ST. MAXIMUS
THE CONFESSOR

The Church’s Mystagogy
Maximus was a staunch defender of Chalcedonian Christology (two physis and one hypostasis) against the heresy of Monothelitism (one divine will). He defense would eventually result in his exile, torture and death as a “heretic.” Maximus died in 622.

The Sixth Ecumenical Council (680-681) restored Maximus to his rightful place as a father and defender of the truth faith.

The 7th century in Byzantium was a time of great upheaval and theological controversy and the Church continued to wrestle with Christological issues. The rise of Islam and its expansion into the heart of the Christendom had an immense impact on the importance of a unified Empire both politically and theologically.

During his lifetime Maximus travelled throughout Byzantium, from Palestine, to North Africa, to Rome, and finally to Constantinople.

The text is a commentary on the nature of the Church and the Eucharistic liturgy. It is dedicated to one “Lord Theocharistus.”

As Maximus notes in the preface the Mystagogy follows in the footsteps of Pseudo-Dionysius’ text The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy. However, Maximus is clear that the purpose of his text is not to repeat what Denys has already said but rather to, “undertake whatever the will of God and his love of man made him leave out” (p61)
The text is divided in three main sections:

1. The Church as Icon/Image (Chapters: 1-7)

2. The Universal mystery of the Divine Liturgy (Chapters: 8-21)

3. The reexamination of the movements of the Divine liturgy, but” in reference to the cognitive soul.” (p96). (Chapters: 22-24)
The Church as Icon/Image

- "It will be shown that God's holy Church, an image conforming to its archetype, does God's work in us." (p.66)
- "A church is thus the image and likeness of man, who was made in the image and likeness of God." (p.77)
- "This blessed and immaculate wedlock is a consummation of that awesome mystery of unity, beyond understanding and reason, through which God will become one flesh and one spirit with His Church, the soul; and the soul with God." (p.80)
- "Perhaps the Church made with hands has been given to us wisely for the soul's sake, because by the complexity of the sacred things in it, it is meant to be a symbolic pattern for the soul, for our guidance to the higher state" (p.82)
“The closing of the doors of the holy church of God after the reverent reading of the holy Gospel and the catechumens' dismissal, expresses first the passing away of material things; then the future entrance of the worthy into the spiritual world (or bridal chamber of Christ) after that dread banishment and even more formidable final reckoning; and lastly the total repudiation of the illusions in the senses.” (p92-93)

“As the final end, the imparting of the sacrament comes: transforming into itself those who receive it worthily, it makes them, by grace and participation, similar to Him who is good essentially, in no way inferior to Him, as far as that is humanly possible and attainable for man. Consequently, by adoption and grace, it is possible for them to be and to be called gods, because all of God completely fills them, leaving nothing in them empty of His presence.” (p96)
The reexamination of the movements of the Divine liturgy, but “in reference to the cognitive soul.” (p.96).

- Then again the soul gets away from sense objects, as the closing of the doors of the holy church of God is assumed to mean, moving to the knowledge of spiritual things, suggested by the entrance of the ineffable sacraments, knowledge which is immaterial, simple, unchanging, and Godlike, and detached from all outward shape and show, in which the soul rallies her own powers to herself and brings herself back to the Word; in her spiritual embrace she has integrated the ineffable teachings of salvation and its way of life as it affects her; she teaches fair-spoken thanksgiving with the formula of the profession of faith. (p.99)

- “The holy reception of the immaculate and life-giving sacraments brings about a resemblance to Him, which effects a communion and identity with Him by participation, after which the human person is deemed fit to be changed out of a man into God.” (p.103-04)
Discussion Questions

• How do we benefit from Maximus’ vision of the Church and its Liturgy in the North American Orthodox Church?

• In clear for Maximus that the Orthodox Church and its particular liturgical practice is the locus of salvation for the world and for each human being. How do we communicate this reality to a world that has multiple expressions of the Church?

• Why should we believe him?