

The Confessor's Tongue for October 20, A. D. 2013

Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost: Great Martyr Artemius

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.

The Way Into The Kingdom of Heaven, 3

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.

Why did God not make the path to the Kingdom of Heaven light and pleasant? Only God knows. Who would question His divine wisdom? He saw that the narrow path is what we need! We who are below see only bits and pieces, but He, Who is above all creation, sees our lives from the standpoint of eternity. However, though not completely understanding the plans of our Creator, let us consider the following:

1. The Kingdom of Heaven is the highest beatitude and inexhaustible wealth. If great efforts are necessary to obtain meager and temporary earthly advantages, then how can it be possible to obtain such a great and eternal treasure without any effort?

2. The Kingdom of Heaven is the most coveted reward. Where else are rewards given freely and for nothing? If we struggle to get temporary benefits, so much more should we struggle to obtain the eternal reward.

3. We must bear our cross because we want to be with Christ and to participate in His glory. If Jesus Christ, our Master and Teacher, gained heavenly glory through suffering, would it not be shameful for us to share His glory when we faintheartedly shun any trials or sorrows?

4. Besides, lifelong crosses are not the lot of Christians alone. Everyone carries their own cross, both Christians and non-Christians, believers and pagans. The difference is that for some, their crosses serve as a means of attaining the Kingdom of Heaven, while for the others they bring no such value. For the Christian, the cross gradually becomes lighter and more joyful, while for the nonbeliever it becomes heavier and more burdensome. Why is this so? Because where the one carries their cross with faith and devotion to God, the other carries it with grumbling and anger.

Therefore, Christian, do not shun your lifelong cross, but, on the contrary, thank Jesus Christ that He honored you to follow and imitate Him. If Christ had not suffered and died, then none of us, no matter how much we suffered and struggled, would enter the Kingdom of Heaven, for then we would have had to suffer as slaves, and slaves deserve no rewards. Now, however, we suffer as sons for our own salvation. O merciful Lord! How great is Thy love for us. How great are Thy benefits to us. Thou batest evil itself for our benefit and salvation!

Christian! Gratitude alone to Jesus Christ, your benefactor, obliges you to follow Him. Christ came down to earth for you. Can it be possible that you would prefer some worldly thing to Him? For you Jesus drank the cup full of suffering; can it be that you would refuse to suffer a little for Him?

5. Jesus Christ redeemed us by His death, and, therefore, by the right of redemption we belong to Him and must do all that He wills. Christ wills only one thing: that we should attain eternal bliss.

6. Finally, we cannot avoid the narrow path into the Kingdom of Heaven, since every man has sins and sin in itself is an ulcer that cannot be cured without strong

medicine. Suffering is the medicine with which God cures our souls. When somebody is ill, then, regardless of his surroundings even though he is in the most magnificent of palaces—he will still suffer. Such is the fate of every sinner; no matter where he settles, even in Paradise itself, he will suffer because the elements of hell reside within him. Similarly, a righteous person can be as happy in a shack as in a palace. When our heart is filled with the Holy Spirit, wherever we may find ourselves, there we will always feel joy, since Paradise is within us.

And so, brethren, if you wish to attain the Kingdom of Heaven, you cannot bypass the path taken by Jesus Christ. Indeed, all the prophets, the Apostles, the martyrs, the saints and countless other righteous ones walked along this path. There is no other.

Some might object, saying, how can we who are sinful and weak be like Jesus Christ or the saints! We live in the secular world and have families and many responsibilities. Oh, brethren! This is a cunning excuse and an insult to our Creator. To justify our carelessness by such reasoning means to accuse our Maker of being unable to create us properly. After all, the saints, like us, were not sinless at first but participated in worldly affairs, labored and had various obligations and families to care about. Surely they were not perfect in everything. They had their share of temptations and low moments. Notwithstanding this, living in circumstances similar to ours and having their ups and downs, they steered toward the main objective of their life: the Kingdom of Heaven. Undoubtedly, we also, if we truly desire to, can be good citizens, faithful spouses, loving parents, and simultaneously good Christians. Our faith will not be an obstacle but, on the contrary, will aid all our good undertakings. The essence of Christianity is pure and selfless love, which is inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, brethren, if you wish to attain the Kingdom of Heaven, follow the path which Jesus Christ took, and He, the all-merciful one, will help you every step of the way.

How Jesus Christ Helps Us

While walking the path of Christ, you should not rely only on yourself. If Jesus Christ, our Great Benefactor, had not given us help every step of the way, no one could have reached salvation. Even the Apostles, when left to themselves, were unable to follow Jesus and faintheartedly dispersed. But when on Pentecost they received help from above, they joyfully followed His path, and then neither dangers nor difficulties nor death itself could discourage them.

What is this help given by Jesus Christ to Christians? This help is the Grace of the Holy Spirit. God's grace surrounds us, and with it the Lord draws us to Himself. All who wish can receive this help and become filled with it.

The Holy Spirit, being God, equal to the Father and the Son, is the source of life and strength. He gives to believers wisdom, inner peace and inspiration, not according to their merits but for Jesus Christ's sake. How the Holy Spirit helps us, what are His gifts, and how one should attract His Grace will now be explained in accordance with the Holy Scriptures.

1. When descending upon a Christian, the Holy Spirit gives him *faith* and *light*. No one can have a true living faith without the Holy Spirit. Even a person most learned in

Scriptures is totally blind without His enlightenment. On the other hand, the Holy Spirit can make even the lowest simpleton wise and disclose God's mysteries to them.

