

The Confessor's Tongue for October 30, A. D. 2011

Twentieth Sunday After Pentecost: Martyrs Zenobius & Zenobia

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.

October 23: James Brother of the Lord

Holy Martyrs Zenobius and His Sister Zenobia suffered for Christ in Cilicia in 285. St. Zenobius and his sister Zenobia since youth were brought up in the fear of God. After death of their parents, they distributed their estate to the poor and began to lead a life in the asceticism of piety. St. Zenobius for his virtuous life was installed as the Bishop of Aegea and zealously spread the Christian faith among the pagans, healing the infirm by the power of God. For his confession of Christ he was subjected to cruel tortures. His sister, St. Zenobia, seeing his suffering voluntarily confessed herself a Christian woman. After torture both brother and sister were beheaded by the sword. liturgies. *V. Bulgakov, Handbook for Church Servers. Translated by Archpriest Eugene D. Tarris © All rights reserved.*

The OCA All-American Council 2012

The All-American Council, consisting of the bishops, clergy and lay delegates from each parish and institution, and sundry, meets every three years. It approves the budget for the so-called "National Church", amends the statute of the OCA as needed, passes or rejects resolutions, and provides an opportunity for the Church in America to gather together, worship together, and be renewed in common vision.

This year, a draft of a strategic plan to set priorities for the next ten years is before us. It treats the identity of the OCA, assesses where it is, its strengths and weaknesses, and presents ten top-level goals and steps to achieving them. The delegates to the AAC are divided up into working groups among these ten goals. Your priest will be on the group working on finding a sounder way to fund the Church; your lay delegate will be on the theological education group. We shall meet in these groups at least three times to hammer out the proper formulation of each goal and how to achieve it.

We shall hear reports from the officers of the central Church on finances, relations with other Orthodox Churches, ecumenical relations with non-Orthodox groups, and administrative matters.

We shall consider several resolutions. Two are limited in scope: one seeks to modify the statute of the OCA in order to clarify the definition of a parishioner for purposes of participating in parish meetings and being eligible for office; another clarifies an ambiguity relating to the term of office of members of the Metropolitan Council.

A third resolution could have significant effect: it proposes reducing the national Church's assessment (also known as the "head tax") from \$105 to \$50. Each parish is expected to pay this assessment on each adult member (ages 18 and up) who is in 'good standing'. The goal of the resolution is to move the central administration away from the head tax and

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move towards proportional giving (such as the tithe) to which they have been paying lip service for years toward which they have done nothing. The central administration is resisting this and claiming they can't function on the lowered rate.

The Council also elects representatives to certain church-wide offices. Documents for the council may be found online at oca.org, and it is reported that sessions may be heard on Ancient Faith Radio.

On the Profit in Reading the Scriptures

St. John Chrysostom

For, tell me, who of you that stand here, if he were required, could repeat one Psalm, or any other portion of the Divine Scriptures? There is not one.

And it is not this only that is the grievous thing, but that while ye are become so backward with respect to things spiritual, yet in regard of what belongs to Satan ye are more vehement than fire. Thus should any one be minded to ask of you songs of devils and impure effeminate melodies, he will find many that know these perfectly, and repeat them with much pleasure.

But what is the answer to these charges? "I am not," you will say, "one of the monks, but I have both a wife and children, and the care of a household." Why, this is what hath ruined all, your supposing that the reading of the divine Scriptures appertains to [monks] only, when ye need it much more than they. For the that dwell in the world, and each day receive wounds, these have the most need of medicines. So that it is far worse than not reading, to account the thing even "superfluous:" for these are the words of diabolical invention. Hear ye not Paul saying, "that all these things are written for our admonition?" ...

For if thou wouldest learn how great is the profit of the Scriptures, examine thyself, what thou becomest by hearing Psalms, and what by listening to a song of Satan; and how thou art disposed when standing in a Church, and how when sitting in a theatre; and thou wilt see that great is the difference between this soul and that, although both be one. Therefore Paul said, "Evil communications corrupt good manners." For this cause we have need continually of those songs, which serve as charms from the Spirit. Yes, for this it is whereby we excel the irrational creatures, since with respect to all other things, we are even exceedingly inferior to them.

Preparing for the Nativity Fast

The Nativity Fast, the 40-day period of preparation for the Nativity of our Lord, begins Tuesday, 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 life in Christ 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 establish a rule for our own effort in the fast before it is upon us. The Nativity Fast can be difficult as the surrounding world parties in the time leading up 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 or the Jesus Prayer as part of our formal rule. We may use the Lenten Prayer of St. Ephrem if we desire. For some, the effort may be to overcome sloth and inconsistency in prayer by setting particular times to fulfill their rule and then striving to keep it with God's help. We should strive to develop a more constant awareness of God throughout the day by the use of the Jesus Prayer, prayers of the Hours at nine, noon, and three, 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. Also choose a spiritual book to read that will warm the heart and inspire the will to seek God more diligently. The right book can help prayer immensely.

Almsgiving: Almsgiving gives 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, which allows us to help in the name of Christ those who come to our door, but also is used to help brethren within the church who find themselves in need. Now that the upstairs is open, it may be time to resume collections for our own "food pantry" for those in need. Traditionally, we have also chosen a local charity or two to support and during the fast collected the items they need. 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*, Metropliton Hierotheos Vlachos' works, Modern Greek elders such Elder Porphyrios, 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.

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.

Upcoming Events 2011

- 31 October – November 4: All-American Council in Seattle, Washington. Please pray!
- 15 November, Tuesday: Nativity Fast Begins, Pan-Orthodox Unction at St. Seraphim's, Dallas
- 26 February: Forgiveness Sunday (all parishioners are expected to attend)

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!