

The Confessor's Tongue for December 16, A. D. 2012

28th Sunday after Pentecost: Sunday of the Holy Forefathers

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.

On Last Friday's Crime

A heinous crime was committed last Friday when a twenty year-old man entered an elementary school in Connecticut and killed 20 pupils and 6 adults.

This crime reflects Satan's intent for each one of us. He comes only to "kill, steal, and destroy." He would destroy each one of us were God to permit it, or, even better, use us as instruments of doing harm to others.

The young man who committed the crime need not have done it. Whatever his circumstances, his struggles, his sufferings and disappointments, you may be sure that there are others who have suffered similarly or worse and have not responded by wantonly killing others.

How did he get arrive at acting in this way? While we are not privy to his particular thoughts, we may say a few things in general from our Christian understanding of sin. The sin of murder which this man committed so many times began with angry thoughts in his mind. People hurt him, misunderstood him, offended him, disappointed him. Instead of forgiving, instead of doing good to those who had hurt him, instead of praying for them, instead of overcoming evil with good, he nursed the memory of wrong which embittered and angered him. Satan whispered to him thoughts of violent revenge on particular offenders and on the world in general for its slighting of him. Instead of rejecting these thoughts, he entertained them, was titillated by them, accepted them, agreed with them, and began to fantasize and imagine how he might carry out his revenge on a hateful world and his own exit from it.

And so, a young man with his whole life ahead of him became a plaything of the devil, made himself an agent of Satan's plan for destroying men made in the image of God, destroyed his own life and soul, and brought death, hurt, and sorrow to many others. These sins all began with thoughts—thoughts that many of us have probably had.

We live in a fallen world corrupted by sin. While Christ has conquered sin, death, and the devil, not all men have embraced the antidote he provides. In fact, most have not. We should not be surprised when such crimes occur, though they grieve us and shock us by their brutality. We should pray for the victims and the perpetrators. Even more, we should endeavor to give ourselves more fully to Christ, to pray fervently for our neighbors, our city, our country, and our world that they may know Christ and respond to His invitation to the feast He has prepared for the world He loves. As we became increasingly full of Christ, purified and illumined by His light, we will become means of bringing light and help to those around us who are darkened by sin and caught in the lies of the evil one. The only antidote to sin and evil

is the Medicine of Immortality which the Great Physician alone offers. *Fr. Justin Frederick*

December 11-17: Sunday of the Holy Forefathers

The Sunday of the Holy Forefathers occurs between the 11th and the 17th of December. This Sunday commemorates all the ancestors of the people of God, the holy patriarchs living up to the law, given on Sinai, and under the law,—from Adam to Joseph the Betrothed; together with them are commemorated "those who preached Christ" the holy prophets—from Samuel to Zechariah and to John the Baptist, and all the Old Testament righteous men and women, who were righteous in the faith in the coming of the Messiah. Especially in the service for this day are praised "the pious youths" Ananias, Azarias, and Misael, (Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego) who "in faith were thrown into the fiery furnace" and "who in the middle of the flames were cooled by the dew of the Spirit and who walked about rejoicing, are mystically a prototype of the Trinity and the incarnation of Christ" from the Virgin, who after giving birth remained a virgin. With these holy youths are commemorated also "the righteous Daniel and the wonderful prophets", who, clearly revealing the divine second coming, saw Christ, "coming to all nations as Judge", and who, "your mind illumined by divine radiance", "that clearly the Virgin would give birth represented in mystical images". "Today as we celebrate the Forefathers' memory", the holy Church exclaims: "let us offer praise to the fathers, who shone forth before and during the law, with righteous minds they served the Lord and Master who shone forth from the Virgin, now they delight in the unending light." "Let us offer songs of praise to the prophets of God". "Let us honor the holy youths, for they quenched the flaming furnace, together with the prophet Daniel, and all the righteous ones who shone forth before the law, together with those who served the Master under the law." By accomplishing "now the honor of the memory of the forefathers", the holy Church edifies us, that we, in the expectation of the great and light-bearing day of the Nativity of Christ, is reflected by the faith and life of the holy Forefathers and, through them, has prepared ourselves, by their example, to the worthy meeting of the Lord Who came from Heaven, who has adorned their soul with virtues beforehand to be ready for the great and light-bearing day of the Nativity of our Savior worthily to meet Him with the lamp of faith and with the oil of charitable deeds, with the firm hope of life everlasting, with the light of both the joyful face of cleanliness and purity.

Together with them the holy Church on the present day, that its appeal be not in vain, places in the Gospel reading by the clergy about those invited

and called to a feast, warning us that we can be distracted from worthily meeting the Lord by the predominance of flesh over spirit, the attachment to the terrestrial, the blinding by gleam of worldly goods, the predilection for vanity, the unwillingness to deny one's self-love and pride everyday, the enslavement to passions and covetousness, and in the Epistle reading directly commands us to destroy our earthly members: fornication, impurity, passion, evil lust and cupidity, to lay aside anger, evil, blaspheming, slander, lies, and in general to take off the old man and put on the new in the image of the Creator.

