

The Confessor's Tongue for April 14, A. D. 2013

Fourth Sunday of Lent; St. John of the Ladder (Climacus)

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.

Letter from the Diocesan Chancellor

April 5, 2013

3rd Friday of Great Lent

Dear Brothers and Concelebrants, Faithful, and Friends, Christ is in our midst!

At last month's session of the Holy Synod of the Orthodox Church in America, two men were vetted who might be potential episcopal candidates for our diocese. It was the judgment of the Holy Synod that both men need more experience. Therefore, we are taking steps to transfer one of these potential candidates, Fr Gerasim Eliel, into the Diocese of the South where he can begin working as a priest in our diocese and get some of the experience the members of the Holy Synod think important. We plan to put him into a position where he will be visible to members of our diocese and also which will allow him to begin working collegially with the priests of the Diocese of the South.

Unfortunately, without vetted and approved candidates, we will not be having a special nominating assembly as part of this summer's assembly at St Justin Martyr Orthodox Church in Jacksonville, FL. I know we were all looking forward to a nomination and possible election this summer. I would encourage us, however, to see this decision by the Holy Synod as the result of prayer and discernment as how best to proceed with the election of a hierarch for the Diocese of the South. In the meantime we can look forward to the move of Fr. Gerasim to the Diocese of the South and the gathering of experience by other potential candidates as small, but significant, steps toward a nomination at a later date.

Wishing you every blessing as we reach the midpoint of the fast, I remain faithfully yours in Christ Jesus

Archpriest Marcus Burch, Chancellor DOS

From St. John of the Ladder

Sleep is a particular state of nature, an image of death, inactivity of the senses. *Step 19*

Just as over-drinking is a matter of habit, so too from habit comes over-sleeping. Therefore we must struggle with the question of sleep, especially in the early days of obedience, because a long-standing habit is difficult to cure. *Step 19*

It is not proper for anyone to engage in any accessory work, or rather distraction, during the time of prayer. For the angle who attended Antony the Great taught him this clearly. *Step 19*

A vigilant eye makes the mind pure; but much sleep hardens the soul. *Step 20*

Long sleep produces forgetfulness, but vigil purifies the memory. *Step 20*

Long sleep is an unjust comrade; it robs the lazy of half their life, and even more. *Step 20*

He who is proud of his natural advantages, I mean cleverness, ability to learn, skill in reading, a clear pronunciation, quick understanding, and all such gifts received by us without labor, will never obtain the supernatural blessings, because he who is unfaithful in a little is also unfaithful and vainglorious in much. *Step 22*

Where a fall has overtaken us, there pride has already pitched its tent; because a fall is an indication of pride. *Step 23*

Meekness is an unchangeable state of mind, which remains the same in honor and dishonor. *Step 24*

Meekness consists in praying calmly and sincerely for a neighbor when he causes many turmoils. *Step 24*

A fall has often corrected the wilful, giving them salvation and guilelessness in spite of themselves. *24*

The beginning of freedom from anger is silence of the slips when the heart is agitated; the middle is silence of the thoughts when there is a mere disturbance of soul; and the end is an imperturbable calm under the breath of unclean winds. *Step 8*

An angry person is a voluntary epileptic, who due to an involuntary tendency keeps convulsing and falling down. *Step 8*

The offspring of flint and steel is fire; and the offspring of chatter and joking is lying. *Step 12*

A lie is the destruction of love, and a false oath is a denial of God. *Step 12*

Let no one who thinks rightly suppose that the sin of lying is a small matter, for the All Holy Spirit pronounced the most awful sentence of all against it above all sins. If Thou wilt destroy all that speak a lie, as David says to God, what will they suffer who stitch an oath to a lie? *Step 12*

One lies for sheer wantonness, another for amusement; one, to make the bystander laugh; and another, to trap his brother and do him injury. *Step 9*

All visible things get their light from the sun, and all that is done according to reason gets its force from humility. Where there is no light, everything is dark; where there is no humility, all that we have is rotten. *Step 25*

Contrition is one thing, self-knowledge is another, humility is another.

Contrition is the result of a fall. He who falls is crushed, and he stands in prayer without boldness but with praiseworthy audacity, as one who is shattered, steadying himself with the staff of hope and using it to drive off the hound of despair.

Self-knowledge is a true idea of one's spiritual growth and an unbroken remembrance of one's slightest sins.

