

The Confessor's Tongue for August 6, A. D. 2017

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost: Transfiguration of Our Lord

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.

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August 6: Holy Transfiguration

One of the Twelve Great Feasts, the Transfiguration of Our Lord primarily proclaims and glorifies Christ's Divinity. On the mountain with Peter, James, and John, Christ was transfigured before them, shining brighter than the sun and revealing His divinity so far as His disciples could bear it without being consumed. Because Christ's Divinity is made manifest, the feast has also been called "the second Theophany."

Traditionally, the Transfiguration is considered to have taken place forty days before the Crucifixion. The feast was originally appointed for February, falling during the Great Fast, but since the joyfulness of feast was not in keeping with the lenten spirit of penitence and fasting, it was transferred to August 6 to be observed forty days before the Feast of the Elevation of the Holy Cross.

Jesus Christ was fully God and fully man in one person, but He appeared to men who looked only on the external appearance to be only a man, for His Divinity was veiled except to the eye of faith. On Mt. Tabor, the veil was removed, and His Divine glory shone forth. It is the same at the weekly Eucharist at which Christ comes to us in the transformed bread and wine. We see bread and wine, just as the disciples and the people of Israel saw a man; but an infinitely greater reality is present to be perceived by the eyes of faith, the very Body and Blood of our Lord, which is our true food and our healing, and for us constitutes "the sacrament of transfiguration." By this mystery, we ourselves are transformed to become partakers of the Divine Nature.

Thus this Feast not only reveals Christ's Divinity, wrapped in humanity, it also reveals divinized human nature. Christ took our full human nature to transform it, to make us by grace what He is by nature. The Transfiguration reveals what we shall be when we no longer fall short of the glory of God, when we are glorified, or as St. John says, "When we see Him, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is."

The Kontakion of the Feast makes another point: by seeing Christ for who He truly was, the disciples would have no doubt when Jesus was crucified that He died voluntarily, not by compulsion. He chose to lay down His life; it was not taken from Him by force. Without this revelation, they and we might be tempted to think of Jesus as a weak man whose life was unjustly taken from Him by a corrupt state. Jesus Himself is emphatic on this point: "I lay My life down for the sheep . . . I lay down My life that I might take it again. No man taketh it from Me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again." (John 10: 15-18)

It is customary to bless summer fruits at the feast. You are encouraged to bring fresh fruits to be blessed at the end of Vigil and Liturgy.

The Feast is celebrated for eight days through its Leavetaking August 13. We sing or say the Troparion and Kontakion at meals and during our usual prayers during this time.

Troparion, Tone 7

Thou wast transfigured upon the mountain, O Christ God, / showing Thy glory to Thy disciples as far as they could bear it. / Through the prayers of the Theotokos, / make Thine everlasting light shine also upon us sinners. / O Giver of Light, glory to Thee!

Kontakion, Tone 7

Upon the mountain wast Thou transfigured, O Christ God, / and Thy disciples beheld Thy glory as far as they could see it; / so that when they would behold Thee crucified, / they would understand that Thy suffering was voluntary, / and would proclaim to the world / that Thou art truly the Radiance of the Father.

St. Maximus on Transfiguration

The Lord does not always appear in glory to all who stand before Him. To beginners He appears in the form of a servant; to those able to follow Him as He climbs the mountain of His transfiguration He appears in the form of God, the form in which He existed before the world came to be. It is therefore possible for the same Lord not to appear in the same way to all who stand before Him, but to appear to some in one way and to others in another way, according to the measure of faith.

Orthodox Asceticism

The term "asceticism" in the Orthodox Church does not have the narrow sense that has often been given to it in the West. Rather, the word points to what every Christian must accomplish in order to benefit effectively from the salvation wrought by Christ. From the point of view of the great Tradition of the Orthodox Church, the work of salvation appears as a cooperation between divine grace bestowed by the Holy Spirit and the effort each baptized person must make personally in order to be open to this grace and to take hold of it. One makes this effort throughout one's life, at every moment and in every act of existence. Besides this, the Greek word *askesis* means "exercise," "training," and "way of life." In addition, the corresponding Russian words *podvig* and *podvizhnichestvo*, derived from the Slavonic verb *podvizatsya* (meaning 'to move or go forward') translate an eminently dynamic conception of spiritual life. These words make it clear that the spiritual life is conceived of as a process of growth; namely, that of the gradual actualization of the grace received in the sacraments and particularly in

Baptism. Likewise, the process is that of the progressive assimilation of the grace of the Holy Spirit that effectively incorporates the baptized into the dead and resurrection Christ. Such grace allows man to acquire for himself the human nature that is restored and deified in the person of the God-man. *Dr. Jean-Claude Larchet, in Therapy of Spiritual Illness, volume 1, p. 8.*

What Are Podvigs and What Should We Do?

