

The Confessor's Tongue for February 21, 2010

First Sunday of the Fast: the Sunday of Orthodoxy

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.

First Sunday of Lent: Sunday of Orthodoxy

This day the Holy Church commemorates the victory of Orthodoxy over heresies and is why this day is also called the "Sunday of Orthodoxy". The Synaxarion explains that the day celebrates "the restoration of the holy and venerable icons", which happened in first half of the 9th century (in 842) "by the Emperor Michael (the Byzantine Emperor), the holy and blessed Empress Theodora (see page 80) and the Holy Methodius, Patriarch of Constantinople".

This commemoration was established to celebrate the final victory of the Holy Church over the iconoclastic heresy. But in this way the Holy Church finally explained and defined in the canons of the Seventh Ecumenical Council the Orthodox Christian teaching that is now a celebrated event and is not called the celebration of iconolatry but the Triumph of Orthodoxy. It does not mean that after the 10th Century heresies would or could not appear any more; but it means that all following heresies, even though they were numerous and various, find their accusation and refutation in the definitions of the Seven Ecumenical Councils.

The victory of Orthodoxy in the Greek Church itself was first celebrated on the first Sunday of Great Lent, and thus the basis of the present Triumph of Orthodoxy is historical. Together with these things the Holy Church through the celebration of the present day means to grant great comfort to those who attend. This intention agrees with the rules of faith and piety and the ascetic effort of the fast. It sees in this action the proof of their living communion according to their faith and life, and finds in this the foundation for prayerful petition to God for them. After the end of the liturgy on this day it is necessary to serve the special Rite of Orthodoxy, composed by St. Methodius.

Again the restoration of honoring and venerating the holy and venerable icons was annually prescribed "from that time these holy confessors appointed the annual commemoration of this solemnity, so that we might never again fall into a similar ignominy".

S. V. Bulgakov, Handbook for Church Servers, 2nd ed., 1274 pp. (Kharkov, 1900) pp. 511-515. Translated by Archpriest Eugene D. Tarris © March 21, 2005. All rights reserved.

The Fast and Keeping Vigil

Fr. Justin Frederick

The Great Fast is given us each year that we may repent and draw near to God through prayer, fasting, and almsgiving.

Part of our prayer is common rather than private and is found in the services of the Church.

Besides the Sunday Divine Liturgy, the most important service during the week is the Saturday evening "All-Night Vigil", which is the service that helps prepare the faithful to take part worthily with

attention in the Divine Liturgy. Strictly speaking, one who wishes to commune (as we all should desire) prepares himself in part by attending the Vigil; not to attend the Vigil strictly means one should not commune.

Many Orthodox Christians have developed the habit of neglecting the Saturday evening Vigil and attending only the Sunday morning Liturgy. Many, who otherwise pray at home, come to Confession, fast, and read their pre-Communion prayers, and attend Divine Liturgy regularly as communicants rarely if ever present themselves in the Church before God on Saturday evening to keep Vigil. This practice is not normative, is defective, and deprives us spiritually.

The Divine Liturgy is a rich feast; we are prepared to receive and appreciate that feast by attending the Vigil. It is analagous to someone of modest means participating in a meal prepared by a top rate chef. The food will be unfamiliar; it is not what he eats normally at home. He will need to have explained to him what he is about to eat and why it is special. He may need a course in fine wines to appreciate the accompanying libations. Without this, he will either thoughtlessly eat and drink with only minimal appreciation, or he will balk and the unaccustomed, strange fare and ask instead for a burger and a coke. When we neglect attending Vigil, we cannot hope to be prepared adequately to partake of the rich fare of the Liturgy and Eucharist with full appreciation.

At the Divine Liturgy, we are called to lay aside all earthly cares "that we may receive the King of all who comes invisibly..." If Sunday morning at 9:00 a.m. is our first entrance into the Church since last Sunday, we shall have small hopes of effectively laying aside those cares. Our minds are too full of thoughts, too scattered, too fragmented, too burdened. The Church in appointing the Vigil for us understands this: standing before God for two hours (not all night as in the early Church!) gives us time to decompress from the stresses of the week; it helps wash of the world's grime, to renew our minds and hearts, to reset our attention on the center of our lives, that is, Christ. This takes time, and we cannot hope to concentrate ourselves on Christ as we need and He deserves in the time we spend driving to church or between the car and the church door.

Keeping Vigil teaches us that this life is not ultimate, that Christ is coming to judge the world. At the Vigil, we keep watch for Him, both for His Second Coming in glory, but also for Him to come and visit us in our need and present afflictions. The early Church took seriously the notion of the Bridegroom "coming at midnight", and kept Vigil to watch for Him.