2. Descending upon a Christian, the Holy Spirit brings *true love* which warms his heart. This love inspires a person to do good deeds, so that for him there is nothing impossible or terrifying anymore. God's commandments, which appeared to be difficult before, now become easy. Faith and love, gifts from the Holy Spirit, are such powerful means that the person possessing them can easily and joyfully follow the path of Jesus Christ.

3. The Holy Spirit *corrects a worldly outlook and attitude*, so that a Christian is no longer overwhelmed by the temptations of this passing world. Gratefully using what God has bestowed, a true Christian does not become attached to anything temporary but considers himself a stranger in this world and wishes most of all to be in contact with God. On the other hand, a person without the grace of the Holy Spirit, despite all his learning and capabilities, always remains a worshiper of the world and a slave of the flesh.

4. The Holy Spirit gives a Christian *wisdom*. This is illustrated very obviously in the case of the Holy Apostles. Because of their low social position, they were the most simple and unlearned of men. However, after the descent of the Holy Spirit upon them on the day of Pentecost, they received such wisdom and power of speech that even philosophers and orators could not stand up to them. The Holy Spirit always teaches Christians what they must do, and when and how they should act. Thus guided by the Holy Spirit, they will always find the time and the means for the salvation of their soul. Amid all the turmoils of the world and in spite of being busy, they will be able to collect their inner self to be with and pray to God. A non-spiritual person, on the other hand, cannot focus or pray sincerely, even in church.

5. The Holy Spirit gives Christians *true joy* and *undisturbable peace*. They feel this peace and joy even during external difficulties and in times of trial. People, on the other hand, who do not have the Holy Spirit, can never truly rejoice or attain inner peace. When they enjoy themselves, they find their joy is transient, frivolous and pitiful, and on occasion even sinful. After their revelry, a boredom greater than ever before fills their heart. Similarly, when a non-spiritual person feels tranquility, this is not a true spiritual peace but a sort of dozing or apathy. Woe to the people who do not awaken in time and do not start being concerned with the salvation of their soul! They will remain spiritually dead even while alive physically.

6. The Holy Spirit gives *true humility*. Even the most intelligent people, if they do not possess the Holy Spirit, cannot know themselves well enough, because their internal illness and spiritual poverty are hidden from them. When they do something good or act honestly, they become haughty, look down on others, and even judge those who in their opinion are inferior to them. Through their own blindness, many self-satisfied falsely righteous ones did not ask the Holy Spirit for guidance and strengthening, and consequently, perished. The Holy Spirit always comes to those who ask for enlightenment and help. As a bright ray of sun penetrates the darkness, enhancing the smallest details found within, so does the Holy Spirit, having descended upon people, disclose to them all the weakness and wretchedness of their soul. Enlightened by the Heavenly light, Christians can no longer boast about their good works, because they realize

their soul needs healing and complete renewal. This realization makes them more humble, and they begin to repent and decide to live more carefully. They stop relying on themselves and ask God for guidance and help.

7. The Holy Spirit grants true *fervent prayer*. Until they receive the Holy Spirit, people cannot pray in a manner truly pleasing to God because they cannot control their scattered thoughts and feelings. Christians in whom the Holy Spirit resides, however, vividly feel the presence of God; their prayer flows evenly, and they know how and for what to ask God. In this inspired state, they can beseech God for anything, even the seemingly impossible.

This is a short list of the most needed gifts of the Holy Spirit. *To be concluded next week.*

On the Passions, Introduction

"You are mistaken if you suppose that there is ever a time when the Christian does not suffer persecution. You are beset without even knowing it, for 'our adversary as a roaring lion walketh about seeking whom he may devour', and do you think of peace? . . . On the one side, self-indulgence presees me hard; on another covetousness strives to make an inroad; my belly wishes to be a God to me, in place of Christ, and lust would fain drive away the Holy Spirit that dwells in me and defile His temple. I am pursued, I say, by an enemy 'Whose name is legion and his wiles untold'; and, hapless wretch that I am, how shall I hold myself a victor when I am being led away captive?" (*Blessed Jerome, Letter 14*)

St. Jerome's words tell us that the Evil One, using a man's passions, destroys souls. But to speak of this is not easy today, when every passion has been given the name of virtue and most men are totally beguiled by the spirit of the world.

"The most dreadful thing of all is that, entangled in evil, we are pleased to hug our chains to ourselves! Dwelling in a dark prison, we refuse to come forth into the light, but rivet ourselves to evil, actually rejoicing in our malady! We are in a worse state than those that work in mines, enduring labors and afflictions . . . And what is truly worst of all is that if anyone tries to free us from this bitter captivity, we do not allow it; we are even vexed and displeased with them..." (*St. John Chrysostom, Homily 36 on St. John*)

The word 'passion' comes from the Latin *passio*, which means 'suffering.' Yet we most often use the word 'passion' in connection with romantic love. It is true that passion also means an intense or overpowering emotion, but our society does not see this as something bad or unworthy of a man.

But the Spirit of God is the spirit of freedom from enslavement to passion. This is true freedom, and true peace, such that this world cannot give nor can it understand. As the Prophet David says: 'Many are the tribulations of the righteous, but the Lord will deliver them out of all of them.'

So long as we accept and revel in our every passionate impulse—which is exactly what the spirit of the world encourages us to do—we are like sheep among wolves, being unprotected by the staff of truth and vigilance, holding 'not a double edged sword, but a staff of reed'. *To be continued... From "The Teaching of the Holy Fathers On the Passions" Nicodemus Orthodox Publication Society*

Upcoming Events 2012-2013

31 October, 6:00 p.m. All Saints Evening

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!