

The Confessor's Tongue for September 30, A. D. 2012

17th Sunday after Pentecost: St. Gregory of Armenia; St. Michael of Kiev

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.

Treatment of Big Donors

Father Archimandrite Moses always received every benefaction, every offering given out of love for the monastery, no matter how small, with sincere gratitude, especially in times of need. On the other hand, he was never overwhelmed by even the most sizeable contribution. Once, a family who had conferred many benefactions upon Optina Hermitage visited the monastery and stayed at a monastery guesthouse. They were displeased by some arrangement of the guestmaster and went to Abbot Moses to complain. "Look, Batiushka, we always eagerly welcome your fund collectors, we try to help them any way we can, we assist the monastery with love as much as we are able—and your guestmaster refused to do such and such for us!" "We had thought that you confer benefactions upon us for God's sake," replied the divinely-wise Elder, "and that you await rewards from the Lord for your good deeds. But if you expect a reward from us sinners, better not confer benefactions on us, because we the humble and heedless ones cannot reward you in any way." The visitors not only were satisfied with this explanation, but also were comforted by the Elder's frankness and later themselves recalled with pleasure and gratitude how they had received such lofty spiritual edification for their souls—instead of the apologies and catering to their self-esteem which they had expected. From *The Elder Moses of Optina*

Building Without Money

All his life, Father Moses was building. Another might not accomplish in a hundred years what he did in thirty-seven. And how did he do it? Always without money. sometimes you'd see that there was none of this, and there was none of that, and yet he'd be planning a building project when there was no money. And you'd say to him, "Batiushka, you're starting such a big project, but do you have the money?" "Yes, yes," he'd say, taking out a wallet with fifteen or twenty rubles in it. "But that's nothing," you'd tell him, "that kind of construction will take thousands!" He'd just smile and say, "But you've forgotten about God. I might not have the money, but He does." And sure enough, God would send it to him. So strong was his faith in God. Another wouldn't even have thought of starting a construction project without funds, but he was so sure of God's aid and so steadfast that he wouldn't even hesitate in the least. And sure enough, his faith would not let him down.

Old timers among the Optina brethren relate that once a certain bishop visited Optina Hermitage on his way to the capital. After touring the monastery, he stopped by the skete, marvelled at its secluded location and arrangement, and then asked

the Father Superior, "Who build all this?" Father Moses answered in a few evasive words to the effect that it had all be gradually build there over a period of time. The bishop responded, "I can see for myself that the skete is situated here—what I want to know is, who is it that built the skete?" "It was the superior and the brethren," answered Father Moses. "They say you built it all," continued the bishop. "Yes, I was there too," answered Father Moses. After this, the visitor did not feel like questioning him further.

From *The Elder Moses of Optina*

On Attending Matins

Father Archimandrite Moses tried to attend Matins without fail, and he would tell others that this was the very best time for prayer. He also told Hieromonk Moses, who was the head chanter during his time, "We must attend Matins, because during the Divine Liturgy the Unbloody Sacrifice is offered to God for us, whereas when we attend Matins we offer ourselves as a sacrifice to the Lord, we sacrifice our rest [sleep] for His sake." The Elder tried to attend not only Matins, but also the Liturgy and Vespers without fail, unless some special business prevented him from doing so. He served frequently on feast days and Sundays, almost always—especially after he was made an archimandrite, saying that he had received this rank not for himself, but for the adornment of the monastery. During the services, he would try to stand properly on both feet, and he would finger his prayer rope, saying the Jesus Prayer....Father Moses was an example of the most profound reverence during the divine services in church. He walked without turning or looking around; he stood without supporting himself or leaning. He just listened attentively to the reading and chanting and said his prayer rope, sometimes closing his eyes. From *The Elder Moses of Optina*

The Path to Confession

Pride and Disobedience to Parents

Pride, I think, is loathsome and disgusting. This passion roots itself in the depths of the heart of fallen man. Just as a thundercloud hides the sun from our sight, so are spiritual light and warmth hidden by pride. "Everyone that is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord." A proud man doesn't see the Lord. Casting aside all thought of eternal truth and the Last Judgment, he considers himself the center of the universe. Pride is disgusting in adults, but it is equally unpleasant in those who are younger. How it narrows the horizons of our mind, how it mutilates the heart created for meekness, humility, patience, and love! You can easily recognize the person who is afflicted with the disease of pride. Pride is unfailingly accompanied by disobedience, stubbornness; nagging; fulfilling one's won whims;

being unwilling to ask forgiveness of someone you have offended, arrogance; swaggering; haughtiness; having a quarrelsome disposition or an exaggerated opinion of one's abilities, boasting; being vain, fake, or hypocritical, affected, stuck up, or finicky; despising and blaming others; speaking with irony and sarcasm; and having an inclination to notice only the shortcomings of others, making them larger than life.

