

The Confessor's Tongue for November 20, A. D. 2011

Twenty-Third Sunday After Pentecost: St. Gregory the Decapolite

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.

November 20: Forefeast, St. Gregory

Today we observe the Forefeast of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple.

Born in the city of Irenopolis, Isauria, Gregory from his youth practiced monasticism. Being an example of abstinence, he was the guide for the Venerable John (see Apr. 18). Enlightening "the world with his teaching" and challenging the "thinking" of "those of evil beliefs", he was granted the gift of wonderworking from the Lord within his lifetime. During the time of persecution against the holy icons he was in Constantinople and here again accused the heretics of their errors. He died about the year 820 in Constantinople.» V. Bulgakov, *Handbook for Church Servers*. Translated by Archpriest Eugene D. Tarris © All rights reserved.

Minor words of the Liturgy: Lord Have Mercy

Archpriest George M. Benigsen

"LORD HAVE MERCY." How frequently these three words are repeated in our churches and in our personal prayers. They are repeated in litanies, which consist of short petitions, each of which ends with the words "Lord have mercy." At evening services and during the reading of the Hours we repeat these words sometimes 3, sometimes 12 and sometimes even 40 times. How marvelous is the score of the Russian composer Lvovsky for the multiple "Lord have mercy" sung at the Elevation of the Cross. And there are many other services during which "Lord have mercy" is repeated many times, insistently, repentantly...

Let us not be disturbed by such frequent repetition of some of our short prayers, in particular the prayer "Lord have mercy." The object of such repetition is to imbue our hearts, our minds, and our souls with the prayer. The aim is to focus our attention on the topic of the prayer, which the Church considers of particular importance for our spiritual growth. This repetition, as leitmotif in music, penetrates our consciousness and remains long in our memory, staying with us even as we leave the church for our everyday existences.

"Lord have mercy." Three words, but what depth of meaning do they hold. First, by calling God "Lord", we confirm His rule over the world, the mankind and, most importantly, over ourselves, over those who speak these words. "Lord" means master, ruler. This is why we call ourselves the "servants" of God. This appellation has nothing offensive about it, as is readily suspected by some of those who would fight the Lord. Servitude by itself is negative as it deprives the human being of the original gift - the gift of freedom. But, as this gift was given to man by God, only in God can man find the plenitude of freedom. It follows, therefore, that service to God is in fact the perfect freedom in God.

Our service to God is far from perfect. Every day, every hour we flee from that blessed Servitude. We flee to where there is neither light, nor love, nor joy, nor life-which we can only find in God. We flee from perfect joy to the bottomless pit of sorrow. Then, we awake spiritually, we return to our senses, we begin to understand that we have nowhere to go, when we flee God, except to death. As King David said: "Whither shall I go from Thy spirit and from Thy countenance whither shall I flee?" We return to God -- some of us after a momentary absence, some after many years of alienation. And, in order to reestablish our filial servitude to Him, the servitude, which we are constantly fleeing, we beg for forgiveness and repeat: have mercy, have mercy.

So there they are, these minor words, these few words of prayer with which we can pray in all places and at all times: "Lord have mercy." It is good to value them, cherish and nurture them. They are our praying beads made up of words and they link our hand with the right hand of the Lord. *Originally broadcasted via Radio Liberty to Russia, Translated from the Russian*

137 Texts on Commandments & Doctrines

St. Gregory of Sinai (Philokalia, volume 4)

14. Many who practice the commandments think they are following the spiritual path. But they have not yet reached the city, and in fact remain outside it. For they travel foolishly, deviating unawares from the straight highway into sideroads, not realizing how close the vices are to the path of virtue. For the true fulfillment of the commandments demands that we do neither too little nor too much but simply pursue a course acceptable to God and in accordance with His will. Otherwise we labor in vain and do not make straight the paths of the Lord (cf. Isa. 40:3). For in everything we do we must be clear about the goal we are pursuing.

17. The essence of the commandments is always to give precedence to the one that embraces them all: mindfulness of God, as stipulated in the phrase, 'Always be mindful of the Lord your God' (cf. Deut. 8:18). Our failure or success in keeping the commandments depends on such mindfulness, for it is this that forgetfulness first destroys when it shrouds the commandments in darkness and strips us of every blessing.

22. To try to discover the meaning of the commandments through study and reading without actually living in accordance with them is like mistaking the shadow of something for its reality. It is only by participating in the truth that you can share in the meaning of truth. If you search for the meaning without participating in the truth and without having been initiated into it, you will find only a besotted kind of wisdom (cf. 1 Cor. 1:20). You

will be among those whom St Jude categorized as 'psychic' or worldly because they lack the Spirit (cf. Jude 19), boast as they may of their knowledge of the truth.

