

The Confessor's Tongue for November 23, 2008

23rd Sunday After Pentecost: Righteous Prince Alexander Nevsky

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 23: Holy Faithful Great Prince Alexander Nevsky

The son of Prince Iaroslav Vsevolodovich of Vladimir, he was distinguished by reason, courage, power of bodily strength, majestic beauty, love of truth, co-suffering and truly Christian piety. "From his youth he loved Christ and has turned away from worldly sophisms, he was charmed by the voice of the church hymns and his soul thirsted for knowledge of the Holy Fathers. His favorite occupation was the all-night vigil and silent prayer to God".

In 1236, St. Alexander was made the Prince of Novgorod. In 1240, the Swedes attacked his principedom. St. Alexander was not afraid of the enemies and left to fight against them. Not only by the strength of his army, but as much by faith in the help of God, had he with deep feeling of faith spoken before the battle: "God is not on the side of force, but of truth". On the shore of the Neva River the holy prince gained full victory over his enemies for which he received the name "Nevsky". In 1242, he freed the city of Pskov from the Germans. The same year he won a glorious victory over the Lithuanian knights on the ice of Chudskoie (Peipus) Lake (known by the name "Battle on the Ice"). Then in 1242 and 1245, he gained many victories over the Lithuanians.

Having become the grand prince of Vladimir in 1250, St. Alexander did much work at restoring and building up the Russian land, strongly suffering at that time from the violence of the Tartars, and revealed him the firm defender and guardian of Orthodoxy. He repeatedly appeared in the camp of the Tartar khan to petition him on behalf of his oppressed native land, and by this he not only prevented many afflictions, but also was able to ask the khans for many privileges. The first time being among the Tatar Horde, St. Alexander proved not only to be the defender of the advantages of the state, but also the confessor of the Christian faith, ready to suffer for it. As to the requirement of the pagan priests to pass through fire and to worship idols, he bravely answered the Khan Batu: "I shall bow to you, for God granted you a kingdom. I shall not bow to created things (i.e. to idols). I am a Christian and it is not necessary for me to worship created things. I worship God, One in Trinity, who gloriously created heaven and earth. I serve Him and I honor Him". The Khan, respecting the courage and intelligence of St. Alexander, allowed him to forgo the requirement of the (pagan) priests.

Being the zealous advocate of Orthodoxy, St. Alexander rejected the proposition of Pope Innocent IV to accept the Roman Catholic confession, having told the representatives from the Pope with unbreakable resolution: "We know the true history of the faith that contains the teaching given to the Apostles, and we do not wish to accept your

teaching". The holy prince was the guardian angel of his people, interceding for them before God, to Whom he turned to in difficult times with prayer for help and heavenly protection to Whom he attributed not a few happy events and cases of salvation from various misfortunes. Not one year of the reign of the holy prince, the chroniclers with awesomeness observed: "that this year was a good one for a Christian". "He labored hard for the Russian land, for Novgorod and Pskov, for all the great reigning even giving his life for the Orthodox faith", the holy true believing Prince Alexander was a most remarkable figure of the appanage-veche period of our history.

For twenty seven years the holy true believing Prince Alexander reigned, courageously and immutably standing guard over his domestic country and consolidating her security and prosperity. The Holy Church in its hymns, singing of the valor of St. Alexander, glorifies him as "the authority of pious kings, and the praise of Orthodox princes", "maintainer of warriors, and vanquisher of barbarians", "who is wonderful in wonders, co-habitant with the fleshless ones", "defender of the despairing".

Heavy labor and ascetic effort disturbed the health of the holy prince. Feeling the approach of death and following the inclination of his heart of always rushing to God, he accepted the monastic schema, taking the name Alexis, received the Holy Mysteries, and died on November 14, 1263 and was buried in the Nativity of Christ-Theotokion Monastery in Vladimir (see Vladimir Diocese). According to legend, before the burial of the holy prince a wonder was worked: he himself took in his hand as if alive the prayer of absolution. In 1381 the relics of the holy prince were opened and placed in the cathedral temple of the monastery. During the reign of Tsar Ivan IV the special service for the holy prince was composed and in 1547 it was established to honor his memory on November 23 (the day of his burial). In 1724, by command of Emperor Peter the Great, the relics of the holy prince were transferred to the Alexander Nevsky Laura in St. Petersburg where they now repose. *Bulgakov Handbook, Tarris tr.*

St. Amphilochius, Bishop of Iconium

Amphilochius was a friend of St Basil the Great and other fourth-century saints. After living alone in asceticism for 40 years in a cave, he was chosen bishop of Iconium. He took part in the Second Ecumenical Council in 381 and was a great defender of the Orthodox Faith against the Macedonian, Arian, and Eunomian heresies. He reposed in 395.

