

The Confessor's Tongue for February 10, A. D. 2013

36th Week After Pentcost; St. Haralambos

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.

How To Conquer Sin

St. Theophan

"He Who Is Born of God Doth Not Commit Sin" I John 3:9

How is it we see sin reigning both within us and around us? Is it that God's promise is not true, or is it that His grace has grown weak? Neither the one nor the other! "For the promises of God in Him are yea and amen" (2 Cor 1:20) and he in whom is grace "can do all things through Jesus Christ who strengthens" him (Phil 4:13). The reason for this pitiful sight is not in God but in ourselves, in that we, from our side, fail to apply the measures necessary for us and do not use as we ought the means decreed for us. The doctor is not guilty of a failure to heal when the patient does not obey his directions and makes no use of the medicine prescribed for him to take.

He who does not wrestle with sin does not conquer it; he who does not conquer it falls into sin and abides in it. On the contrary, abundant help is always prepared for him who opposes sin and compels himself towards good. Strengthened by it, he may always turn from evil and do good—though not without effort. Consequently, our main business is the struggle with sin. One struggling must have weapons and then must know against whom to do battle and how to do battle.

The weapons against sin are the following: prayer, attending church, thorough obedience, the reading of God's Word and of the holy Fathers, sober attention to oneself, bodily labor, vigil, prostrations and bows, solitude, control of feelings, abstinence, fasting. All these weapons flow out of the nature of the struggle itself, and all of them are essentially necessary in the spiritual battle.

But let us assume that someone has armed himself with them all—has he done everything? No, it is still needful to employ them and that not any which way but expediently: otherwise they will not bring him their full effect. One person, for example, undertakes to read spiritual things—and reads and reads unto weariness—but without clarifying for himself beforehand why he needed to do this and what he needed to try to attain by these efforts. Still another undertakes fasting and fasts without pity for himself to the depletion of his strength, but he did not determine for himself why precisely he needed to fast and in what measure and what to keep sight of in it. I present these examples not to give grounds to judge unfavorably the indicated weapons, but in order to show that ill-considered action with them and failure to direct them towards the necessary goal deprives them of their inherent power—the conquest of sin.

Precisely how one must operate, I shall briefly define. It will not do to set the goal of Christian armament as acquiring the arms themselves: it will

not do to set the goal of fasting as just fasting, the goal of solitude as just in being alone, the goal of prostrations in just doing prostrations. The purpose of all this should be internal to identify and conquer the sin living in us.

What is this "sin living in us"? Self-love, with the whole horde of passions flowing from it. Self-love is the root from which grow pride, self-interest, and sensuality. These are the main trunks of the tree of sin. From them sprout the offshoots—vainglory, hatred, envy, anger, despair, lust. Without these passions, we would always act correctly, living according to the commandments of God without any difficulty. Why, for example, does a blacksmith give short measure or exact an excessive price? From greed: without greed, he would not act so. Why do people quarrel and even fight duels? From anger: without anger, all matters would be settled peacefully. Why does one person do evil to another? From hatred or envy: without these passions, evil deeds would not be. In a word, if it were not for the passions in us, we all would live holy and undefiled, in peace and love, in mutual assistance and help for one another. Consequently, the passions are our main enemies. We must overcome them particularly and direct against them all our martial spiritual strength, all our spiritual armament. If we will not do this, then we labor in vain and with all these weapons we shall gain no success whatsoever; we shall bear the weight of the weapons, but we shall not receive the crown of victory. Moreover, we may wound ourselves with these weapons. From this may be drawn the general conclusion: take all the spiritual weapons and use them courageously and vigilantly; do not use them aimlessly but rather with a set purpose, directing them against the passion definitely known to you and attacking you.

Now I shall briefly indicate how one must struggle, how to conduct battle and employ spiritual weapons to good effect.

1. Do not imagine you can wage war against the whole horde of passions—you will not be able to cope—but arm yourself each time against that passion warring against you. If pride tries to conquer, do battle with pride; if anger, do battle with anger; if envy, do battle with envy. Whatever enemy is before you, smite that enemy and direct all your martial strength and all your attention against it. If you set out to chase other foes, then this one will attack from the flank or rear and the victory will be lost.

