

The Confessor's Tongue for March 24, A. D. 2013

Sunday of Orthodoxy; Ven. Zachariah the Recluse

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.

Homily 48 For Friday of the First Week

St. Theodore the Studite

Brethren and Fathers! If anyone who is a layman wishes to construct a large and magnificent home, then he gives himself no rest either day or night, but labors, worries, and endures deprivation until he finishes the building of the house. They have such zeal and diligence in this work that their minds and thoughts, day and night, are occupied with nothing else but only with how the roof might be finished more beautifully and excellently, and so that all below and all the rest might be adorned and done so that anyone who might see it would like to have such a home. And if anyone should desire to keep them from this work, then this would be for them so painful that it would be as if they suffered a great offense.

What is it that I wish to say to your love, respected Brethren? Since each of us builds and sets up for his soul not a house that is tangible and corruptible, which is made of stone and wood, but a heavenly dwelling that is incorrupt and eternal, which is composed of the virtues and gifts of the Holy Spirit, then tell me, shall we be actually less concerned and more slothful in constructing it than we would be in constructing a temporal house? Would not the loss of it be hard for us to bear? And the more so, since a house that is corruptible and temporal receives people of the flesh and thereafter when the house has had many owners, it itself grows old, goes to ruin and collapses, but our spiritual house, which is built of the virtues, receives the Holy Spirit, as the Apostle says, "Ye are the temple of the living God, and the Spirit of God dwelleth in you" (*I Cor. 3:16*). And when the time comes for us to leave this world, He also follows us into heaven, and we shall be there eternally.

The beginning of building the virtues is the fear of God, as the Divine Scriptures say, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (*Ps. 110:9*). And thereafter the four great virtues, that is, wisdom, courage, chastity, and righteousness, and the others with them, each linked to another and forming a union of love, will grow into a holy temple of the Lord. Let us then, Brethren, build this habitation and adorn it with the virtues so that we might have within us the Holy Spirit, and so that we may bring joy to the holy angels and be of benefit to mankind through the accomplishment of the virtues. And since temperance is one of the greatest virtues which we struggle to attain, then let us render glory unto God for having vouchsafed us to complete the span of one holy week. Our faces have changed and become pale, but there shines in us the grace of temperance. From the gall that arises as a result of the fast, we feel in our mouths a bitterness, but our souls are sweetened

by the hope and grace of salvation. For these two, that is, the soul and body, by nature battle against one another, and when one grows stronger, the other becomes weaker. And so we shall rejoice, Brethren, in that we have made the better aspect, that is, the soul, much stronger.

It may be that someone will say: Will not eating once a day ruin the perfection of temperance? No, we need not fear this, for if it were so, then Christ would not have commanded us in the prayer "Our Father" to ask for our daily bread; nor would the raven have brought to the Prophet Elias food each day, and likewise the divine Paul of Thebes; and Anthony the Great would not have considered it better to eat a little each day rather than to remain fasting for three, four, or seven days. And it seems to me that the cause for this is as follows: since our bodies are exhausted and weakened from daily work, that God, Who created us as He designed, might strengthen them by daily rations and we might fulfill the commandments of God, and would not be like a man paralyzed, as happens with those who fast for two or three days. They cannot accomplish prostrations, nor become experienced in readings and chanting, as they should, nor fulfill properly the other services; we will not mention what is supernatural. Thus the daily use of nourishment, according to the rule and order indicated, is not something imperfect, but something quite perfect, since all that has been instituted for us by the Holy Fathers is good and pleasing to God. O would that the Lord grant us still more health and strength of soul and body in order to serve the living and true God, and gain the reward that awaits us in the last day, in which may you, with all the saints from the ages, shine like the sun, having received an inheritance in the heavenly kingdom of Christ our Lord, to Whom is due glory and dominion with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages, Amen.