Forgive us, Merciful Lord!

Believe me, my friends, even my hand is tired of writing so many unpleasant and untender words at one time, but we can't deny that "God resisteth the proud." Only to the meek does He give grace.

Have you ever felt, young readers, how the snake of pride stirs in your soul? When you are capricious, when you sin by being willful and impetuous toward your parents, you have allowed this poisonous reptile to bite you. *Forgive us, Merciful Lord!*

You were obedient neither the first, nor the second, nor the third time you were told to do something. *Forgive us, Merciful Lord.*

You fell into ridiculous hysterics, thrashing your arms and stamping your feet as you staggered across the room with heartrending screams, throwing everything at hand to the floor, jerking yourself through the door, you slammed it loudly behind you. Glory to God, such things don't happen to everyone, but unfortunately, some of us have such unenlightened pages in our biography...

Forgive us, Merciful Lord!

We've sinned by being as stubborn as mules, although obstinate mules are more likable than proud children.

Forgive us, Merciful Lord!

We haven't wanted to eat what was offered to us at dinner, but made faces, shoved the plate away, and rudely left the table, upsetting everyone.

Forgive us, Merciful Lord!

Until recently, most of us thought that "I" was the first letter of the alphabet, and suffered with never-ending "I" ness, "I, I, I want... I don't want... Yes I will... No I won't."

Forgive us, Merciful Lord!

Have we stirred up God's wrath by mocking and ridiculing those who are different from us—people of another country, race, or religion, or the unfortunate ones who are handicapped, weak, mentally ill, or who simply look different? Those who cannot shield themselves from our cruelty will be defended by God Himself!

Forgive us, Merciful Lord!

All upstarts who want to be first in everything—talent, knowledge, power, beauty, wealth—paying no heed to the stern words of our Savior, "The first shall be last"—must repent of pride.

Forgive us, Merciful Lord!

Is any of us in danger of crowing like a rooster because we've forgotten that our little successes in

prayer and fasting and our budding virtues are not our own, but are gifts from Almighty God?

Forgive us, Merciful Lord!

The general mark of pride, by the way, is touchiness. And who of us hasn't taken offense, hasn't "sulked like a mouse on the grain"? [*A Russian proverb about a little mouse who sits atop a mountain of grain, his greatest desire, and yet sulks like a child who doesn't get his own way.*]

Forgive us, Merciful Lord!

Proud children make a nuisance of themselves around grown-ups. They talk loudly in their presence, rudely interrupt their conversations, play pranks, and run and jump about the room trying to draw attention to themselves. A widespread sin and a contagious disease!

Forgive us, Merciful Lord!

Afflicted by the disease of pride and self-love, children and teenagers often ignore the wise advice and warnings of their parents and brush aside their rightful requests like pesky flies. Instead, they trust in their own nonexistent experience and upset mother with rudeness, caddishness, and disrespect. Often they provoke an argument, causing a scene. Captured by the devil, they use foul language and even dare to raise their hand against the one who gave them birth.

Forgive us, Merciful Lord!

My dear readers, I grieve with you for these unhappy youths who hold nothing sacred. It is sternly said about them in the Bible, "Cursed is he who provokes his mother's anger and who leaves his father without help, the same is a blasphemer."

O Merciful Lord, enlighten all disrespectful teenagers and help them repent of these heavy sins!

We write about these harsh sins so that you will know that it is only a single step from a small transgression to a great: "He that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much."

But now, let us look to our holy Guardian Angel, who was given to us by God at the hour of our baptism and who is woven from the virtues of meekness, obedience, and humility! Do you see, my friends, how unutterably beautiful his face is, how light the countenance of this heavenly being! True meekness and humility have nothing in common with being a weak, spineless "loser," as the ignorant say. Obedience to God's law not only did not diminish this blessed creature but actually strengthened his will for good, making his mind light-bearing and his heart pure. Keep watching—a holy, imperishable energy of unearthly joy, peace, and love shines forth from him. Angel of God, our holy guardian, teach us how to overcome the dismal pride in our souls!

Upcoming Events 2012

30 September: St. Maximus Annual Meeting
21 January 2013: Feast of St. Maximus and the First Annual St. Maximus Memorial Lecture

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!