2. Hasten to separate yourself from the enemy and oppose yourself to him and him to yourself. In spiritual battle, it is not as it is in physical [perceptible to senses] where the enemy stands visibly against you. In spiritual battle, you and your enemy are both in one soul and one heart. All our trouble stems from the fact that we do not know how

to separate ourselves from the enemy and disunite ourselves from him; we think that the passionate movements disturbing us is, in fact, us—our nature—and we hurry to satisfy it [what we think is our nature, ourselves]. But this is not our nature and not us, but our enemy. This error is the source of all our falls into sin and wrong actions. If only at the first moments of an attack we succeeded in separating the passion from ourselves, then we would aim not to satisfy it but to stand against it.

3. Having separated the passion troubling you from yourself and having acknowledged it to be your enemy, begin to war against it, to fight it, taking up one weapon after another until the passion flees or hides from you or until the soul finds peace. Fast, pray, read, meditate, be alone, visit your spiritual father, go to church, make prostrations at home—in a word, make use of every useful weapon that you have in order to overcome the foe. Sometimes the passion hides itself at once, sometimes it struggles long—our task is not to weaken but to endure in bearing up under the weight of the martial podvig until the soul has regained complete peace.

4. The enemy is driven off, the passion is extinguished, the soul has found peace, but this still does not mean that either this or another passion was defeated unto death—not, it has only concealed itself and gone away for a time, though it was defeated. Give it a new situation, and it will immediately arise, although not with its former strength. You overcame the passion in a familiar situation, but it will find thousands of such situations and will begin again the struggle and call you out to battle. This means that a Christian should never lay aside his arms; he is a permanent warrior who must always be ready for battle. Thus in this sense it is said: “He who endures to the end will be saved” (Mat 10:22).

Here is the whole program of battle! Having identified your enemy in the passion attacking you at this moment, begin to defeat it with your weapons, using first one, then another, while you drive it away. Having driven it off, stop and look and expect another attack from one side or another by any passion. When it attacks, deal with it as you did with the former passion with which you did battle and which by God's mercy you defeated. So do each day, each hour, and each minute.

But when does it end? One cannot determine this. It may only be said that the more vigilantly a Christian fights and does not give in to any passionate attraction the more quickly the passions in him will begin to weaken, and to that degree, as the unrelenting war goes on, peace and quiet begin to be established in the soul. With the passage of time, it arrives at a quiet and peaceful state of order in which, as in the stillness of midnight, a deep silence will begin to reign, a sign that enemies have been driven far away or put in their place.

Help us all, O Lord, to receive such good!

Translated by Fr. Justin Frederick

February 10: Hieromartyr Haralambus

Saint Haralambus was a bishop in the city of Magnesia in Thessaly. For his fervent preaching of the Christian faith to the pagans, this hierarch was subjected to judgment of Emperor Severus, being 113 years old. The emperor commanded him to undergo severe tortures, which began in Magnesia and ended in Antioch. The hierarch was tortured with iron claws; they drove nails into his body, burnt him with fire and shattered his mouth with a stone. Before his martyred death the hierarch prayed to the Lord: “come that my relics will be venerated and my memory will be honored, and that there will not be in this place any hunger or pestilence or evil producing air, which destroys fruit”. Thus praying and praising God for his sufferings, Saint Haralambus departed to his everlasting rest earlier, than the order to behead him could be executed. It happened in the year 202.

Prayer of the 9th Kathisma

In the traditional Orthodox Psalter, which is the primary prayerbook of the Church, each of the 20 kathismata (divisions) of the Psalter is followed by the trisagion prayers, three troparia and a longer prayer. Here is one of those prayers for your benefit.

O Master Lord our God, who alone knowest the sickness of my wretched soul and the healing thereof, Heal it, as Thou knowest, for the sake of the greatness of Thy mercy and Thy compassion, for there is no salve, or ointment, or binding, which may be applied thereto because of my deeds. But do Thou, who camest not to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance, have mercy and compassion, and forgive it; tear up the account of my many shaeful deeds, and guide me to Thy straight path, that, walking in Thy truth, I may be able to escape the darts of the evil one, and thus stand uncondemned before Thy dread throne, glorifying and praising Thy most holy Name for ever. Amen.

Upcoming Events 2012-2013

- 22-23 February: North Texas Orthodox Missions presents “How to talk with your children and grandchildren about God.” Friday at St. Barbara's, 6:00 p.m., Saturday Holy Trinity, 8:30 a.m.
- 23 February: Love and Logic Class.
- 17 March: Forgiveness Vespers, 6:00 p.m. We ask that all who consider St. Maximus their church home plan to attend this service. Great Lent begins at Midnight.
- 18—23 March: Clean Week & Great Canon
- 5 May: Great and Holy Pascha

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!