutilated by sin. St. Ambrose compares the baptismal robe to the vestments of Christ on Mt. Tabor. The Transfigured Christ reveals perfect and sinless humanity as not "naked" but vested in garments "white like snow," in the uncreated light of divine glory. It is Paradise, not sin that reveals the true nature of man; it is to Paradise and to his true nature, to his primordial vestment of glory, that man returns in Baptism.

The Blessing of Homes

Homes are customarily blessed after the Great Blessing of Waters at Theophany, though they can be blessed at any time. This is a brief service in the home of prayer and sanctifying the house through the sprinkling of holy water. A longer order of blessing is often used for the first blessing and cleansing of a new home.

With the house cleaned and ready, we dress as we would for a church service. When the priest arrives, we turn off the television, radio, stereo, etc. Pets that may interfere are placed out of the way. A small table may be set up before the Icon Corner, upon which a wide-mouthed but small bowl full of newly blessed water is placed. A lit candle, censer (if you have one), and icon are placed on the table. These things should be arranged before the priest arrives.

Family members and any guests gather and stand before the small table. The first names of those residing in the home are printed on a piece of paper and placed on the table. Proper baptismal names should be used.

One family member may carry the lit candle, going before the priest and leading him through the

house, turning on lights, opening doors, etc. The other family members may accompany the priest or may stay at the table (children, though, usually want to see their rooms blessed).

After the service, some of the faithful will make an offering to the church or give a gift to the priest. There is no obligation to do this, but if done, it is done following the service.

Take advantage of having the priest in your home for the house blessing to ask questions or to voice any concerns you may have. Some parishioners desire a more extended visit or to have a meal with the priest. This should be arranged beforehand.

On Reading the Old Testament

The Old Testament is an essential part of Scripture, and without it, it is impossible to understand fully Christ and His work on our behalf. A large part of early catechesis was instruction from the Old Testament showing how Christ fulfilled the words of the ancient prophets. In the early Church, the term "the Scriptures" was applied only to the Old Testament, and so it is used in the Creed when we confess Jesus to have risen on the third day "according to the Scriptures." This means that the death and resurrection of the Messiah was foretold by the prophets, contrary to the fond expectations of the Jews.

The Apostles, the Holy Fathers, and Christ Himself considered the words of the Old Testament Scriptures to be inspired of God and useful for our instruction, training, and edification, and we do well to read the Old Testament.

Christians often attempt to read the Old Testament, but if they make it out of Genesis, they find themselves bogged down by Leviticus. Here are some suggestions for reading the OT profitably and avoiding getting bogged down.

First, read the Psalter. We hear it regularly in church services. Add just one Psalm to your prayers daily, and you will read the entire Psalter twice in a year. Read one Psalm in the morning and one in the evening, and you'll read it four times. An ancient canon required candidates for the episcopacy to know the Psalter by heart, thus indicating that they were men of prayer. We cannot go wrong reading the Psalms regularly.

Second, read the rest of the wisdom literature (Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Wisdom of Sirach (aka Ecclesiasticus), the Wisdom of Solomon, Job). Make it a habit to read the chapter from Proverbs corresponding to the day of the month. Or read repeatedly through all these works a chapter or two at a time. It will nourish your soul and give make you wise.

Third, get a sense of the historical narrative of the Old Testament. Below are the books and chapters containing historical narrative, not genealogies or detailed instructions on how to build the tabernacle or offer burnt offerings. One may read

this sequence of material and come away with a good sense of the events of the OT and their chronology.

Genesis 1-50

Exodus 1-20, 24, 31-35, 40

Leviticus 9-10, 26

Numbers 1, 2:40-51, 8-14, 16-17, 20-25, 31-33;

Deuteronomy 1-34

Joshua 1-24

Judges 1-21

Ruth 1-4

I Samuel 1-31 (aka 1 Kings or Kingdoms)

II Samuel 1-24 (aka 2 Kings or Kingdoms)

I Kings 1-22 (aka 3 Kings or Kingdoms)

II Kings 1-14 (aka 4 Kings or Kingdoms)

Jonah 1-4

II Kings 15-25

I Chronicles 10-29

II Chronicles 1-32

Tobit 1-14

II Chronicles 33-36

Judith 1-16

Daniel 1-6

Esther 1-8

I Ezra 1-9

II Ezra 1-10

Nehemiah 1-13

I-II Maccabees

This outline gives a rough chronological reading of the narrative portions of the Old Testament. It will be eventually prepared in more polished form.

Upcoming Events 2010

- 20-21 January: Feast of St. Maximus Vigil 7:00 p.m.,
Divine Liturgy 9:00 a.m.
- 22 January, 5:30 p.m. A new class will be offered most Friday evenings: a reading and discussion of the abridged version of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's Gulag Archipelago. This class could be titled "A Preparation for Martyrdom", for besides the historical and literary interest of Solzhenitsyn's work, he gives us important insight as to how we might stand in the face of unjust persecution.
- 23 January, 2010, North Texas Orthodox Mission (NTOM) Pre-Lenten Retreat at Holy Trinity with Fr. Joseph Honeycutt, 8:45 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.
- 29 January, Friday: Open House at Rectory, 6:00 p.m.
- 6-7 February: Elder Zacharias of St. John's Monastery, Essex, England at St. Serapim's & Sava's: Saturday morning at St Serapim's 7:00 Liturgy, 9:30 Talk with Q&A; St. Sava's 5:00 p.m. Vespers, 6:00 Talk with Youth. Highly recommended!
- 14 February 2010, 6:00 p.m. Forgiveness Vespers, Great Lent Begins. If you attend this parish, you should consider this service to be mandatory.
- 26-27 February 2010 Metropolitan Jonah visits.
- 4 April 2010, Holy Pascha, the Feast of Feasts.

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!