

The Confessor's Tongue for May 29, A. D. 2011

Sixth Sunday of Pascha: Healing of the Blind Man, Martyr Theodosia

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.

May 29: Martyr Theodosia

After the prayers of her barren mother, she was born in Constantinople and when she was 8 years old she entered the women's Monastery of St. Anastasia. After the death of her parents, Theodosia used the remainder of her inheritance to aid the poor and for the adornment of temples, but as for herself she lived in poverty, abiding in fasting and prayer. When warriors according to an edict of the iconoclastic Patriarch Anastasius wanted to remove the copper icon of the Savior which was over the gates of Constantinople, Theodosia and other nuns decided to protect the holy things and toppled the ladder placed before the gates with a warrior on it. For this zeal she was subjected to cruel tortures from which she later died in prison in 730. *Bulgakov*

Sixth Sunday of Pascha: Blind Man

According to the teaching of St. Tikhon of Zadonsk, "as physical darkness is for the eyes, so is a sin for the human soul". The spiritual darkness so darkens and blinds the eyes of the soul, that the sinner walks like the blind: he doesn't know where the path leads him; he doesn't see before him the torment of an eternal death in which he might fall; he doesn't distinguish vice from virtue, evil from good, truth from lies, true good fortune from evil fortune, and, thus, seeing he does not see and acts by touching like the blind.

Does he live in good fortune? He becomes violent, as an untrained and unrestrained horse, and does not see that with this good fortune God draws him to Himself as a father of a little child draws an apple. Will misfortune visit him? He grumbles, is indignant and blames, that as if he told a lie; he makes complaints and says a malicious word: "Am I a liar? In what have I sinned? Am I really more sinful than others? Am I worthy of this? Does my work deserve this?" "He justifies himself, being full of every kind of untruth; he cleanses himself, being all besmirched; he considers himself unworthy of temporal punishment, but worthy of the eternal; he praises his merits, which stand for nothing". "All of creation, the heaven, the sun, the moon, the stars, the earth and its fulfillment, as if by mouth "tells of the glory of God" (Psalm 16:2); but the blind sinner does not feel the majesty of His glory and does not tremble". "God, both through creation and by His word, reveals Himself for everyone; but the sinner, like a deaf person, does not hear His word and does not recognize the Lord. He hears the name of God, but he does not recognize God: he hears the voice of the Lord only with carnal instead of spiritual ears, and therefore, hearing he does not hear and seeing he does not see.

When God is preached by His holy word, then His sacred will is also preached; but the sinner doesn't know it and does not make it his own. His omnipotence and majesty is preached, before which the sinner is not humble. His righteousness is preached before which the sinner is not afraid and does not honor. His truth is preached before which the sinner does not believe. His omnipresence is preached, before which the sinner does not show reverence. He does not show it because does not recognize Him. His most wise reason is preached, in which the sinner does not discern. His highest holiness is preached which the sinner does not honor. His supreme authority is preached which the sinner does not obey. His awesome glory is preached which the sinner does not honor. His timeless goodness is preached, in which the sinner makes no effort to participate. His fearful judgment is preached before which the sinner does not tremble, and so forth.

Thus, the sinner is like "the man out of his mind who cannot know, and the stupid cannot understand (LXX Psalm 91:7)" God and the acts of God. "And not only in relation to God, but also in relation to his neighbor, i.e. to any human, the blind man is a carnal and unenlightened man. We see that a person does evil to his neighbor, which he himself does not want; and does not do good to him, which he himself wants. We see that he is indignant and angry at the one who offends him, he abuses, abases, blames, discredits, lies about him, steals, kidnaps, takes away that which it his, and does other offenses; but he himself does such evil, or repays evil with evil, is not ashamed and does not sense this.

On the other hand, he wants his neighbor to be merciful to him and not leave him in need, for example: to quench his thirst and to give him drink when he thirsts, clothe the naked, welcome the stranger into his home and to comfort the sick and visit those in prison and do other works of mercy for him, all of this he wants; this truth is indisputable; but he himself does not want to do the same for a neighbor.

