

The Confessor's Tongue for August 14, A. D. 2011

Ninth Sunday After Pentecost: Prophet Micah; Forefeast of Dormition

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.

Dormition of the Most-Holy Theotokos

August 15

This feast, celebrated on August 15, is the last Great Feast of the liturgical year, which ends on August 31. The Dormition refers to the "falling asleep" or death of the Theotokos.

According to the ancient tradition of the Church, when it came time for the Theotokos to pass from this life to the Kingdom, an angel appeared to her three days before her death to inform her of this passage. The Virgin made preparations for her death, ascending the Mount of Olives to pray and give thanks to the Lord. Meanwhile, the Holy Apostles were miraculously carried away from where each had been to the house of the Theotokos. There, they prayed with her, and she committed her soul to her Son and God. The Apostles laid her body to rest in a tomb in the valley of Kedron near Gethsemane. By God's providence, Thomas arrived late, on the third day after her death. He was grieved that he had missed Mary's last moments, and so he wanted to see her one last time and venerate her body. The other Apostles took him to the tomb and had it opened. Inside, they discovered her body missing and the empty grave clothes. In this way, they realized she had already partaken of the Resurrection.

The focus of the Dormition Feast is the glorification of the Holy Theotokos in death and her participation in the Christ's Resurrection before the day of the general resurrection. This shows her to have reached man's goal of perfect life in union with God. The feast is also eschatological in that it points to the victory over death that every faithful believer will gain.

In commemorating the Theotokos' repose or death, Dormition is akin to the feast of any other saint. It differs, however, in that it affirms her bodily resurrection and her participation in the life of the age to come. Though affirmed in the hymnology and by many of the Fathers, this belief in Mary's "assumption" is not dogma in the Orthodox Church, though by papal decree in 1950, it is dogma for Roman Catholics.

We celebrate the Dormition for 8 days, from August 15 through the Leave-taking August 23. We add the festal troparion and kontakion to our regular morning and evening prayers, in place of our usual prayers before and after meals, and when setting out to travel.

It is customary to bless herbs and flowers on this feast.

Troparion, tone 1

In giving birth, thou didst preserve thy virginity, / in falling asleep thou didst not forsake the world, O Theotokos. / Thou wast translated to life, O thou

who art the Mother of Life, // and by thy prayers thou dost deliver our souls from death.

Kontakion, tone 2

Neither the tomb nor death could hold the Theotokos, / who is constant in prayer and our firm hope in her intercessions. / For being the Mother of Life, she was translated to life / by the One who dwelt in her virginal womb.

The Church Porch 49-54 (On Speech)

George Herbert

In thy discourse, if thou desire to please:
All such is courteous, useful, new, or witty.
Usefulness comes by labor, wit by ease;
Courtesy grows in court; news in the city.

Get a good stock of these, then draw the card
That suits him best, of whom thy speech is heard.

Entice all neatly to what they know best;
For so thou dost thyself and him a pleasure:
(But a proud ignorance will lose his rest,
Rather than show his cards) steal from his treasure.
What to ask further. Doubts well raised do lock
The speaker to thee, and preserve thy stock.

If thou be Master-gunner, spend not all
That thou canst speak, at once; but husband it,
And give men turns of speech: do not forestall
By lavishness thine own, and others' wit,
As if thou mad'st thy will. A civil guest
Will not more talk all, than eat all the feast.

Be calm in arguing: for fierceness makes
Error a fault, and truth discourtesy.
Why should I feel another man's mistakes
More than his sickness or poverty?
In love I should: but anger is not love,
Nor wisdom neither: therefore gently move.

Calmness is great advantage: he that lest
Another chafe, may warm him at his fire:
Mark all his wand'rings, and enjoy his frets;
As cunning fencers suffer heat to tire.
Truth dwells not in the clouds: the bow that's
there,
Doth often aim at, never hit the sphere.

Mark what another says: for many are
Full of themselves, and answer their own notion.
Take all into thee; then with equal care
Balance each dram of reason, like a potion.
If truth be with thy friend, be with them both:
Share in the conquest, and confess a troth.

St. Nicholas of Zicha On Happiness

From *Prayers by the Lake*

Are there days gone by, O man, to which you would wish to return? They all attracted you like silk, and now remain behind you like a cobweb. Like honey they greeted you, like stench you bade them farewell. All were totally filled with illusion and sin.

