

The Confessor's Tongue for October 6, A. D. 2013

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost: St. Innocent of Alaska, Apostle Thomas

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.

October 6: St. Innocent of Alaska

Bishop Innokenty (known in the world as Ivan Popov-Veniaminov) was born in 1797 in the village of Achinsk, in the province of Irkutsk in Siberia. Even in childhood, having lost his father, he grew under God's special care. He taught himself to read and write, and by the age of seven he was already reading the Psalter and the Epistles. The parishioners of his church convinced his mother to send him to school, and Innokenty was accepted into the Irkutsk seminary at government expense, graduating from it with distinction. Having married in 1821, he was then ordained into the priesthood. In 1823 he was sent as a missionary to Alaska, where he went with his wife. Here, with great self-denial and success, he preached the teachings of Christ among the primitive Aleuts. He compiled the first alphabet and grammar of the Aleut language and translated Holy Scriptures, sermons and divine services into Aleut. After several years in America, Innokenty traveled to St. Petersburg to obtain assistance for his missionary work from the Synod. While there, he was informed of his wife's death, whereupon he promptly entered the monastic life. In 1840 he was consecrated bishop and was assigned to the Kamchatka, Kuril and Aleutian bishoprics, and his missionary activity grew further. Twenty-eight years later he was transferred to the cathedral of Moscow as Metropolitan. He fell asleep in the Lord in 1879. In February 1994, Metropolitan Innokenty (Veniaminov) was canonized as a saint at the Joy of All Who Sorrow Cathedral in San Francisco together with Archbishop Nicholas, the Apostle of Japan.

The Way Into The Kingdom of Heaven *St. Innocent of Alaska*

St. Innocent originally composed this work for publication in the Aleut language in order to provide a summary of Christian life for the native peoples of Russian Alaska.

Introduction

We were created to live on earth unlike animals who die and disappear with time, but with the high purpose to live with God—not for a hundred years or so—but for eternity!

Every individual instinctively strives for happiness. This desire has been implanted in our nature by the Creator Himself, and therefore it is not sinful. But it is important to understand that in this temporary life it is impossible to find full happiness, because that comes from God and cannot be attained without Him. Only He, who is the ultimate Good and the source of all good, can quench our thirst for happiness.

Material things can never wholly satisfy us. Indeed, we know from experience that every item we

have desired has pleased us only for a short while. Then it became boring, and we started to desire something else. This process of satisfaction and boredom then repeated itself many times. The most striking example of unquenchable thirst for happiness was Solomon, the famous King of Israel, who lived around 1000 B.C. He was so rich that all the household utensils in his palaces were made of pure gold. He was so wise that kings and famous people from far away lands came to hear him. He was so famous that his foes trembled at the mere mention of his name. He could easily satisfy any of his wishes, and it seemed that there was no pleasure that he did not possess or could not obtain. But with all of this, Solomon could not find total happiness to the end of his life. He described his many years of searching for happiness and his continual disappointments in the book of Ecclesiastes, which he began with the following phrase: *Vanity of vanities, all is vanity* (Ecc. 1:2).

Innumerable other wise people who were also successful in life came to the same conclusion. It seems that in the depth of our subconscious something reminds us that we are just wanderers on this earth and that our true happiness is not here but there, in that other and better world known as Paradise or the Heavenly Kingdom. Let man own the whole world and everything that is in it, yet all this will interest him for no more than a short period, while the immortal soul, thirsting for personal communication with God, will remain unsatisfied.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came to this earth in order to return to us our lost capacity to spend eternity in the blissful presence of God. He revealed to people that all their evil lies in sin and that no one through their own efforts can overcome the evil within themselves and attain communion with God. Sin, ingrained in our nature since the fall, stands between us and God like a high wall. If the Son of God had not descended to us through His mercy for us, had not taken on our human nature, and had not by His death conquered sin, all mankind would have perished for ever! Now, thanks to Him, those who wish to cleanse themselves from evil can do so and return to God and obtain eternal bliss in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Now we will discuss in detail how you can achieve this aim. We will examine:

- Which benefits were granted to us by Our Lord Jesus Christ.
- How Jesus Christ lived on earth and suffered for us.
- Which path leads to the Kingdom of Heaven.
- How Jesus Christ helps us to walk along the path of salvation.

