

The Confessor's Tongue for November 7, 2010

24th Sunday After Pentecost: Synaxis of Unmercenary Healers

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 in November

The first Sunday in November is devoted (if the rector so chooses) to the memory of all the unmercenary healers, those saints who healed others by both natural and supernatural means without taking money for their services.

The Apostle and Evangelist Luke heads list, followed by three pairs of Cosmas and Damian, Cyrus and John, Panteleimon, Hermolaus, Diomedes, Sampson, Mocius, Anicetus, Artemius, Thelalaeus, Tryphon, Antipas, Haralampus, and Blaise, each of whom has his own feast day during the year.

The Unmercenary Healers represent one of the nine ranks of the Saints that are commemorated at every Divine Liturgy. We do well to seek their prayers when we are ill. An Akathist to St. Panteleimon is readily available for this purpose

The Sayings of St. Anthony the Great

Abba Anthony said, "Whoever hammers a lump of iron, first decides what he is going to make of it, a scythe, a sword, or an axe. Even so, we ought to make up our minds what kind of virtue we want to forge, or we labor in vain."

Saying 35 Sayings of the Desert Fathers

Commentary: In forging a metal object, the smith must know ahead of time what he is making. Not only does he need to know how to form it, but also how hot to heat the metal, what type of metal to use, and how to quench the hot metal to achieve the desired quality of hardness. The process a good sword requires will not work for a hammer or a chisel.

St. Anthony likens the acquisition of the virtues to this process. If we take a general approach to forging a virtue, for example, just going to Church, praying, reading, fasting, receiving the Holy Mysteries, and so forth but without any more precise focus, we may not succeed to gaining any of the virtues. What are the virtues? Humility, liberality, chastity, mildness, temperance, happiness, diligence, faith, hope, and love are among them. Providing needed focus, St. Justin of Chelye recommends that each day we seek to put aside one sin and put on one virtue. St. Theophan the Recluse advises us to discern what our controlling passion is and to fight against it by putting on the virtue that opposes it, and having prevailed in this struggle, we shall much more readily prevail over our other vices and acquire the other virtues.

Warring against a particular passion most often means obedience to a particular command of Christ that counteracts the passion and develops the virtue. For example, avarice and love of money are counteracted by almsgiving; obedience to Christ's command "Give to them that ask thee, and from them that would borrow from thee turn thou not away." The sinful passion is cut away by obedience to

Christ's command and working to acquire the virtue of generosity. If we struggle with lust, we must learn to guard not only our eyes but also our stomachs by fasting. If pride is our controlling passion, we seek to acquire the virtue of humility by serving others, putting others first, doing the dirty jobs no one else wants to do. "Whoever wishes to be first among you, let him be the servant of all," as Christ has said, and "If you are invited to a feast, take the lowest place." "He who exalteth himself will be abased, but he that humbleth himself will be exalted" (Luke 14:11, 18:14). Humility leads to the spiritual heights. If you struggle with anger, hatred, remembrance of wrong, and unforgiveness, seek to put on love by obeying Christ's command to not return evil for evil, but to overcome evil with good by doing good to those who harm us, blessing those who curse us, and praying for those who persecute us and whom we experience as enemies.

Fr. Justin Frederick

Preparing for the Nativity Fast

The Nativity Fast, the 40-day period of preparation for the Nativity of our Lord, begins Monday, November 15 and lasts until the Liturgy the morning of the Nativity of Our Lord, December 25. The Fast is a time of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving given to us by the Holy Spirit in the Church for our spiritual benefit: for repentance, healing, cleansing, growth, and, ultimately—for knowing Christ more intimately and being filled afresh with His Spirit. The Fast is a time to lay aside the lesser things choking our lives to pursue greater things and recalibrate our spiritual life.

The Fast is a wholistic effort of the whole man consisting of three main elements: prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. Now, before the Fast is upon us, is the time to prepare for our own fasting so that we know how we shall be fasting ahead of time. The Nativity Fast can be difficult for us as the surrounding world parties in the time leading up to the Nativity, and then, when we are celebrating the twelve days of Christmas, the world has already turned away from the Feast, weary already from its excesses. So we do well to plan ahead. If you have not done this before, or want to make substantial changes in your practice, or have any questions at all, please consult with your priest or confessor.

Prayer: During the Fast, we seek to advance our prayer life, keeping our rule of prayer more strictly and adding to it if we can. An easy way to increase it is to add Psalms and prostrations. We may use the Lenten Prayer of St. Ephrem if we desire. We should strive to develop a more constant awareness of God throughout the day by the use of the Jesus Prayer or other such short prayers. Prayer also includes the

corporate prayer of the Church in her services. We should attend services more frequently, as the services provide support for our overall efforts.