We all know that the only way to develop close relationships with others is by spending time with

them, to eat the requisite "pood of salt" (Russian Proverb). We know that our children need our time and attention; no minimum of so-called "quality time" can replace the sheer quantity of life spent lived together. Both 'quality time' is needed, but even more is just quantity of time. A large quantity of time ensures that at least some of it will have the possibility of being quality time. The same is true in our relationship with Christ: no minimum of 'quality time' can make up for a lack of quantity. The Vigil gives us two hours each week, a small portion, in which we can spend time in His presence in His temple.

If we were to offer Christ a tithe of our time as well as our money, that would amount to sixteen hours and forty-eight minutes a week. If we subtract our hours of sleep, that would still leave the tithe of time at eleven hours, thirty-six minutes. If we give Christ two hours for Vigil and two hours for Liturgy, that still leaves us six hours a week short of a tithe of our time. And surely He is worth at least that?

The Fast provides motivation and the setting to strengthen our prayer. One way in which our parish can grow in prayer is to grow more faithful in attending the Saturday evening Vigil. The Vigil is not just a nice 'extra' for those who are particularly pious; we need to see it as a necessity for all as frequently as we can manage it. At least during this Lent, we can make the effort to come, asking God for grace to do what we have not been able until now to do in our own strength: to lay aside our plans, to submit our will, to give Him first place, to let our Saturday evenings be devoted to Him first in preparation for His giving Himself to us on Sunday morning.

The Hierarchical Liturgy & the Bishop's Visit *Subdeacon Anthony Stokes*

When the ruling hierarch of a church visits one of his parishes, things do not run quite 'as usual.' The following will help prepare for next week's visit of our Metropolitan and *Locum Tenens*: To begin with:

1. When speaking to the Metropolitan, he should be addressed as either "Your Beatitude" or "Vladyka." When asking for a blessing, you should say either "Master, bless!" or "Vladyka, bless!" (Vladyka is Russian for "master"). Anytime a Bishop is present in the room, you should not ask for a blessing from any Priests, only the Bishop(s). Everyone should make the effort to get the Metropolitan's blessing while he is here.

2. When a Bishop is present, you will notice that any references that include "Father, bless" or "Through the prayers of our holy fathers" are replaced by "Master, bless" and "Through the prayers of our holy Master." This is especially true at the dismissal of any service and any time we bless food.

3. When a Bishop enters a room, it is proper for everyone to stand until the Bishop has taken his seat, which is commonly preceded by a blessing and the singing of "Eis polla eti Despota!"

4. Generally, any time a Bishop blesses the people, either with his hands, his staff, or the Bishop's candles, the people respond by singing "Eis polla eti, Despota!", "which is Greek for "Many years, Master!" The Bishop's staff represents his role as shepherd of his flock. The candlesticks, called trikiri (three candles) and dikiri (two candles), represent the Holy Trinity and two natures of Christ, respectively.

The Hierarchical Liturgy

There are several differences in the Liturgy when a hierarch serves. First of all, it is important to note that the Hierarchical Liturgy is the fullest form of the Divine Liturgy. Common practice today is for the Liturgy served only by a Priest, or occasionally a Priest with a Deacon, but the fullness of the Liturgy, just as the fullness of the Church, is to have the Bishop serve with Priests and Deacons.

Much of what we see in today's Hierarchical Liturgy developed from the rites in the Great Church of Constantinople during the reign of the Byzantine Emperors. The Bishop's mitre (crown); the eagle rug where the Bishop stands; and even the fact that the Bishop does not enter the altar until the Entrance with Gospel are all inherited from the grand liturgies involving the Patriarch and Emperor that took place in Hagia Sophia (the Church of the Holy Wisdom, i.e. Christ) for almost 1,000 years.

Today, the service usually begins with the Bishop being greeted at the door of the church by a member of the parish who offers the Bishop a loaf of bread and salt. Young children also greet the Bishop with a gift of flowers. The Bishop is then vested in his mantle, a monastic vestment, and given his staff. As the Bishop enters the church, he is greeted by the rector of the parish and the Deacon, who have both already vested and served most of the Proskemede (Preparation) service. The choir sings the hymn "From the rising to the setting of the sun is the Name of the Lord to be praised. Blessed be the Name the Name of the Lord, from henceforth and forever."

At this point the Bishop begins his entrance prayers, which are read by the Deacon, all while the choir sings the hymn to the Theotokos for the day. Since we will be serving the Liturgy of St. Basil, the hymn will be "All of creation rejoiceth in thee..." Once the Bishop has finished his veneration of the icons, he turns to bless the people while the choir responds with "Ton Despotin..." (the fuller version of the many years). The Deacon and choir then immediately begin the vesting prayers for the Bishop, who is vested in the middle of the church by the subdeacons. You may notice at this point that everywhere that the Bishop has stood inside the church has been covered by a small rug with an eagle on it. This is called an orlets, and it depicts an eagle flying over a fortified city. This symbolizes the Bishop's duty to care the flock of a specific place, and the guard and protect its people. The eagle rug is one of the inheritances of the Byzantine empire, when the emperor would stand on elevated rugs, often

emblazoned with the symbol of the Byzantine emperors (and later the Romanov's), the double-headed eagle.

