

# The Confessor's Tongue for March 22, 2009

## Sunday of the Veneration of the Cross; Hieromartyr Basil of Ancyra

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.

### March 22: Hieromartyr Basil of Ancyra

St. Basil, "beauty of the church, might of the pious and destroyer of impiety", was a zealous defender of the Christian faith and frequently accused heretics and pagans of errors. During the reign of Julian the Apostate he was subjected to severe torture for his fearless preaching of Christ. Each day they made seven belts out of his skin and when all his skin was torn apart, they pierced him with wooden stakes, after which torture he died in 363. This martyr should be distinguished from the St. Basil of Ancyra commemorated on January 1. S. V. Bulgakov, *Handbook for Church Servers*, 2 ed., 1274 pp. (Kharkov, 1900) Translated by Archpriest Eugene D. Tarris © All rights reserved.

### The Prayer of St. Ephrem

*But the spirit of continence  
of humility, of patience, and of love  
do Thou grant unto me Thy servant.*

Having asked for deliverance from the spirit of idleness, despondency, love of power, and idle words in the first part of the Prayer of St. Ephrem, in the second part we ask to be given a virtuous spirit to replace the prior vicious one.

#### CONTINENCE

We request first "the spirit of continence." The Greek word *sophrosyne* means "sobriety, chastity, continence, discretion, moderation, sanity, self-control, prudence, temperance, control over physical, especially sexual, impulses leading to self-restraint, moderation, right-mindedness, whole-mindedness, or abstinence. The Gerasene Demoniac, once Jesus has cast out the Legion of demons from him, is found sitting at Christ's feed "in his right mind", a stark contrast from his condition of being tormented by the demons. In like fashion, the host of passions trouble and torment us if we lack *sophrosyne*. By this virtue, we are enabled to deal with bodily desires correctly, with discretion, in due measure and not to excess or for misuse. The Russian word "*tselomudriye*" literally means "whole-mindedness".

#### HUMILITY

Second, we request "the spirit of humility." The Greek word, *tapeinophrosyne* comprises the words *tapeinos*, or humility, and *phrosyne*, the mind as it deliberately chooses. So this humility is a posture deliberately chosen; it is a submission to what is right and true and a willingness to accept and follow God's will rather than our own. Humility is critical to spiritual progress, for "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, and He will lift you up." To have God, we must bow the knee to Him and humble ourselves. No spiritual progress will be made without it. St. Nikon of Optina writes, "Without humility,

you cannot be saved. Whatever structure of virtues you might build, it will collapse without humility."

Some more thoughts from the Optina elders on humility:

"In reading the teaching of the holy fathers, do not soar aloft, but, seeing your weakness, descend to the depths of humility. It alone can save us, and without it all of our works and virtues will bring no benefit." *St. Macarius*

"Humility consists in not judging and not reproaching anyone, and having simple clothing and furniture in your [home]." *St. Ambrose*

"Humility consists in yielding to others and considering yourself worse than all. This way will be much more peaceful." *St. Ambrose*

"He who yields obtains more." "Humble yourself, and all your affairs will proceed." *St. Ambrose*

"Everything is all right if we reproach and humble ourselves. However, many are trying to climb up to heaven, piling ascetical struggles on themselves, but they do not want to humble themselves. Humble yourself, humble yourself!" *St. Barsanuphius*

"All evil proceeds from pride, but all good is obtained with humility. This is a great virtue—humility! And like a precious stone, it is rarely found, but especially in the present disastrous time." *St. Macarius*

"One can acquire humility by means of obedience. The person who submits his will to his spiritual guide overcomes pride and acquires humility." *St. Barsanuphius*

"It is essential to humble oneself. Without humility, virtue, and in general nothing, will bring any kind of benefit." *St. Barsanuphius*

"Why is there no peace in our bones, in our soul, and in our heart? Because of our sins! Because we are not at all instructed in humility, because we very much love to argue and prove that we know more than others, because we do not stop conversing with our thoughts, which along with sorrows continually torment us." *St. Anthony*

"Let the following be for you signs of humility or pride: the latter scorns everyone, reproaches them, and sees darkness in them, while the former sees only his own faults and does not dare to judge anyone." *St. Macarius*

"Truly lamentable is that person who does not have humility. He who is not able to humble himself will later on be humbled by other people. And he whom other people cannot humble, God will humble." *St. Anthony*

"The Lord arranges everything for our spiritual benefit. For how could we be humbled if we continually felt spiritual consolation? So the Lord withdraws from us so that we see our infirmity and spiritual nakedness." *St. Joseph*

"Do not be despondent because you are not living as you should, but humble yourself, and the Lord will

look more favorably on your humility than on struggle which are great but not humble." *St. Anatoly*

PATIENCE

Third, we request "the spirit of patience." The Greek word *hypomene* means to 'stand or remain under'. It is staying put and abiding and enduring rather than running to escape. This patience arises out of humility and submission to God's providence and will. The prophet Isaiah encourages us to patience when he declares: "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint" (Isa 40).