The Benefits the Lord Jesus Christ Has Granted Us

In order to evaluate the benefits given us by our Lord Jesus Christ, let us first remember what blessings the first man Adam had while he was

sinless, and what sorrows befell him and all of mankind after his fall into sin.

The first man, having been created in the image and likeness of his Creator, had the most vital and close relationship with Him and therefore enjoyed total happiness. God, having created Adam in His image and likeness, endowed him with many of His qualities. The most important of these was immortality. God, being all-just, created Adam sinless and pure. Being all-blessed, He created Adam blessed also, and this blessedness or beatitude was meant to increase in him day by day.

As the book of Genesis states, Adam lived in the most beautiful garden (named Eden or Paradise), planted by God, and there he enjoyed all the blessings of life. He knew no sickness nor suffering. He feared nothing, and all beasts submitted to him as their master. Adam suffered neither cold nor heat. Although he toiled by caring for the garden of Eden, he did so with pleasure. His soul was filled with awareness of the Divine presence, and he loved his Creator with his whole heart. Adam was always calm and happy and knew no unpleasantness, sorrow, or concern. All his desires were pure, righteous, and orderly; his memory, intellect, and all other faculties were in harmony and were constantly being perfected. Being pure and innocent, he was always with God and conversed with Him as with his Father, and in return God loved him as His own beloved son. In brief, Adam was in Paradise, and Paradise was within him.

If Adam had not sinned, he would have remained forever blessed, and all his descendants would have enjoyed blessedness. It was for this very purpose that God had created man. But Adam, having succumbed to the tempter-devil, transgressed against the law of the Maker and took pleasure in the taste of the forbidden fruit. When God appeared to Adam right after he had sinned, Adam, instead of repenting and promising obedience henceforth, began to justify himself and to blame his wife. Eve in turn blamed the serpent for everything. And so it was that sin became a part of human nature, deeply injuring it because of the lack of repentance of Adam and Eve. The existing communion with the Maker was cut and the blessedness lost. Having lost Paradise within himself, Adam became unworthy of the external Paradise and was therefore banished from it.

After the fall into sin, Adam's soul darkened: his thoughts and desires became muddled, and his imagination and memory began to cloud. Instead of peace and joy he met sorrow, agitation, ruination, misery, and woe. He experienced hard labor, poverty, hunger, and thirst. And after years of unsurpassed sorrows, sickly old age began to oppress him, and death neared. Worst of all, the devil, the perpetrator of every evil, obtained through sin the ability to influence Adam and to further alienate him from God.

The whole of nature, which had previously served Adam as a means to happiness, had now become

hostile to him. From then on Adam and all his descendants began to suffer from cold and heat and to experience hunger and the effect of changes in climate and environmental conditions. Animals became unfriendly toward people and looked upon them as enemy or prey. Adam's descendants began to suffer from different diseases, which gradually became more varied and severe. Men forgot that they were brothers and began to fight with each other, to hate, to deceive, to attack and to kill each other. And finally, after all kinds of hard labors and tribulations, they were doomed to die, and, as sinners, to go to Hades and experience eternal punishment there.

No man, even the most talented and powerful, nor all of mankind in unison, could ever restore what Adam lost when he sinned in Eden. What would have happened to us and to all of mankind if Jesus Christ in His mercy had not come to redeem us?

But we should all thank our Heavenly Father for taking pity on us. He loves us far more than we are capable of loving ourselves. And because of His infinite love, He has sent His only-begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, to rid us from our sins and from the snare of the devil and to lead us into the eternal Kingdom of Heaven.