24. The efficacy of the commandments depends on faith working directly in the heart. Through faith each commandment kindles and activates the soul's illumination. The fruits of a true and effective faith are self-control and love, its consummation God-given humility, the source and support of love.

28. Grace-imbued faith energized by the Spirit through our keeping of the commandments, alone suffices for salvation, provided we sustain it and do not opt for a dead and ineffectual faith rather than for a living effective faith in Christ. To embody and give life to an effective faith in Christ all we need to do as believers. But nowadays we who call ourselves orthodox believers have in our ignorance imbibed not the faith imbued with grace but a faith that is merely a matter of words, dead and unfeeling.

Orthodoxy may be defined as the clear perception and grasp of the two dogmas of the faith, namely, the Trinity and the Duality. It is to know and contemplate the three Persons of the Trinity as distinctively and indivisibly constituting the one God, and the divine and human natures of Christ as united in His single Person - that is to say, to know and profess that the single Son, both prior and subsequent to the Incarnation, is to be glorified in two natures, divine and human, and in two wills, divine and human, the one distinct from the other. *St. Gregory of Sinai, 137 Texts, #25.*

The All-Night Vigil

As we know, the Church's celebration of Sunday, the Lord's Day, the day of Resurrection, begins each week on Saturday evening with the celebration of the All-night Vigil. In the Church's mind, this service is an essential part of our worship of God and of our preparation to partake of Christ's Body and Blood.

The All-Night Vigil comprises the daily services of Great Vespers, Matins, and First Hour. It is appointed for the evening before each Great Feast and every Sunday (which is, in effect, a Little Pascha). The feasts of certain saints also call for a Vigil. It is called "all-night" because in ancient times in Palestine where it first developed, it began at sunset and continued through the night until dawn. Later, as the service spread through the Church, out of condescension to the weakness of the faithful, it was abbreviated to begin late in the evening (but before midnight) and to last until morning. Now in normal parish use, it is abbreviated still further, beginning earlier in the evening and lasting but two or three hours. In our parish, it typically lasts two to two and a quarter hours.

Sunday for Christians is the day of the Lord's Resurrection, the day of the Eucharist, and the day of the Lord's Kingdom (the 8th day). The Sunday services communicate these themes. Since the

Liturgical day begins at sunset, each Sunday has its Vespers and Matins before the Divine Liturgy. These services prepare us for the Liturgy. Indeed, the Liturgy may not be served with Vespers or Matins having been served, or at least read privately by the clergy.

Though we may be tempted to think of the "All-Night" Vigil in terms of the quantity of time spent in the service, the primary concept of time contained in the term "vigil" is qualitative. In ancient times, "vigil" referred to time spent on guard duty, or 'keeping watch'. In the Church, it means time spent in attentive preparation and 'waiting on God'. Spiritual life needs time for development. No one can achieve results in one's spiritual life without time. Modern man's spiritual life is in a state of collapse because of his impatience to achieve results. Vigil is taking time seriously. It relates all time to history, specifically to the history of salvation. When God became man, the Kingdom of God appeared in the time of this world. Vigil becomes the time of the proclamation of that kingdom. Vigil takes us back to the beginning of time and prepares us for the end of time, when all things will be fulfilled in the fullness of Christ's kingdom.

Moreover, Christ instructed His disciples to "watch and pray" so that, though they did not know the hour of His return, they might be ready for it. To keep vigil in the historical and ascetic sense is to deprive oneself of a measure of usual sleep to keep watch, waiting in readiness for the coming of the Son of Man at midnight, training oneself to live life in expectation of Christ's coming: first, in the Holy Mysteries at Every Liturgy, and second, in glory to judge the world and inaugurate His Kingdom. To this day in places like Mount Athos, the Vigil is served through the night (for up to eight hours), preserving the ascetical effort and eschatological anticipation of the service.

In parish practice, the two to three-hour service still represents a significant ascetical effort for us, as we stand in readiness, waiting on the Lord and contemplating in the hymns and psalms all that He has done for us, especially His Incarnation, Death on the Cross, and Resurrection. Having stood through the Vigil, our bodies tell us clearly that we have been in church keeping watch, focused on the 'one thing needful' for our lives. Inconvenient and demanding it may be, but it also offers indispensable training in waiting on the Lord and making Him our priority above all else in life. *Fr. Justin Frederick; see it all online, http://stmaximus.org/liturgicalworship_vigil.html*

Upcoming Events 2011-2012

- 21 November: Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple. Vigil on 20th at 6:00p.m. Liturgy 9:00 a.m. on feast.
- 26 February: Forgiveness Sunday (all parishioners are expected to attend) Great Lent Begins
- 15 April: Pascha

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!