Some words on patience from the Optina Elders help us better understand what it is and why it is important.

"You must gain your salvation in patience. Patience is essential. In other words—the cross is essential." *St. Nikon*

"The one most reliable means for salvation—endure everything that God will send: the good and the bad." *St. Anatoly*

"From Holy Scripture, we see that sorrows bring people closer to salvation, if a person does not become fainthearted and does not despair, but arms himself with patience, along with humility and devotion to the will of God." *St. Ambrose*

"Patience is continuous good humor." *St. Nikon*

"Have spiritual peace and have patience—with yourself and with others. Patience, according to St. Gregory of Sinai, is 'stillness even within a storm.'" *St. Ambrose*

"It has been determined by God that every person has some kind of cross in this life, i.e., a spiritual sorrow which he must bear undisturbedly, for there is not any benefit from faintheartedness and impatience. And since many are the tribulations of the righteous people in this life, then how more must we sinners endure." *St. Anthony*

"We must thank the Lord for everything, the labor which He imposes on us to teach us patience, which ennobles the soul and is more beneficial for us than comfort. Evidently, this is pleasing to the Lord. Sorrows cannot befall us except through God's permission—for the sake of our sins. And these very sorrows protect us from other temptations." *St. Moses*

"With childlike submission we must endure both the pleasant and the unpleasant and give glory for everything to God who is good, i.e., when any sorrow or sickness comes, we say 'Glory to Thee, O Lord!' If the sorrows and illnesses increase, again we say: 'Glory to Thee, O Lord!' When the unhappy sorrows and illnesses have worsened and lead to the grave, again: 'Glory to Thee, O Lord!'" *St. Anthony*

"You must be patient not only with the sorrows which befall you, but also with yourself." *St. Nikon*

An oft-quoted verse on patience is "In your patience, possess ye your souls" (Luke 21:19).

LOVE

Fourth, we ask for "the spirit of love," or *agape*. This is perfect love, the selfless love of God, a love

that is all-merciful and is incapable of taking offense, that loves everyone no matter what, that forgives our debtors as we ask our debts to be forgiven, love that is never shaken no matter how others act. This is the love that empowers one to lay down one's life for one's friend. Love is the summation of all the commandments: love for God and love for man. Authentic love is the goal of Christian life. If we have love, we have all we need. If we lack love, no other gift, power, attainment or work can compensate for the lack.

"The feeling of love of the Lord corresponds to how much we fulfill His commandments." *St. Nikon*

"Love of God is expressed most of all by keeping the commandments of God." *St. Nikon*

"When giving all of yourself to God, you must not worry about rags and attach your heart to them." *St. Anthony*

"If one relies on the will of God—everything good, and even what is unpleasant, everything leads to the salvation of our soul, and in this is revealed great wisdom and profundity. For those that love God, all things lead to good." *St. Nikon*

"You must love every man, seeing in him the image of God, disregarding his vices. You must not dismiss people with coldness." *St. Nikon*

"Love covers everything. And if someone does good to his neighbor through the inclination of his heart, and not out of duty, then the devil cannot interfere; but when it is done out of a sense of duty, then he tries to interfere with one or the other." *St. Ambrose*

"If you will receive people for the sake of God, then be assured that all will be well with you." *St. Ambrose*

"Above all, strive to love your neighbor, for in his love consists love for God." *St. Macarius*

"Love, of course, is above everything. If you find that you have no love, but desire to have it, then perform works of love, although at first without love. The Lord will see your desire and our striving and will put love in your heart. But mainly, when you notice that you have sinned against love, immediately confess it to your elder. This can happen sometimes from a foolish heart, and sometimes from the enemy. You yourself cannot discern this, but when you confess, the enemy will go away." *St. Ambrose*

*Fr. Justin with credit to Rick Joines for research.*

**Upcoming Events 2009**

- 25 March, Holy Annunciation
- 12-18 April, Holy Week
- 11 April, Lazarus Saturday Work Day, 10:30 a.m.
- 12 April, Palm Sunday
- 19 April, Pascha! Paschal Picnic
- 25 May, Memorial Day Picnic
- 16-19 August, Proposed men's retreat at Holy Archangels Monastery. Let Father know if interested.
- 7 September, Labor Day Picnic

**GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!**