Once the Bishop is vested, the reading of the hours may continue or begin. This is also the time that Readers or Subdeacons would be tonsured or ordained. The Bishop will stay in his place on the elevated platform in the center of the church until the Entrance with the Gospel.

The Liturgy begins and proceeds as normal until the Entrance with the Gospel. At this point, all of the clergy have exited the altar and come to stand near the Bishop. Once the Bishop has blessed the entrance, the clergy then enter the altar while singing "Come, let us worship." This practice for the entrance stems from the Byzantine Empire. When the Emperor and Patriarch would be present for a service at Hagia Sophia, the Liturgy would begin with a procession throughout the city of Constantinople, stopping at many of the small churches on the way and singing hymns. This is where the antiphons that are sung at the beginning of the Liturgy have their roots. When the procession arrived at the cathedral, the Patriarch and Emperor would enter the church through a specific set of "Royal Doors" and proceed to the sanctuary. The Emperor was the only "laymen" allowed to enter and venerate the altar as the clergy would do. Over the years this practice of the entrance expanded and travelled throughout the church and is now part of every celebration of the Divine Liturgy.

After the entrance, the Bishop will cense the altar and the people while a trio sings an elaborate version of "Eis polla eti, Despota!" The people and clergy will join in the singing as well. You will also notice that the clergy will sing the final Kontakion for the day, as opposed to the choir.

Since the Metropolitan will be serving at St. Maximus, there will be a few parts of the service that occur that are only reserved for when the Primate of an Orthodox Church presides. One of these parts is the reading of the Dyptichs, or the list of all Orthodox Primates. This will be done by the Deacon and the Choir before the Trisagion is sung. There will also be other special petitions throughout the service for the Primate. When a Priest serves, he commemorates the Bishop of the Diocese. When the Bishop serves, he commemorates the Primate of the church. So, when the Primate of a church serves, instead of commemorating himself, he commemorates the other primates of the Orthodox world.

The clergy will also join in singing the Trisagion hymn, which is extended for the Hierarchical service. The Cherubic Hymn is also extended, at least with regards to time. Earlier it was noted that the Priest only served part of the Proskemede service. It is at this time that the Bishop completes this service, before the Great Entrance takes place. It is interesting to note that the Bishop does not process in the Great Entrance with the rest of the clergy, but remains in the altar to receive the gifts from the

Deacon and the Priest. From this point on, the liturgy is fairly similar to that of a liturgy served by the Priest and Deacon, with the exception that the Priest's parts are mainly said by the Bishop. There will also be a few times when the Bishop blesses with his candles, accompanied by the singing of "Eis polla eti, Despota!"

At the conclusion of the Liturgy, the Bishop gives the dismissal which is immediately followed by the singing of "Eis polla eti, Despota!" The Many Years to the hierarch is not sung as usual if the Bishop is present. It is common for everyone to remain in the church during the Post-Communion Prayers and await the Bishop's exit from the sanctuary. "Ton Despotin" is sung one last time at this moment.

The Sayings of St. Anthony the Great

Abba Anthony said, "I saw the snares that the enemy spreads out over the world, and I said, groaning, 'What can get through such snares?' Then I heard a voice saying to me, 'Humility.'"

Saying 7 in *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*

Commentary: The snares the enemy lays out by which to catch and destroy souls are many and powerful. Looking at our own world, how shall we escape gluttony, with so many varied foods to suit every taste in such great quantity available around the clock? How shall we escape lust and fornication in a when sensual images assail us from all sides, modesty and virginity are lost virtues, and sexual encounters are nearly free for the asking? How shall we escape greed, stinginess, and envy in a society that glories in conspicuous consumption? How shall we avoid telling and being enslaved by lies in a world of spin and image over substance? How shall we avoid error when even the notion Truth is denied and all opinions and positions are treated as being of equal value? How shall we avoid sloth in a culture of entertainment, whose constantly expressed desire is "don't work too hard" and "take it easy"? How shall we be motivated to undertake the hard work of repentance and looking at ourselves in the mirror when there are so many drugs and other means of escape available to us to numb the pain of guilt and feelings of inadequacy? And if we by some means escape the common pitfalls and sins of our age, how shall we avoid judging those who do not and taking pride in our own righteousness?

Who, if not the Lord, will save us from this wicked and perverse generation?

