

The Confessor's Tongue for December 19, 2010

30th Sunday After Pentecost: Sunday before Nativity; Holy Fathers

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.

Sunday Before Nativity

On this Sunday falling between December 18 and 24, the services glorify the Old Testament saints from whose human family came our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore the Gospel appointed to be read this is contains Jesus Christ's "genealogy". Together with Christ's physical ancestors, all those living in faith and all the Old Testament saints who have come to the Savior, who are listed in the Epistle reading for this Sunday, are commemorated both on this Sunday, and on the Sunday of the Forefathers.

In the church hymns for this day the Holy Church primarily sings "of the beginning fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob", "together with the Three Youths (Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego), who quench the fiery flames with the dew of the Spirit" and "the physical images of the hidden mysteries of God revealed to the world", and the prophet Daniel, who, "foretold the birth of the Christ from a virgin" and "foresaw that the cruel world would be counted among those with deep spiritual peace by the coming of Christ, having sometimes stopped the mouths of lions in the pit".

In addition, the Holy Church in the hymns for the present day as well as for the Forefeast of the Nativity of Christ, exclaims: "Come let us all faithfully celebrate the Nativity of Christ", "Skip, O hills and mountains; Dance, O prophets who spoke of God! Clap your hands, O peoples and nations! The salvation and the enlightenment of all draw near. He comes to be born in the city of Bethlehem"; "The never-setting Sun arises from the bedding of the Virgin to enlighten all those under the sun. Let us hasten with chaste eyes and pure deeds to meet Him." *From the Bulgakov Hadbook, Fr. Tarris trans.*

The Sayings of St. Anthony the Great

Abba Anthony once went to visit Abba Amoun in Mount Nitria, and when they met, Abba Amoun said, "By your prayers, the number of the brethren increases, and some of them want to build more cells where they may live in peace. How far away from here do you think we should build the cells?" Abba Anthony said, "Let us eat at the ninth hour and then let us go out for a walk in the desert and explore the country." So they went out into the desert and they walked until sunset, and then Abba Anthony said, "Let us pray and plant the cross here, so that those who wish to do so may build here. Then when those who remain there want to visit those who have come here, they can take a little food at the ninth hour and then come. If they do this, they will be able to keep in touch with each other without distraction of mind." The distance is twelve miles.
Saying 34 *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*

Commentary: Abba Amoun in humility credits Anthony's prayers for the growth of his community rather than his own leadership. In humility, he asks

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Anthony's council about that matter of where to build more cells to house the brethren so a modicum of peace may be maintained. Anthony on his part, does not give his own wisdom off the top of his head. He waits until the fast of the day is concluded and broken at the ninth hour (3:00 p.m.) and then walks into the desert with the brethren to explore until they find the proper place at sunset. And notice how practical is the result, how it fits into the monks' way of life: the one's building the cells are far enough away from the original settlement so as to have a large measure of peace and quiet, but they are within the walking distance of an afternoon (let it not be said that these monks are lazy and out of shape! a twelve-mile walk between 3:00 p.m. and sundown...) and so will not be so remote as to be practically cut off. Thus Abba Amoun and Abba Anthony set an example of doing all things with prayer and counsel and in not relying on their own wisdom.

The custom of planting a cross on a site where a church or monastery will be built remains a living custom in the Church to this day. When we have the official groundbreaking ceremony for our new church, God-willing about the time of our tenth anniversary in July, we shall plant a cross on the spot to claim it for its holy purpose. *Fr. Justin Frederick*

Pastoral Visit From the Metropolitan

As Metropolitan Jonah will be with us this Wednesday evening, a few pointers are in order. When the Metropolitan is present, we take blessings from him instead of the priest in the same way we usually do: we bow (without making the sign of the cross), cross our hands with right over left, and say, "Your Beatitude, bless", or "Vladyka, bless." After he blesses us with the sign of the Cross, we kiss his hand. We stand when he enters the room and do not sit until he indicates. When taking leave of him, we ask his blessing as we did in greeting him. Everyone should make it a point personally to receive his blessing at least once in the course of the evening.

After Vespers and Compline, His Beatitude will most likely address us. We also plan to have some refreshments, and, if His Beatitude so grants, we'll have an opportunity for a sessions of question and answer.

When you address the Metropolitan to ask a questions or for any other reason, you say either "Your Beatitude" or "Vladyka".

At the end of Vespers, we'll sing "eis polla eti despota", which means "Many years, Master."