'Lift Up the Horn'

In the prayer "O God, Save Thy People," which is prayed at Festal and Resurrectional Matins and at the Litia of Vespers, the priest prays that God will "Exalt the horn of Orthodox Christians." Later, in the Praises of Matins, we hear that God "shall exalt the horn of His people" (Psalm 148:14) And in the irmos of one of the odes of the Nativity canon, we sing "Thou hast raised up our horn, holy art thou, O Lord." This notion of "exalting the horn" is a curious one, its meaning is not obvious, but, since we hear it weekly (at least), we should know what it means—and what it is we are asking God to do for us.

The phrase comes from the Scriptures, particularly the Old Testament, where it occurs in various forms. The Prophet David calls the Lord "the horn of my salvation," my shield, and my high tower (2 Samuel 22:3; Psalm 17:2). When Hannah presented her young son, the future Prophet Samuel, to serve in the house of the Lord, she prayed, "My heart rejoiceth in the Lord, mine horn is exalted in the Lord: my mouth is enlarged over mine enemies; because I rejoice in thy salvation" (I Sam 2:1). The Psalmist warns fools and the wicked in one place (Psalm 74:4-5): "Deal not foolishly...lift not up the horn: lift not up your horn on high: speak not with a stiff neck." In another place, it is said of the good man who gives to the poor, "his righteousness endureth forever; his horn shall be exalted with honor" (Psalm 111:9). What does this exalting or lifting up of the horn mean?

Many animals familiar to the peoples of the ancient Near East, particularly bulls, defend themselves from attackers with their horns. Thus to the Hebrews and other nations, the horn was a symbol of strength and courage. A horn lifted up is one that is strong and victorious, whereas a low or fallen horn is weak and defeated.

Modern bullfighting vividly illuminates this image. In bullfighting, six-foot staves with barbed ends called *banderillas* are placed in the bull's neck to weaken it so that its head will be low enough at the end of the fight for the kill. If this is not done, the bull is able to hold its head and horns high with its powerful neck muscle, making it next to impossible for the matador to kill it with his sword and presenting the matador with a mortal threat.

Thus, when we pray that God will "exalt the horn of Orthodox Christians," we pray for strength and courage to persevere unbowed in our spiritual warfare and for victory over those who attack us, namely, over the demonic powers that seek to overcome and destroy us. Later in Matins at the Praises, we are assured that God will exalt the horn of His people, for He it is who gives us the victory, and consequently, we rejoice in Him. *Priest Justin Frederick*

The Aim of the Christian Life

St. Seraphim of Sarov (+1833)

Prayer, fasting, vigil, and all other Christian practices, however good they may be in themselves, do not constitute the aim of our Christian life, although they serve as the indispensable means of reaching this end. The true aim of our Christian life consists in the acquisition of the Holy Spirit of God. As for fasts, and vigils, and prayer, and almsgiving, and every good deed done for Christ's sake, they are only means of acquiring the Holy Spirit of God. But mark, my dear, only the good deed done for Christ's sake brings us the fruits of the Holy Spirit. All that is not done for Christ's sake, even though it be good, brings neither reward in the future life nor the grace of God in this life. That is why our Lord Jesus Christ said: "He who gathers not with Me scatters".

What does it mean "to acquire"? Acquiring is the same as obtaining. You understand, of course, what acquiring money means. Acquiring the Spirit of God is exactly the same. You know well what it means in a worldly sense to acquire. The aim in life of ordinary worldly people is to acquire or make money, and for the nobility it is in addition to receive honors, distinctions, and other rewards for their services to the state. The acquisition of God's Spirit is also capital, but grace-giving and eternal; and it is obtained in very similar ways, almost the same ways as monetary, social, and temporal capital.

God the Word, the God-man, our Lord Jesus Christ, compares our life with a market, and the work of our life on earth He calls trading, as says to us all: "Trade till I come" (Luke 19:13), "redeeming the time, because the days are evil" (Eph 5:16), that is to say, make the most of your time for getting heavenly blessings through earthly goods. Earthly goods are good works done for Christ's sake and conferring on us the grace of the All-Holy Spirit.

Upcoming Events 2012-2013

- 20 December: Holy Unction Service, 7:00 p.m., for the healing of soul and body, 7:00 p.m. To receive the anointing, one must be Orthodox and have made a Confession since the Nativity Fast began.
- 25 December: Feast of the Nativity of Our Lord
- 27 December: Open House at the Rectory.
- 21 January: Feast of St. Maximus with John Granger.

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!