St. Anthony was granted to see the snares that the enemy spreads, and he groaned in despair of escaping them. How may one escape them? How can we sinners resist the compelling advertising of the enemy?

The answer is that only humility can save us. Humility says, "I am weak; of myself, I can do nothing. Left to myself, I will be overcome and will fall. If I haven't fallen today like my neighbor, I surely will tomorrow. Unless Christ stretches out His hand to catch me, I shall surely sink in the sea like Peter. If

there is any good in me, any resistance to sin, any victory over my passions and the enemy, it is entirely due to God's grace at work in me." Humility places no confidence in man and all its trust and hope in God. God gives grace, not to the proud, but to the humble, to those who recognize their need (James 4:10, I Peter 5:6). "Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up."

Amma Theodora [one of the Desert Mothers] said that neither asceticism, nor vigils, nor any kind of suffering are able to save, only true humility can do that. There was an anchorite [hermit] who was able to banish demons; and he asked them, "What makes you go away? Is it fasting?" They replied, "We do not eat or drink." "Is it vigils?" They replied, "We do not sleep." "Is it separation from the world?" "We live in deserts." "What power sends you away then?" They said, "Nothing can overcome us, but only humility." "Do you see how humility is victorious over the demons?" Humility is alien to the proud hosts of hell.

God, on the other hand, is humble. "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Philippians 2:5-8). Christ, who had every right to glory over man humbled Himself rather, and in so doing won Himself the name above every name at which every knee will bow. We are to have the same mind of humility in us, and that humility is our only path to victory.

Humility allows us to receive the grace of God we need to stand. Only through humility can we escape the enemy's snares.

Fr. Justin Frederick

The Christian Understanding of Sin

Sin is primarily a metaphysical phenomenon whose roots lie in the mystic depths of man's spiritual nature. The essence of sin consists not in the infringement of ethical standards, but in a falling away from the eternal Divine life for which man was created and to which, by his very nature, he is called.

Sin is committed, first of all, in the secret depths of the human spirit, but its consequences involve the individual as a whole. A sin will reflect on a man's psychological and physical condition, on his outward appearance, on his personal destiny. Sin will, inevitably, pass beyond the boundaries of the sinner's individual life to burden all humanity and thus affect the fate of the whole world. The sin of our forefather Adam was not the only sin of cosmic significance. Every sin, manifest or secret, committed by each one of us, affects the rest of the universe.

The earthly-minded man when he commits sin is not conscious of its effect on himself as is the spiritual man. The carnal man does not remark any change in himself after committing a sin because he is always in a state of spiritual death and has never

known the eternal life of the spirit. The spiritual man, on the contrary, does see a change in himself every time his will inclines to sin—he senses a lessening of grace.

From St. Theophan the Recluse (+1894)

For what reason were the martyrs tormented? Because, having believed in the Lord and been united with Him, they did not want to worship false gods. The false gods were the spirits of passions and evil deeds. He who refuses to give in to passions and sinful desires does the same as he who refuses to bow down and worship idols. He who refused to worship idols was given over to external sufferings, while he who refuses to satisfy the passions actually wounds himself and forces his heart to suffer until the passions quiet down in him. Victory over passions is a self-inflicted spiritual martyrdom, which is performed invisibly in the heart but is nevertheless very painful.... But if there is a lot of pain, there are a lot of rewards.... The more the sorrows, the more intense the consolations.

On Conversations During the Divine Liturgy

It has come to the priest's attention that a number of us have developed a habit of conversing outside of the church in the coffee hour room while the Divine Liturgy is begin celebrated. It is indeed good that we have come to church, but to come fully to church is to enter the nave and be present for Christ.

Standing outside and talking, whether for five minutes or for much of the Liturgy is not only harmful spiritually to ourselves, but also puts a stumbling block before others. Those who have to leave Liturgy due to children or other good reasons are tempted to stay to talk, absenting themselves longer than they should. And what sort of impression do you suppose the sight of a number of the faithful gathered to chat during the Liturgy makes on visitors?

Children, also, should not be permitted to play in the coffee hour room during Liturgy. This only gives them a motive to demand to be let out of Liturgy. Children should be taken out long enough to be calmed and then brought back into the service.

Brethren, let us be attentive to these things that all may be done in love and in order for the good of all and that we might not cause others to stumble. Thank you!

Upcoming Events 2010

- 27 February Liturgy and Women's Retreat and Nativity of Our Lord Monastery.
- 27-28 February Metropolitan Jonah visits for Vigil and Liturgy. Parish workday Saturday morning 9:00 a.m. the 27th to prepare. Metropolitan Jonah arrives Sunday morning at 9:00 a.m.
- 4 April 2010, Holy Pascha, the Feast of Feasts.

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!