Humility is Christ's spiritual doctrine, noetically introduced into the inner chamber of the soul by

those who are counted worthy of it. It cannot be defined by perceptible words. *Step 25*

There are some who all their lives use the bad deeds previously done by them, and for which they have received forgiveness, as a motive for humility, thereby driving out their vain self-esteem. Others, having in mind Christ's Passion, regard themselves always as debtors. Others hold themselves cheap for their daily defects. Others, as a result of their besetting temptations, infirmities and sins, have mortified their pride. Others for want of graces have appropriated the mother of graces [i.e. humility]. There are also people (if they still exist) who for the sake of the very gifts of God, in the measure that they receive them, humble themselves and so live as to account themselves unworthy of such wealth, and each day add it to their debt. Such is humility, such is beatitude, such is the perfect reward! *Step 25*

Sickness is sometimes for the cleansing of sins, and sometimes to humble the mind. *Step 26*

When our good and all-gracious Lord and Master sees people too lazy in their exercises, He lays their flesh low with sickness, and asceticism with less toil; and sometimes it also cleanses the soul from evil thoughts or passions. *Step 26*

Persecution of Christians

Kirsten Powers, USA Today, April 2, 2013

"Christianity is the most persecuted religion in the world." So asserted German Chancellor Angela Merkel late last year, causing a stir. Merkel echoed a concern expressed by then-French President Nicolas Sarkozy, who warned in a 2011 speech **that Christians face a** "particularly wicked program of cleansing in the Middle East, religious cleansing."

Now, this is not about clerks who say "Happy Holidays" or bans of nativity scenes in public schools. Merkel spoke of real persecution of hundreds of millions of Christians around the world. Indeed, a **2011 Pew Forum study** found that Christians are harassed in 130 countries, more than any of the world's other religions.

The just-released book *Persecuted: The Global Assault on Christians* provides the gory details behind these statistics. *Persecuted* is a collaboration of the Hudson Institute's Nina Shea, Paul Marshall and Lela Gilbert to catalog the human rights abuses visited upon Christian believers from North Korea to Mali. They define this persecution as Christians "who are tortured, raped, imprisoned, or killed for their faith." It's a worldwide phenomenon, but Shea points out a troubling acceleration in the cradle of Christianity's birth: the Middle East and North Africa. As London *Guardian* columnist Rupert Shortt wrote in January, "The religious ecology of the Middle East looks more fragile than ever, as the Arab Spring gives way to Christian Winter."

Tragically, Christians have been forced to abandon homelands they have occupied for thousands of years. Up to two-thirds of Christians

have fled Iraq in the past ten years to escape massacres, church burnings and constant death threats. Many Christians fled to Syria, where they are experiencing persecution anew. In Iran, U.S. pastor Saeed Abedini has been sentenced to eight years in prison for preaching Christianity.

Last week, Amnesty International blasted Egypt's government, a major recipient of U.S. aid, for its continued failure to protect Coptic Christians from discrimination and violence. Amnesty's report comes on the heels of a fresh wave of attacks just before Easter in the town of Wasta, south of Cairo.

Lebanon was once a majority Christian country but no longer, as Christians flee the hostility. *CBS News* reported in 2011 that the former president of Lebanon, Amin Gemayel **complained of a** "genocide" against Christians in the Middle East. "Massacres are taking place for no reason and without any justification against Christians. It is only because they are Christians."

"The future of Christians in the Middle East is very bleak," Neil Hicks of Human Rights First told me. "What has happened in Iraq and Syria is de facto ethnic cleansing of Christians." In other words: Christians can leave or be killed.

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St. Paul writes to St. Timothy: "Everyone who wishes to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." Sometimes that persecution comes from family (St. Barbara and others); sometimes from within the Church (St. Maximus, St. Nectarios, et al.); but often it comes from those outside (the holy martyrs).

Would you or I remain faithful to Christ if someone told us to deny Him or die? Or if we were forced to choose between our faith and our property or position?

This hymn to the martyrs from the *Triodion* from last week offers insight into how they were able to stand firm in the decisive moment of trial.

Breathing one purpose and looking to a single hope, vying with each other in their end, the victorious martyrs looked upon death for Christ as the only entry into life. O strange wonder! Though torture might have been postponed, they seized hold of it as men seize hold of treasure, and they said to one another: "Even if we do not die today, yet some day we shall surely die, obeying as we must the laws of human birth. Let us turn necessity into an act of generous love; willingly let us make our own what is the common fate of all, and let us purchase life with death." At their intercessions, O God, have mercy on us. *Matins of Thursday of the 4th Week*

Upcoming Events 2012-2013

28 April – 4 May: Great and Holy Week

May 5, Sunday: Paschal Vigil (midnight), Blessing of Baskets (3:00 a.m.), Paschal Vespers (3:00 p.m.), Picnic

May 27, Monday: Memorial Day Picnic, noon to five.

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!