

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

Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost: Apostles Rodion, Quartus, Tertius et al.

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 Theotokos Described by St. Maximus

Georgian manuscripts discovered in the 20th century were found to contain a life of the Theotokos written by St. Maximus the Confessor. Available in French since 1984, this Life has finally been translated into English.

She is the ardent intercessor of her Son, Christ God, for all those who entreat her.
She is the calm harbor of all those buffeted by waves, who rescues them from spiritual and fleshly waves.
She is the guide on the way of life for all who have gone astray.
She is the one who seeks those who are lost.
She is the help and support of those who are afflicted.
She is the intercessor and mediator of those who are penitent.
And I will say even more than the above:
She is the resurrection of the fallen Adam.
She is the destruction of Eve's tears.
She is the comforter of those who mourn.
She is the throne of the king, who bears the One who bears all.
She is the one who renews the old world.

From *St. Maximus the Confessor, The Life of the Virgin, translated by Stephen H. Shoemaker, Yale University Press: New Haven and London, 2012, p. 149.*

Mechanics of Confession

When we come for Confession, we stand before the icon of Christ and the Cross; we cross ourselves and bow twice, kiss the cross and the icon, and then cross ourselves and bow a third time.

When our Confession is done, we again cross ourselves and bow twice, kiss the Cross and icon, and the cross and bow a third time. We then turn, bow to the priest, and ask his blessing by holding out our hands in the form a cross, right over left, and then kiss the priest's hand when he finishes giving his blessing.

During Confession, we do not use other people's names. We may speak of our husband, our wife, our third child, our mother, our father, our friend, but we don't use their names. This helps keep us focused on our sin and from speaking unnecessarily about others in our confession.

When we come to confession, we come ready to name our sins as specifically as we can. Most of us would do well to have a list of things written down, which we have prepared beforehand to confess. We name our sins, our faults, our failures to love God with all our heart, our neighbor as ourself, our wives as Christ loved His Church. Any 'story' needed to give the context of the sin should be only what is needed and be brief.

This last item becomes particularly important as the parish grows and more people are needing to

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come to Confession. If you do due diligence and come prepared, the confession line can be kept moving. To be prepared properly to receive Holy Communion, we should have made a good Confession within the past month.

St. Gregory of Sinai: Three Degrees of Eating

There are three degrees of eating: self-control, sufficiency and satiety. Self-control is to be hungry after having eaten. Sufficiency is to be neither hungry nor weighed down. Satiety is to be slightly weighed down. To eat again after reaching the point of satiety is to open the door of gluttony, through which unchastity comes in. Attentive to these distinctions, choose what is best for you according to your powers, not overstepping the limits. For according to St Paul only the perfect can be both hungry and full, and at the same time be strong in all things (cf. Phil. 4:12).

On Sinful Falls

Our falls into anger and other movements of the passions demonstrate to us our underlying spiritual pride, and they humble us against our will; if we strive to eradicate this root, the branches will fall off by themselves.

Much experience is needed before we truly realize our infirmity and are humbled, and this is acquired not quickly but with much time. Our falls themselves bridle our arrogance and humble us against our will. But before God it is better to be a sinner with repentance than a righteous man with pride.

Falling and rising, repenting and being humbled is better than not falling, not repenting, and not being humbled; from the battle we learn skill.

St. Macarius of Optina

The Need for True Theology and Virtuous Living

Fr. Justin Frederick

In his Fourth Catechetical Lecture, delivered in the fourth century to those who were soon to be illumined through Holy Baptism, St. Cyril of Jerusalem discusses the two fundamental needs of authentic Christian life.

He says, "The method of godliness consists of these two things, pious doctrines, and virtuous practice." By pious doctrines, St. Cyril means true theology, speaking about, confessing, and believing in God accurately as He has revealed Himself to us to be. By virtuous practice, he means a Christian way of life, one which is in conformity to God's revealed will for man as expressed in His commandments.

If either is lacking in a man, he gains no ultimate benefit. As St. Cyril puts it, "For what profit is it, to know well the doctrines concerning God, and yet to be a vile fornicator?" In other words, if our theology is correct, that is, what we confess and believe about God is true and accurate, yet we practice sin, we do

not profit—and we dishonor by our sinful lives Christ God whose name we bear.