If a deacon is present, he is addressed as "Father Deacon." A bishop is addressed as "Your Grace," an archbishop as "Your Eminence", a Metropolitan as "Your Beatitude", and a Patriarch as "Your Holiness". To confuse matters for you, the Greeks

reverse the order of precedence of Archbishop and Metropolitan, with Archbishop being a higher title to be addressed as we would address our Metropolitan.

Services of the Week Before Nativity

All the services scheduled this week before Nativity are services of the Forefeast. This means that they look forward to the Feast and help prepare us for it. After nearly a month's bombardment of carols and decorations in the world, we do well to take advantage of these services of the Church to prepare ourselves for the Feast in an Orthodox manner. The services will help support our fasting for the last and strictest week of the fast. Please note that abundant opportunities for Confession remain before Nativity, and other times may be scheduled by agreement with the priest. *No regular communicant older than age 7 may continue communing who has not been to Confession during the Fast.* Irregular communicants should make every effort to partake of the Holy Mysteries at this time of year. Please see your priest if you have any questions.

Holy Supper

The Holy Supper is a tradition of the Carpatho-Russian peoples. Held on Nativity Eve, the last day of the 40-day Nativity Fast, it is a strict lenten meal: no meat, dairy, or other animal products are eaten.

In the old country, the Holy Supper was a family affair held in the home at dark, and after the meal, the family went to the Nativity Vigil at church, which was served about 10:00 p.m.

At the supper itself, first, the bread is broken—no knives are used at the Holy Supper. Then a piece of garlic is dipped in salt, symbolizing the bitterness of life. The bread is then dipped in honey, symbolizing the sweetness of life and the Bread of Life. The garlic, bread, and honey are eaten together first. The other dishes are then eaten. With twelve dishes, the Holy Supper appears to be a feast rather than a lenten meal. In fact, only small portions of the food are eaten. It is also customary that one eats a portion of each dish whether one likes it or not—at least one bite!

“Perverse Thoughts Separate Men from God” Part Three

From Elder Paisios in “Elder Paisios of the Holy Mt.”

Looking at this subject from a different point of view, Elder Paisios stressed and greatly emphasized the specific characteristic of love, that is, that “love is not irritable or resentful.” He used to say that “we should never, even under the worst circumstances, allow a negative thought to penetrate our soul. The person, who, under all circumstances, is inclined to have positive thoughts, will always be a winner; his life will be a constant festivity, since it is constantly based on his positive thinking. Our acts depend on and are determined by the “machine” we have inside us, and not by the “material” we digest, or the

environment we live in. I will give you an example, so you can better understand what I am trying to say:

If one has a machine that produces bullets and feeds it with the highest quality material—let's say gold—the machine will still convert gold into bullets, golden but destructive bullets; if he feeds it with silver, then it will produce silver bullets; if he feeds it with iron, it will produce iron bullets, or if he feeds it with clay, it will produce clay bullets. In other words, no matter what material he feeds his machine, it still produces bullets, because it was made to manufacture these destructive products. If someone converts the machine into one that produces holy chalices instead of bullets, then whatever material he feeds it, it will always produce holy chalices. If he puts in the machine iron or clay, it will manufacture clay or iron chalices respectively.

I will now tell you a story regarding a very old father from Kapsala. The old father's “machine” was the kind that produced only positive thoughts. He only saw the good things in life, and he was blind to every evil. Once, a group of people visited him and brought him a small radio as a present. The old father took it in his hands and examined it with lots of admiration. He asked where it was manufactured, and the visitors told him in Japan. As he was looking at it, suddenly he was filled with joy and started kissing the radio saying: “Glory to God!”

The visitors asked him why he was glorifying God, and he explained to them, “You see, I am very pleased that the Japanese Christians put the sign of the Holy Cross on the products they manufacture.”

The old father had noticed the positive and negative poles (+, -) of the batteries and thought it was the sign of the Cross. His mind produced a simplistic and positive thought for the radio the visitors brought him. Considering he was an ascetic, he could have developed negative thoughts and get angry at them for bringing him such an unsuitable present.

Someone asked the same father why he was making the sign of the Cross when he saw an airplane. And he simply answered: “Don't you see, my child, that its shape looks like the sign of our Holy Cross?”

The old father ignored the negative thoughts associated with the sight of an airplane, such as wars and bombing. His mind was attracted by the similarity of its shape to the sign of the Holy Cross; the sight and noise of the airplane made him think of the crucifixion of Christ.... *To be continued...*

Upcoming Events 2010-2011

- 22 December: Wednesday, 7:00 p.m. Metropolitan Jonah visits at Vespers.
- 24 December: Nativity Eve Vigil & Holy Supper.
- 6 March 2011: Sunday, 6:00 p.m. Forgiveness Vespers
- 24 April 2011: Pascha

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!