St. Sergius of Kasimov

The time of the fast has come, let's say, Great Lent. For seven weeks, almost fifty days, we may not eat what is non-lenten. The first week, the week of the Cross, and Holy Week are an especially strict fast when even oil is not allowed.

Is this hard? Yes, very, especially at the middle and in the second half of the fast. The flesh shrinks, protests, and demands that we feed it to satiety. But force yourself, take the upper hand over the body, and spend the whole fast as you should. And if you master yourself, then here is your first podvig!

Has the time to pray come? Force yourself—and here is a podvig!

It is time to go to church, but it is hard to do so. Does one thing or another detain you; does one thing or another draw you away? Take up your arms, leave everything and go—and here is a podvig!

In church, are you lacking a desire to pray; is there coldness in your heart? With bows or prostrations, with attentiveness, with effort of will, do your best to overcome this unwillingness—and here is a podvig!

Do you hear mocking of faith, gossip, ridiculing, or idle talk? Turn away, avoid it, or at least be silent—and here is a podvig!

Are you being forced to get angry, to contradict, or to argue? Yield; keep in check the tumult of your agitated heart—and here is a podvig!

Do you have something you cherish, but someone has expressed a desire to have it? Give it away—and here is a podvig!

Do you have enemies; are you able to take revenge on them? Stop; don't take revenge, but that is not enough; forgive them; but even that is not enough, rather: do good to them. This is surely a great podvig! St. Dimitry of Rostov says, "Whoever forgives his enemies and prays for them is a wonderworker, a doer of miracles."

Has an opportunity for an unjust or dishonest gain turned up for you? Turn away—and here is a podvig!

Is your unruly flesh demanding pleasures that are not permitted by the law of Christ, such as unnecessary fine clothing? Refuse it—and here is a podvig!

Is the world calling you out to an amusement, to a game during the fast? Stay home—and here is a podvig!

Do you feel like reading a worldly book, listening to or playing music during a fast? Restraine yourself—and here is a podvig!

Do you live well in the material sense; do you have everything you need and even extra that you are able to store away? Remember the hungry, the barefoot, and the unclothed; look at life around you carefully and seek them out. Satisfy their needs, and don't sigh and be remorseful about what you give them, but do it with joy—and here is a podvig, a brilliant podvig. When you give to a person in need, it is actually Christ who is invisibly stretching out His hand and receiving. And incorruptible wealth will be accumulating for you in heaven.

By all means, without fail, adopt this podvig, it is obligatory for all Christians. At the Dread Judgment, he who has given alms will hear from the Lord, "Come, ye blessed," but he who has not given will hear, "Depart from me, ye cursed." Do not excuse yourself on the grounds of your own lack of means, but remember the two mites of the widow in the Gospel. The Lord said that she gave more than all the rich.

Do you see those who are unfortunate whom you would like to help, but cannot; is it beyond your strength? Then go down on your knees and pray for them to our Heavenly Father in the name of Jesus Christ, and He will give them help through others, and you will have carried out a podvig of love and compassion.

If you see a person who has died, whether you knew him or not, pray for him—and here is a podvig! This brings great mercy to the departed one.

In your morning and evening prayers and in church, when you pray for your departed relatives and acquaintances, remember also all of our forefathers, fathers, and brethren, and especially warmly pray for those who have no one to pray for them—and this is a podvig! And the Lord will note it, and faithful Christians will pray for you when you yourself will have reposed. Do not pass by a cemetery without praying silently and secretly for all those buried there—this is a podvig!

Is there noise, hubbub, the restless bustle of life all around, and nowhere to pray? Go within yourself and repeat over and over the prayer: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner." And not once, not twice, but ten times, a hundred, a thousand times and more say the prayer—and this is a podvig! If you will practice this podvig, the Lord will send you constant, contrite, and tearful prayer of the mind and heart. Remember that true prayer is a gift from heaven to the Christian struggler. *From 'A Spiritual Testament'*

Upcoming Events 2017

- 13 August Summer Feast of St. Maximus
- 15 August Feast of the Dormition of the Theotokos
- 24 September Annual Meeting

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!