See how all the pools of water in the moonlight resemble mirrors; and how all the days that were lit up with you levity resemble mirrors. But as you stepped from one day to the next, the false mirrors cracked like thin ice, and you waded through the water and mud.

Can a day that has a morning and an evening as doorways be a day?

O luminous Lord, my soul is burdened with illusions and longs for one day—for the day without doorways, the day from which my soul has departed and sunk into the shifting shadows—for Your day, which I used to call my day, when I was one with You.

Is there any happiness gone by, O man, to which you would wish to return? Of two morsels of the same sweetness, the second is the more trite. You would turn your head away in boredom from yesterday's happiness, if it were set out on today's table.

Moments of happiness are given to you only in order to leave you longing for true happiness in the bosom of the every-happy Lord; and ages of unhappiness are given to you, to waken you out of the drowsy dream of illusions.

O Lord, Lord, my only happiness, will You provide shelter for Your injured pilgrim?

O Lord, my ageless youth, my eyes shall bathe in You and shine more radiantly than the sun.

You carefully collect the tears of the righteous, and with them You rejuvenate worlds.

Stewardship: Tipping & Tithing

Now it came to pass on a day at noon that the writer of this piece was a guest of a certain rich man. And the lunch was enjoyed at a popular restaurant. And the waiters were very efficient. And the food was good. Now when the end of the meal was at hand, the waiter brought unto the host the check. And the host examined it, frowned a bit, but made no comment.

But as we arose to depart, I observed that he laid some coins under the edge of his plate. I know not what denomination the coins were, although the waiter, who stood nearby, smiled happily, which, being interpreted, means that the tip was satisfactory.

Now this parable enters not into the merits or demerits of tipping. But as I meditated on the coins that become tips throughout our nation, I began to think of tips and tithes. For the proverbial tip should be at least a tenth of the check (preferably 15% or more), lest the waiter turn against you.

And as I continued to think on these things, it came unto me that few people who go to church treat

God as well as they honor their waiter. For they give unto the waiter a tithe or more, but unto God they give whatsoever they think will get them by, if at all.

Truly, does man fear the waiter more than he fears God? And does he love God less than he loves the waiter? Or does the waiter do more for him than God? Truly a man and his money are past understanding! *A 20th Century Christian in Where Moth and Rust Do Not Consume: An Anthology on Christian Giving*, by Rev. Anthony Coniaris.

The Curse of Withholding Alms

It was told us at the monastery of St. Theodosius the Great that it used to be the custom for the poor and orphans of the region to come here on Holy Thursday to receive half a peck of grain or five loaves of blessed bread, five small coins, a pint of wine, and half a pint of honey. For three years prior to the event which we are about to relate, grain had been scarce and, in this area, it was selling at one piece of gold for two pecks. When the Great Fast came round, some of the brethren said to the hegumen: "Abba, do not make provision for the customary dole to the poor this year, sir, lest the monastery not have enough for the brethren—for grain is not to be found." The abba began to say to the brethren: "Children, let us not discontinue the charity of our father Theodosius [the founder]. Behold, it is his commandment, and it would be held against us if we disobeyed it. It is he himself who will look after us."

But the brethren continued to argue with the abba, saying: "We cannot give the accustomed charity, for we do not have anything to give." Then the hegumen was deeply grieved: "Go then and do what you will." The customary charity therefore was not distributed that Holy Thursday. But on Holy Friday morning, the brother in charge of the granary opened up and found that what grain they did possess had germinated. So they ended up throwing it all into the sea.

Then the abba began to say to the brethren: "He who sets aside the commandments of his father suffers these afflictions. You are now reaping the fruits of disobedience. We were going to part with five hundred pecks of grain and, in doing so, to serve our father Theodosius by our obedience; also to bring consolation to our brethren the poor. Now about five thousand pecks [1250 bushels] of grain has gone to ruin. What good has it done us, brethren? We have twice been guilty of wrong-doing: once in that we transgressed the precept of our father; and again in that we did not put our trust in God but in our granary. So let us learn from this, my brethren, that God watches over all humanity; and that Saint Theodosius invisibly cares for us, his children."

Upcoming Events 2011

15 August: Dormition of the Theotokos

16 August-15 September: Fr. Justin on vacation

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!