We see that this evil is self-love, an untruth and blindness in Christians, who either silently pass by his neighbors living in misery as if not seeing them, or is ashamed to ask: what can I do for him? Many have plentiful food and a magnificent table for themselves, but do not care about a hungry neighbor; others wear all kinds of expensive clothes, and do not care about their naked neighbor; others build rich, large and tall houses and decorate the rest of the building, but for their neighbor who does not have a place to lay his head and to rest they do not care; they have silver, gold and other riches, comfortable for soul and life, that is kept whole and is saved, but there is no care for their neighbor who is burdened with debt and it is torment or prison for him for his shortfalls or sitting

debts and suffering. We see this self-love and untruth in Christians: for not only they do evil, but also they don't do good for their neighbors, there is the untruth. But, what it is even worse, we see that many Christians are not ashamed and are not afraid to steal, to kidnap and to be cunning, to flatter, to lie, to deceive, to slander, to scandalize, to denounce, to abuse, to commit adultery and make other offenses against their neighbor that they themselves would not want. All this comes from blindness ".S. V. Bulgakov, *Manual for Church Servers*, Translation: Archbishop Eugene D. Tarris © All rights reserved.

The Ascension of Our Lord

The Great Feast of the Ascension is commemorated on the fortieth day after Pascha, which always falls on a Thursday. It has a post-feast of nine days, concluding on the Friday before Pentecost.

It is preceded on Wednesday by the Leavetaking of Pascha, which marks the end of the forty-day Paschal season. On the Leavetaking of Pascha, all the services of the Church are celebrated similarly to how they were celebrated on Pascha itself. (This is true in general of the Great Feasts.)

The Ascension marks the end of our Lord's earthly work and his triumphal return to Heaven.

On a deeper level, the Ascension marks the first entrance of human nature into God's Kingdom in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. Christ's glorification in the Ascension is also our glorification, for it is the elevation of human nature. Man's nature now shares Divine honor as Christ our brother enters Heaven in human form. The Feast leads us to consider seriously the nature of our true home in God's plan of salvation. Too often we think of the Kingdom of God as an afterlife, a postscript to our existence in this world. In reality, our true home is not on this fallen planet, but in the perfect and eternal Heavenly Kingdom. As St. Paul writes to the Colossians:

If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory. (*Colossians 3:1-4*)

Our life is hidden with Christ in God in heaven.

It is there and there alone where God desires us to live in common union with Him to its fullest. If we indeed have the vocation to become saints, to share in the Divine nature, we must be prepared to inhabit the abode God has prepared for us, which was first experienced in the flesh by our Lord Jesus Christ after His Ascension. Our Lord has prepared the way for us to participate fully in God's Divine plan for our salvation. Let us glorify Him for establishing us as heirs to the Heavenly Kingdom and prepare ourselves in holiness to become worthy citizens of it.

St. John Chrysostom proclaims in his homily on the Feast, "Today, the human race is completely

reconciled with God. The ancient battle and enmity have disappeared. We, who were unworthy to live even on earth, are now lifted up to Heaven. Today, we become heirs to the Kingdom of Heaven, we, who do not even deserve earth, we ascend to heaven and inherit the throne of the King and Lord. Human nature, against which the cherubim guarded paradise, is now raised up above all the cherubim."

During the nine days of the Ascension, we say or sing the troparion and kontakion of the Feast at meals and during our usual morning and evening prayers.

Ascension, Troparion, tone 4

Thou hast ascended in glory, O Christ our God, / granting joy to Thy disciples by the promise of the Holy Spirit. / Through the blessing they were assured / that Thou art the Son of God, / the Redeemer of the world.

Ascension, Kontakion, tone 6

When Thou didst fulfill the dispensation for our sake, / and unite earth to heaven; / Thou didst ascend in glory, O Christ our God, / not being parted from those who love Thee, / but remaining with them and crying: / I am with you and no one will be against you!

Paschal Notes

The prayer "O Heavenly King" is not said at home or in church during this season until Pentecost, June 12.

From Pascha until the kneeling prayers of Vespers on Pentecost Sunday, we do not kneel or make prostrations in church in keeping with the joyful, festal character of the season.

This Wednesday of the Leavetaking of Pascha is the last day to greet each other with "Christ is Risen!" "Indeed, He is Risen!".

From Elder Epiphanius of Greece

The Elder urged a certain spiritual child of his who worked until late at night and would not go to vigils: "My child, look a little upward. Not all downward, on the earthly things. Look at your soul a bit, too."

"Father," he persisted, "I don't have time, I don't have the opportunity."

Once that youth became ill, and the Elder visited him in the hospital. As soon as he saw the youth lying in the bed, he put the index finger of his hand on his temple, telling him: "Do you remember what I was telling you?"

The youth replied, "You were right, Elder."

"Now you must look upward against your will," continued Fr. Epiphanius. "When you become well, you will look up of your own will."

Upcoming Events 2011

30 May: Memorial Day Picnic

28-31 July: Ten-Year Anniversary Celebration

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!