Through His teachings Jesus Christ scattered the darkness of ignorance and all possible error and enlightened the world with the light of the true faith. Now anyone who desires it can come to know the will of God and attain eternal life.

By His way of life Christ showed us how to live to attain salvation. And He also assists us constantly in everything good. By His most precious blood Jesus washed away our sins and made of us children of God, who were slaves of passions and the devil. Those torments we, as transgressors of the will of God, would have had to suffer, He bore for us. By His death He crushed the power of the devil, destroyed the power of hell, and delivered us from death. By His resurrection He gave us life and opened the gates of Paradise to all. Therefore, death is no longer an irreversible tragedy but a passage from this temporary world of vanity and sorrows to the world of bright and joyous life. By His ascension into heaven Christ glorified our nature, enabling us to share eternal bliss with the angels and all the heavenly creatures.

It is impossible fully to comprehend and to describe all the benefits that the Lord has prepared for us. Let us just say that all who choose to believe in Him and to live a Christian life will become sons of God, will attain Paradise, where the angels and the just reside, and will see God face to face. They will rejoice with a pure and eternal joy, knowing no weariness, sadness, or troubles.

It is so wonderful that Jesus Christ gives these benefits not to a chosen few but to each and every person who desires to receive them! The path to salvation has been shown and arranged; it has been made as smooth and level as possible. Besides this,

Jesus Himself constantly helps us along the way, so to speak, leading us by the hand. It only remains for us not to oppose Him, not to be obstinate, but to surrender ourselves to His will. So you can see how much Jesus Christ loves us and what great blessings He is bestowing upon us!

Let us consider for a moment what would happen if Jesus were to appear before us now and ask: "My children! Do you love Me for all that I have done for you and do you value those blessings that I bestow upon you?" Who among us would not answer Him: "Yes, Lord! I love You and am grateful to You!"

If, then, we truly love Jesus Christ with our hearts and not just with our words, and if we are grateful to Him, are we then not bound to carry out what He wills for us to do? When a person truly loves his benefactor, he expresses his gratitude by doing what pleases his benefactor.

How Jesus Christ Lived and Suffered for Us

The basis of life is love: *Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength, and love your neighbor as yourself* (Mk. 12:30-31). Because of our sinfulness, none of us is capable of loving God and our neighbors in such a complete and perfect manner. Only Jesus Christ truly loved everyone, even His enemies.

His infinite love was evidenced in His every word and deed. Being the only-begotten Son of God and God Himself, Jesus Christ in His pity for us came down from Heaven and was incarnate, becoming in everything the same as us, except in sin. Being the Sovereign Heavenly King, before Whom all Angels and creatures tremble, He deigned to take on the image of an ordinary person, to restore our corrupted nature. While possessing all the treasures of the world, He agreed to be born in poverty, lying in a manger in a dark cave.

Being the supreme Lawgiver, Jesus Christ during His earthly life humbly submitted to all the decrees and commandments of the Jewish religious law. Thus, on the eighth day after His birth, He submitted to circumcision, and on the fortieth day His Mother brought Him into the temple and there paid the redemption fee for Him, the Ruler of the Universe. As was fitting for a boy and then later a youth, He always obeyed His earthly Mother and helped His foster father, the elderly Joseph. Once mature, He treated the Jewish elders and leaders with respect, as well as the Roman governors, and paid the required taxes. He willingly lived in poverty and often, while travelling to preach, had no place to rest His head. Christ, to Whom all nature submits, Himself served people and even washed the feet of His disciples, who were uneducated fishermen.

Jesus Christ constantly prayed to His Heavenly Father, even at night when the others were asleep. On Sabbath days at a synagogue, He took part in the communal prayers and the reading of the Scriptures, and on the major feast days He made pilgrimages to the temple at Jerusalem.