St. Gregory, Bishop of Agrigentum

A great wonderworker, Gregory was bishop of his hometown in his native Sicily. He was a great

spiritual guide and ascetic. As bishop, he took part in the Fifth Ecumenical Council in Constantinople in 553. He peacefully reposed after many severe temptations at the end of the 6th century.

An irritable state of souls comes, first of all, from self-love, when something happens not according to our desire or point of view, and secondly, from lack of faith that fulfilling the commandments of God in the given situation will bring benefit. *St. Ambrose of Optina*

METANOIA

Richard Gregory Joines

The day begins at dusk, with Vespers: "Gladsome Light, of the Holy Glory . . ." He whose Word lit sunless heaven, breathed earth and Adam to life, cares little what our clock's measured, that today's repentance is incomplete, our desire for a day holy, peaceful and sinless just another vain conceit puddling like a fifty-cent votive candle. We images standing before the Image declare many things not obvious to sense: that nothing can hold us in bondage, that at Judgment's seat we'll have a good defense, that we will love our brother as ourselves, though we told him, this morning, "Go to hell."

The Rule For Attending To Oneself For One Dwelling In The World

By St. Ignatii Brianchaninov

The soul of all practices in the Lord is vigilance. Without vigilance, all these practices are fruitless. He who is desirous of saving himself must so establish himself that he might remain continuously vigilant toward himself, not only in solitude, but also under conditions of distraction, into which he is sometimes unwillingly drawn by circumstances.

Let the fear of God outweigh all other sensations upon the scales of your heart; and then will it be convenient to for you to be vigilant toward yourself, both in the silence of your cell and in the midst of the noise that surrounds you from all sides.

A well-reasoned moderation in foodstuffs, diminishing the passionate heat of his blood, tends greatly to facilitate your being able to attend to yourself; while the impassioning of your blood, stemming, as it does, from an excessive consumption of foodstuffs, from extreme and intensified bodily movements, from the inflammation of wrath, from being heady with vanity, and by reason of other causes, gives rise to a multitude of thoughts and reveries—in other words, to distraction. The Holy Fathers, first of all, ascribe to such a one as is desirous of attending to himself a moderate, evenly-measured, constant abstention from food.

Upon awakening from sleep—an image of the awakening from the dead, which awaits all men—direct your thoughts to God, offering up to Him the first-thoughts of your mind, which has not yet

become imprinted with any vain impressions whatsoever.

Having carefully fulfilled all the needs of the flesh upon arising from sleep, quietly read your customary rule of prayer, taking care not so much for the quantity of your prayerful expression, as for the quality of it; i.e., do it attentively, so that, by reason of your attention, your heart might be enlightened and enlivened through prayerful feeling and consolation. Upon concluding your rule of prayer, do you again, direct all your strength to the attentive reading of the New Testament, primarily the Evangel. In the course of this reading, intently take note of all the instructions and commandments of Christ, so that you might direct all your actions—both manifest and veiled—in accordance with them.

The quantity of the reading is determined by one's strength and by one's circumstances. It is unnecessary to weight-down one's mind with an excessive reading of prayers and Scripture; likewise, is it unnecessary to neglect one's needs in order to practice immoderate prayer and reading. Just as the excessive use of foodstuffs disorders and weakens the belly, so too does the immoderate use of spiritual food weaken the mind and create in it a revulsion to pious practices, leading it to despair.

For the novice, the Holy Fathers suggest frequent—but brief—prayers. When one's mind matures with spiritual age, becoming stronger and more manly, then shall one be in proper condition to pray without ceasing. It is to such Christians as have attained to maturity in the Lord that the words of the Apostle Paul pertain:

"I desire, therefore, that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without anger and reproach." (I Tim. II, 8) i.e., dispassionately, and without any distraction or inconstancy. For that which is natural to the man is not yet natural to the infant.

Enlightened, through prayer and reading, by our Lord, Jesus Christ, the Sun of Righteousness, one may then go forth to carry out the affairs of one's daily course, vigilantly taking care that in all one's deeds and words, in one's entire being, the All-holy will of God might prevail, as it was revealed and explained to men in the Commandments of the Evangel. *To be continued...*

Upcoming Events 2008

- 15 November — 24 December Nativity Fast.
- 26 November: Akathist: "Glory to God for All Things"
- 27 November: Thanksgiving Day Liturgy, 7:30 a.m.
- 12-13 December: All-Night Vigil & Liturgy for St. Herman of Alaska.
- 16 December, Tuesday, 7:30 p.m. Holy Unction
- 24 December Nativity Eve: 8:00 a.m. Royal Hours, noon Vespers, 5:30 p.m. Vigil, 7:30 p.m. Holy Supper
- 25 December Nativity of Our Lord: 8:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy
- 31 December New Year's Eve Feast at Rectory

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!