

The Confessor's Tongue for March 27, A. D. 2011

Third Sunday of the Fast: Veneration of the Precious Cross

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.

Third Sunday of Lent

In the services for this Sunday the Holy Church glorifies the holy cross and the fruits of the death of the Savior on the cross. During Vigil, she will carry out the holy cross into the middle of the temple for veneration, and is why the Sunday is called the Veneration of the Cross.

The purpose of instituting the Holy Cross in the service on the third Sunday will be revealed as a beautiful comparison by the Holy Church to the tree of life in paradise, the tree which sweetened the bitter waters of Marah, the tree with the canopy of leaves under whose shade tired travelers seeking the eternal promised land may find coolness and rest. Thus, the Holy Church offers the Holy Cross for spiritual reinforcement to those going through the ascetic effort of the fast, just as food, drink and rest serve as bodily reinforcement. This spiritual reinforcement is given as the representation of the love of God to man for whom the Son of God turned Himself over to death on the cross. It is especially necessary in the middle of our effort because now our ascetic efforts already have lost much of the freshness of its power and however yet cannot hopefully enliven itself for the near and successful ending of our ascetical effort. Having concentrated all that is the most severe and sorrowful in the worship services of the previous weeks, especially during the first, that may both frighten the sinner and apparently touch the hardest of human hearts, now in the middle of the large and difficult arena of the Holy Forty Day Fast the Holy Church offers the Holy Cross for great comfort and encouragement as needed for raising the flagging strength of those fasting. Wherefore nothing can both console, encourage, and inspire the fatigued, or perhaps even the Christian weakened in spirit so much as the presentation of the eternal divine love of the Savior who turned Himself over to the struggle on the cross for the sake of our salvation.

By this holy armor of the cross Christ the Lord has terminated the all-consuming bowels of Hades and blocked the many snares in the mouth of the devil. Having seen the cross, death trembled and released everyone whom she possessed with the first creature. Armed with the cross, the God-bearing apostles subdued all the power of the enemy and caught all peoples in their dragnets, and gathered them for the worship of the One Crucified. Clothed in the cross as in armor, the martyrs of Christ trampled all the plans of torturers and preached with plainness the Divine Cross-bearer. . . .

Therefore on the forehead, and on the eyes, and on the mouth, and on the breasts let us place the life-giving Cross. Let us arm them with the invincible armor of Christians, with this hope of the faithful, with this gentle light. . . . Let us not forget the Cross,

neither for one hour, nor for one instant, nor let us begin to do anything without it. . . let us adorn all our members with the life-giving Cross. *Bulgakov, Handbook for Church Servers, Translated by Archpriest Eugene D. Tarris © March 6, 2004. All rights reserved.*

Parish Fundraising

Beyond our normal operations funded by our tithes, St. Maximus has five other opportunities for giving to develop our parish, listed in order of priority.

First, our hall expansion. This will give us a thousand square feet for coffee hour, for large meetings, for wedding receptions, and the like. It will allow us to reserve the church for prayer and worship as is proper. It will also permit us to convert the current hall (coffee hour room) into a kitchen. We need to raise about \$10,000 more for this project.

Second, we are raising money to beautify the outside of our building. Soda sales are the only ongoing means of raising money for this, but there is an opportunity to give to see the outside of our building repaired and beautified as the front porch has been. It would be wonderful to do another section of the front of the building, that over the front porch, before our anniversary. That would probably cost a good \$2000. We have about \$200.

Third, we continue to raise money for building a new church. We have some \$57,000 or more on hand, but we'll need at least \$250,000 for the church, parking lot, and landscaping.

Fourth, when the priest's family finally moves down the street in the next couple months, the church will need its own Macintosh computer and printer, as Fr. Justin will be taking his with him.

Lastly, there is the list of "liturgical needs:" that was recently put out. There are liturgical items that will enhance and beautify our worship. While none of them are needs in the strict sense of the word (i.e., we can't do without them), they are things we wish to work towards.

Some of these items may seem large and intimidating. But a few dollars regularly given adds up to many.

"We That Are Strong Ought to Bear the Infirmities of the Weak"

Homily of Met. Anthony of Surozh, 14 August 1983

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost.

In his Epistle to the Romans (15:1-7) St. Paul calls all Christians to be the strength and the support of those who are weak. St. Paul says to each of us and to all the Christian community: You who are strong support those who are weak.