With all His love and diligence Jesus fulfilled that commission for which His Heavenly Father sent Him, directing everything toward His Father's glory. He felt pity for all people, especially for the poor and underprivileged, wished well to everyone, and was willing to bear anything in order to ease their suffering. He bore all conceivable affronts and insults from the ungrateful crowd with the greatest meekness, and did not vent His anger on those who slandered Him and plotted intrigues against Him. Some who bore Christ ill will called Him a sinner and lawbreaker; others called Him a carpenter's son and a shallow person; still others said He was a friend of drunkards and sinners. On several occasions Christ's enemies attempted to stone Him or toss Him from a mountaintop. Jewish scribes called His divine teachings deceitful; and when He healed the sick, raised the dead, or exorcised demons, they explained away these miracles as the deeds of an evil spirit. Some even openly called Him possessed. The Lord Jesus, being Almighty God, could have destroyed them all with one word. Instead, He pitied them as spiritually blind and prayed for their welfare and for their salvation.

In brief, from His early youth till His very death, Jesus Christ constantly did good to all people, even when, instead of being grateful to Him, they caused Him anguish and pain. He was especially hated by the Jewish elders, high priests, and scribes—whose mission it was to teach the people goodness and to lead them toward faith. They worked with all their might to keep the people from believing in Jesus as the God-sent Messiah, distorting the meaning of the prophecies that predicted His coming. They contradicted all that He said or did. Jesus did not grieve so much that the Jewish leaders fought against Him as He did from the fact that they were rushing blindly toward doom, taking the simple people along with them.

Not long before His death, Jesus worked His greatest miracle: He resurrected Lazarus, who had already been in the grave for four days and whose body had started to decompose. This miracle took place in the presence of a great crowd and made an overwhelming impression on them all. After this miracle, many of the unbelieving Jews started to believe in Jesus as the Messiah. But the high priests and the scribes, being envious of His fame, hastily gathered and decided to put Christ to death without delay, together with Lazarus whom He had resurrected.

Knowing that the days of His earthly life were drawing to an end, Christ gathered his disciples in a room near Mount Zion for the mystical last supper. Here He instituted the Mystery of Holy Communion and gave His last commandments to the disciples. After that He went to the garden of Gethsemane, where He experienced His most agonizing inner sufferings. The anguish was so great that during prayer the sweat on His face became a sweat of blood. At that moment the soul of the Savior was immersed into a terrible darkness and horror at the unbearable sins which He was taking upon Himself. Jesus

knew that he had to wash away with His most Holy blood all the countless transgressions of billions of people, beginning with Adam and including all future generations. Overwhelmed by the oppression of the world's evil, Jesus Christ exclaimed: "*My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death*" (Matt. 26:38).

No one can truly comprehend what the pure soul of the God-man experienced in the garden of Gethsemane. You can imagine, however, that all the loathsome sins of mankind were revealed to Him in all their ugliness and that the pure soul of the God-man was shocked and depressed by this terrible sight. Christ knew that His great sufferings and boundless love would be appreciated by only a few, that the majority of the people would turn away from Him with indifference, and that some would reject His teachings and would cruelly persecute those who believed in Him. He foresaw that among His followers there would be many hypocrites who would turn faith into a means for profit and that there would be false teachers and false prophets who would distort His teachings and who, because of pride and greed, would entice the faithful into harmful sects. He foresaw that false pastors would appear, who, because of ambition, would create schisms in the Church. Christ knew not only that many Christians would fail to love God and live righteously but also that they would give themselves to heinous crimes and vices, so that by their sins they would even surpass pagans, and as a result the Christian faith would be scandalized.

In these most trying sufferings, while justice and loyalty to His Father demanded from Christ that He destroy mankind as ungrateful and criminal, the feelings of pity and sorrow ultimately stirred Him to accept all sufferings and death itself to save us sinners from the power of the devil and from eternal damnation.