Advancing from ungodliness to the true faith, and illumined with the light of knowledge, let us clap our hands and sing aloud, offering praise and thanksgiving to God; and with due honor let us venerate the holy icons of Christ, of the all-pure Virgin and the saints, whether depicted on walls, on wooden panels, or on holy vessels, rejecting the impious teaching of the heretics. For, as Basil saith, the honor shown to the icon passeth to the prototype it representeth. At the prayers of Thine undefiled Mother and of all the saints, we beseech Thee, Christ our God, to bestow upon us Thy great mercy. *Vespers for Sunday of Orthodoxy*

From the Optina Elders on Humility

With only humility one can be saved, even without any works. *St. Macarius of Optina*

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 of Optina*

Humility consists in not judging and not reproaching anyone, and having simple clothing and furniture in your cell. *St. Ambrose of Optina*

The humble do not investigate the depth of the unknown, but they humble their thinking, and, in time, God enlightens them. *St. Macarius of Optina*

Humble yourself in spirit more—humility takes the place of works. Endure all misfortunes and entrust yourself to the Lord. *St. Ambrose of Optina*

By all means strive to acquire the opposite of pride—humility; and how it is acquired you will learn in the books of the holy fathers: continual self-reproach is the shortest path to it. *St. Macarius*

How do you reproach yourself? Very simply. The conscience immediately speaks out, it immediately censures us, and we have only to agree that we acted wrongly and humbly turn to God with a prayer for forgiveness. Even if only for a minute, you must absolutely reproach yourself in this way. Our job is to reproach ourselves, even if it is just for a brief time, and the rest is up to God. *St. Barsanuphius of Optina*

[How to reproach yourself:] When the devil points out to you the faults and weaknesses of others and urges you to judge them, then you say to yourself: “I am worse than everyone else, I deserve eternal torments. Lord, have mercy on me.” And even if you say this without feeling, you still need to say it. *St. Barsanuphius of Optina*

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 of Optina*

Genuine obedience which brings great benefit to the soul comes when you act in defiance of yourself. Then the Lord Himself takes you in His arms and blesses your labors. *St. Nikon of Optina*

Every obedience which seems difficult becomes very easy when we fulfill it, because that is how obedience works. *St. Nektary of Optina*

Take this advice for your whole life: if the superiors or those older than you suggest something, then no matter how difficult or how lofty it might seem, do not refuse. God will help you for your obedience. *St. Nektary of Optina*

Humility consists in yielding to others and considering yourself worst than all. *St. Ambrose*

When your heart is troubled, keep silent, but not with anger. If you see that angry thoughts are secretly acting in you, depart and pray to God for those who have grieved you and ask for mercy through their prayers. Always try to find the fault in yourself, and if this time you were not at fault, then the reproach is being sent for previous sins and to expose our woeful condition. *St. Leo of Optina*

You ask, “By what path do I go to God?” Go on the path of humility! By humbly bearing the difficult circumstances of life, by humbly enduring sicknesses sent by the Lord, by the humble hope that you will not be abandoned by the Lord, the quick helper and Heavenly Father overflowing in love, by humble prayer for help from on high to dispel despondency and feelings of helplessness by which the enemy of salvation tries to bring us to despair, which is so perilous for man, depriving him of Divine Grace and removing from him the mercy of God. *St. Nektary of Optina*

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 struggles which are great but not humble. *St. Anatoly of Optina*

Annunciation & Greek Independence

For the Greeks, March 25th, besides being the Great Feast of the Annunciation, also marks an anniversary of great importance: the commemoration of the liberation of the Greek nation from a four hundred-year Turkish slavery. Bishop Germanos raised in the Peloponnese the flag of liberation on the day of the Annunciation—the one day above all that marks the beginning of man's salvation—thus connecting it with the beginning of a hard a long struggle for national independence. Hence, the joy of both feasts bears a deep and personal relevance for the Greek Orthodox. Because of the greatness of the joy associated with the Feast, fish is always permitting even in the midst of the strictness of fasting in Great Lent.

Annunciation, Troparion, tone 4

Today is the crown of our salvation / and the revelation of the mystery which is from before the ages! / The Son of God becometh the Son of the Virgin, / and Gabriel announceth the glad tidings of grace. / Wherefore, with him let us cry out to the Theotokos: / Rejoice, O thou who art full of grace! // The Lord is with thee!

Upcoming Events 2012-2013

25 March, Monday: Annunciation, Vesperal Liturgy
6:00 p.m.
28 April, Palm Sunday
28 April – 4 May: Great and Holy Week
4 May: Holy Saturday Baptisms, 10:00 a.m.
5 May: Great and Holy Pascha

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!