Almsgiving: Almsgiving helps give our prayer wings. It is an act of love to give up some of the resources God has given us to benefit others who are in need. We offer several outlets for almsgiving: the almsbox and our own "food pantry" for those in need, and the collections of items needed by the local Woman to Woman and Interfaith Ministries. One may also give to the needy or to worthy charities such as International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC) on one's own. The important thing is that we give alms, which is giving for those in need above and beyond our normal tithes and offerings.

Fasting: In many people's mind, this is what is meant by the Fast, but this is but one part. We abstain from meat, dairy products, fish, wine, and olive oil (see wall calendar for when fish, wine, and oil are permitted) and marital relations (see priest if you have questions) so that we can give ourselves to prayer and have extra means for almsgiving. We eat less: when we get up from the table, we still have "room" in our stomachs. The money we save by eating less and more simply we give as alms (above and beyond our usual tithes and offerings); here fasting has its practical social benefit. We also seek to minimize influences in our lives that draw us away from Christ or cause our hearts to grow cold or indifferent to Him. Hence, for the season we may cut back on or cut out altogether TV, movies, secular music, parties, and other entertainment and replace it with prayer, Church services, works of mercy, and spiritual reading. This is a good time to unplug ourselves from as much electronic media as we can and concentrate on personal face to face relations with friends and especially family members.

Each person is strongly encouraged to choose a spiritual book for daily reading during the Fast in addition to our daily reading of Scripture, etc. These include works such as Dorotheos of Gaza, *Discourses and Sayings*, John Cassian's *Conferences*, anything by St. Theophan the Recluse, *Unseen Warfare*, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, St. John of Kronstadt's *My Life in Christ*, St. Maximus 400 *Chapters on Love*, various lives of saints such as the Optina Elders, St. Seraphim, St. Silouan, St. Nectarios, St. Elizabeth of Moscow, St. Maria Skobtsova, etc. It is wise to consult with your priest or confessor if you are not sure what to read. Put our Library and Bookstore to good use!

All regular communicants must make a Confession during the Fast. Those who do not commune regularly should use the Fast to prepare for Confession and Communion. We cannot expect to have spiritual health if we do not make the spiritual and physical effort involved to commune at least a three or four times a year.

If we seek to commune regularly, we must make *at least* a monthly Confession. Frequent Communion

is a privilege which assumes that we are examining ourselves in confession regularly, keeping fast days, and trying to live an active Christian life throughout the week. If we won't, don't or can't do this, we should commune less frequently and carefully prepare for it each time by a Confession along with prayer and fasting. If you have any questions about how to keep the fast in your particular circumstances, please consult your Confessor or Priest.

Head of the Church & the Body of Christ

St. Nicholas of Zicha (+1956)

"And gave Him to be the head of the Church which is His body" (Ephesians 1:22-23)

Headless humanity is given a Head in the Lord Jesus, risen from the dead. The Body, [formerly] severed from the Head, begins to knit together with that Head, bit by bit and part by part. Not all men are the Body, but only those who believe in Christ the Lord; all are called, but only those who respond are received under the Head. Those who respond compose the Body that is called the Church, of which the Lord is the Head. But, as the risen and glorified man, Jesus is exalted within the Holy Trinity above each and all on earth and in heaven, so also will His Church, His Body, be raised up to its Head, above each and all. The whole Church will stand at the right hand of the Holy Trinity, for, where the Head is, there is the Body. To such an exaltation, greatness and glory will the gathered repentant sinners attain, who had sometime been enemies of God, wandering astray like the Prodigal Son and headless as a dead body, but now adopted through Christ and for Christ, and clad in the beauty of divine life and light.

It is a great thing, my brethren, for the Son of God to be incarnate on earth, and for Him to suffer on the Cross and die for our sakes. His sojourn on earth brought a vast change in the destiny of man and in the meaning of all created things. He changed all things and made them new. Therefore, my brethren, let us not live and conduct ourselves as the old man, but as the new; let us not live in sin but in righteousness; let us not conduct ourselves according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. Let us merit that exaltation, greatness, and glory to which we are called by our Head.

O Lord Jesus, the holy Head of Thy holy Church, make us worthy to be members for ever of Thy most pure Body. To Thee be glory and praise for ever. Amen.

Upcoming Events 2010

- 14 November: IOCC event at Holy Trinity, 6:00 p.m.
- 15 November: Nativity Fast Begins
- 15 November: Pan-Orthodox Unction Service at SS. Constantine & Helen, 7:00 p.m.
- 22 December: Metropolitan Jonah visits.

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!