This must make us ponder. Are we to be called strong as contrasted with anyone else? Don't we realise, each of us, how frail and how weak we are? Don't we feel that, whatever desire we have to be God's own people, we have no strength and no power to achieve our human and our Christian vocation? And at this point we must remember another saying of St. Paul; he too felt that he was weak, that he did not possess all the strength he needed to fulfil his apostolate, and he prayed the Lord to give him strength. The Lord answered him and said: My strength makes itself manifest in weakness

(2 Cor. 12:9). And St. Paul, having understood what that meant, exclaims: So I shall glory in nothing but my weakness, because then all will be an act of God.

But this weakness is not cowardice, timidity, sloth, laziness: everything that could be called inertia and that prevents us from doing those things which we believe to be right, which our heart longs for, which our mind understands to be the best, the holiest, and yet which our will is incapable of bringing into operation. It is a different weakness; rather the awareness that we cannot achieve the greatness to which we are called unless God helps us. Because we are all called to be the sons and the daughters of the Most High, to be God's own children; indeed, by adoption, but once adopted, to be as completely and perfectly God's children as the Only-begotten Son of God was the Son of God.

But what does it mean that we should support, help, uphold those who are weak? Perhaps we can find the beginning of an answer in today's Gospel (Matthew 9:27-35). Christ was confronted with the blind man. He gave him sight. We are surrounded by people who are blind — not physically, but in so many ways, people who need to acquire a vision and sight which would allow them to grow to the full measure of their stature and to be truly happy. Not in the superficial sense of enjoying the good things of life that leave us all hungry and full of longing, but with another happiness.

What are the things to which we can open the eyes of others? First of all, make people around us see how great they are, how important they are to God. Each of us was not only willed, but loved into existence by God. Each of us means so much to God that He gave His Only-begotten Son for our salvation: all His Life, His Passion and His Death. This is what each of us, all human beings in the world, mean to God. This is what so few realise — that they are infinitely precious, with the infinity of God. Also, that there is in them this hunger, and the hunger is too great for the things of this created world to satisfy. Only God can fill them; but in order to see God, have we not heard, Sunday after Sunday, read time and again, the words of Christ "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God"? So we must call every person around us to venerate, to reverence his own purity and to fight for the purity of his mind,

the purity of his heart, the purity of his life, so that becoming gradually less opaque, then translucent, then perfectly transparent, the mind and the heart of man can perceive God.

At this point, everyone can turn to us and say "Physician, heal thyself." And indeed we can help others only if we ourselves struggle and strive to be great with the purity that allows us to set God, with the greatness of God, of the Only-begotten Son become the Son of men. There are many other things which we may discover which are forms of blindness in us and in others. Whenever we discover them, we must help others to discern them, because even if we ourselves are not truly capable of being what we should be, at our words others may achieve what we are too slack or too weak, to do.

And so it is also with the man who was deprived of speech. How many, how many are speechless before the greatness of God and the beauty of their own selves? There is no way of discovering who and what God is unless we discover holiness and beauty in us. A Russian preacher said once "When God looks at us He does not see the virtues or the achievements which are not there; He sees the eternal beauty which He has implanted in each of us."

This is our message to every person, and this is the message of every person to us: reverence, love, fulfil this beauty, become great! And then we will have done what St. Paul calls us to do in today's Epistle: we will have supported those who are frail and weak, not with our strength, but with the strength of God, because all things are possible in the Spirit of God that upholds us. Amen.

Lenten Notes

On the five Sundays of the Great Fast, instead of the usual Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom the older Liturgy of St. Basil the Great is served. Besides these five Sundays, it is also served twice during Holy Week on Holy Thursday and Holy Saturday, on the eves of Nativity and Theophany, and on January 1, the Feast of St. Basil. Its anaphora is a complete summation of what God has done for our salvation, and the intercession offered in it for the Church and world is most detailed. We shall be examining it in a few weeks at Basics Class.

Upcoming Events 2011

- 29 March, Tuesday: St. Maria Study Group meets at Anna Stokes' to read St. Basil the Great's Homily "I Will Tear Down My Barns", 8:00 p.m.
- 13 April, Wednesday, 9:30 – 1:30 St. Maximus's next time to work at "Our Daily Bread" the local soup kitchen.
- 24 April: Holy Pascha: The Feast of Feasts!
- 7 May: Church Yard Sale
- 30 May: Memorial Day Picnic
- 28-31 July: Ten-Year Anniversary Celebration

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!