While Jesus was still praying, a mob with torches and clubs, along with some soldiers who were sent by the Jewish elders, came into the garden. They bound Him and dragged Him, as they would an evildoer, to the high priest for trial. The Apostles, whom He loved so much and brought so close to Himself, faintheartedly left Him and fled. Then the leaders and all the Sanhedrin quickly assembled at the home of the high priest, where they brought a multitude of the most ridiculous accusations against Christ. None of these, however, was enough to warrant a sentence of death. The high priest demanded that Jesus, while He was under oath, state whether or not He was the promised Messiah, the Son of God. After He affirmed that He was, the Sanhedrin accused Him of blasphemy and sentenced Him to death. After this, the members of the council, unable to hold back their hatred of Jesus any longer, surrounded Him and subjected Him to beatings and all kinds of insults.

The Romans, however, had deprived the Sanhedrin of the power to execute anyone. So, the next morning, on Friday, the day before the Passover, the Jewish leaders brought Jesus Christ to a new trial before the Roman governor Pontius Pilate, hoping that Pilate would affirm their decision. Pilate, realizing that they were accusing Christ out of envy, wanted to let Him go. But the high priests and elders threatened that they would complain about him to the Roman emperor. Not wishing to jeopardize his career, Pilate decided to address the people who had gathered there. Reminding the people of the custom to free some prisoner on the eve of the Passover holiday, Pilate asked them which of the two they would want him to set free: Barabbas or Christ (Barabbas was a

robber who had been imprisoned for some crime). While the mob of people were talking among themselves, the Jewish leaders convinced them to ask for Barabbas' release and to demand that Christ be crucified on the cross.

The people forgot the innumerable good deeds of Christ: from how many of them He had exorcised demons, how many He had healed of leprosy, blindness, weakness and other incurable diseases, how many He had turned from debauchery to the path of goodness, and to how many of the despairing He had returned hope.

The Roman soldiers submitted the Lord to scourging and cursing. Finally they placed on Him a purple cloak and on His head a crown of thorns. Pilate then brought out the wounded Christ, hoping the people would feel pity and ask for His release. Instead they began to shout, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" On hearing this, Pilate decided to give up. He halfheartedly washed his hands as a sign of non-participation in the conviction of an innocent man, ordered the release of Barabbas, and handed Christ over to the Jewish leaders for them to dispose of.

The soldiers gave Christ the wooden cross on which He was to be crucified and ordered Him to carry it to the execution site, known as Golgotha (meaning "place of the skull"). There they removed His outer clothing and nailed Him to the cross. Two robbers, one on either side, were crucified with Him. Thus, in the most humiliating circumstances, as if He were a great criminal, they executed the One Who with the divine light dispelled the darkness of fallacies and Who with His boundless love defeated hate! Dear God! How cruel and blind people can be!

But those who hated Christ could not satisfy their hatred. Even on the dying Sufferer they piled more curses and with sneers demanded a miracle. When He asked for water to quench His thirst, they gave Him vinegar. And thus, deserted by all, wounded, bleeding and suffocating, fatigued by an unbearable thirst, He, the one who once breathed life into the first man, died the cruelest of deaths! Even soulless nature recoiled at this crime: the sun darkened and the earth quaked.

For whom, then, did the Savior of the world suffer? He suffered for all mankind, for enemies and tormentors, for those who, having received many benefits from Him, failed to thank Him. He suffered for each and every one of us, stubborn sinners, who daily sadden Him with our indifference, ingratitude, hatred, lies, and wicked deeds, and who, by these innumerable sins, crucify Him again and again.

In order to appreciate more fully the boundless love of Jesus Christ and the extent of His sacrifice, let us remind ourselves how great He is and how insignificant we are. Indeed, Christ is the true God, equal to the Father and the Holy Spirit. He resides in an unreachable world, this all powerful Creator of the universe, this immortal King before whom bow countless hosts of angels. He is the undying fountain of life, the Lord of all that is visible and invisible, the formidable Judge of the living and the dead. This same Jesus suffered for us sinful and worthless creatures. Who can comprehend this mystery of Godly Love?
To be continued...

Upcoming Events 2012-2013

15 November Nativity Fast begins.
31 Dec - 1 Jan All-Night Vigil for the Feast of St. Basil, Circumcision of Our Lord, and New Year

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!