St. Cyril goes on: “And again, what profit is it, to be nobly temperate, yet an impious blasphemer?” We can be very virtuous people and live a perfectly moral life, but if our theology is wrong, we are, in fact, impious blasphemers, for we speak and believe wrongly about the true God, rejecting His self-revelation and, in effect, slandering Him and telling lies about Him, thus misrepresenting Him to ourselves and the world. The god we claim to serve, in such a case, is actually no god at all but only the figment of our deluded imagination. True Theology is essential for us to purify our distorted notions of God so that we may come to know Him as He has revealed Himself to be, as He truly is, not as we might wish Him to be.

Both right doctrine and right living are necessary for a truly Christian life. St. Cyril says, “A most precious possession, therefore, is the knowledge of doctrines: also there is need of a wakeful soul, since there are many *that make spoil through philosophy and vain deceit* (Col 2:8). He goes on to warn how other religious and philosophical groups of his day sought to lead one astray from sound teaching and correct living.

St. Cyril's warnings are as relevant to us now as they were to his catechumens in the fourth century. We live immersed in corrosive religious relativism in which acidic notions of false tolerance eat away at claims of true doctrine and a correct way of life. People may tell us, “I'm glad your Orthodox Christian faith works for you, but it's not for me” or “It may be true for you, but it isn't true for me, and it certainly isn't true for good Muslims, Jews, and Hindus...”. Our generation views our confession that “We have seen the true Light, we have found the true faith” as an arrogant and intolerant claim and considers a life lived in accordance with that true Light as extreme.

Since Absolute Truth is generally denied today, all that we are permitted is relative truths: “It's truth for me,” replaces “It is the Truth.” That there is any Absolute Good for man in his behavior has been rejected as well. The notion of virtue, or living in accordance with God's design and will for man, has been discarded and replaced with man's moral autonomy to choose right and wrong for himself. For if there is no true God who has designed us for our true life to be found in Him, virtue loses its meaning and its goal. Virtue is then left to be defined by the autonomous individual in accordance with his preferences or to be discarded altogether as a concept that has outlived its usefulness.

Our land is full of Christian groups, all of which, to one degree or another, have departed from true doctrine of the true God and from correct living according to His will. Some are so far gone as to have given up even their claim to possess the Truth or to live correctly in accordance with God's revealed will.

The acid of the age has fatally eroded any conviction they once had, depriving them of both fundamentals of Christianity and leaving them bereft of light in a dark world. Others still believe that they possess the truth about God and that they teach a correct way of life, but these all have demonstrably departed from the Apostolic Faith taught by St. Cyril, the Apostles, and the Fathers.

The Orthodox Church distinguishes herself from every other Christian group and every other religion in our land by continuing to uphold true Theology and virtuous practice taught by the Apostles and Fathers according to God's revelation and passed down to us. We Orthodox Christians cannot rest complacent and proud in our possession of the fullness of the Faith but must be sober-minded and vigilant both to hold to and walk in the True Faith, that we not be led astray by the spirit of our age, either in our doctrine or in how we live as Christians.

It is for this reason so many of our hymns and prayers are theological in nature, putting before us daily who this God is who has revealed Himself to us in Christ, so that we may hymn and pray to the true God Who Is rather than some product of our own corrupt imaginations. We particularly sing these hymns at the Saturday evening Vigil, which is one reason why regular attendance at the Vigil is so important for our preservation and growth in the Faith. It is for this reason that all of us are corporately called to days and seasons of prayer, fasting, almsgiving, and repentance that we may move ahead in the struggle to conform our lives to the image of Christ and live in accordance with His will as revealed in His commandments.

Theological Terminology: Vouchsafe

From *vouch* and *safe*; to vouch or answer for safety. It means to condescend to grant; to condescend, to deign, to yield. *Condescend* means “to descend from the privileges of superior rank or dignity to do some act to an inferior which strict justice or the ordinary rules of civility do not require. Thus, we pray: “Vouchsafe, O Lord, to keep us this night without sin...”; “And vouchsafe, O Lord, that with boldness and without condemnation, we may dare to call upon Thee, the heavenly God and Father, and to say...” In using this word, we ask God for something we need, recognizing that He does not owe it to us, but He graciously deigns to grant it to us out of His love and mercy toward us.

Upcoming Events 2012-2013

- 15 November Nativity Fast begins.
- 21 November Great Feast: Entry of the Theotokos into the Temple.
- 30 December – 3 January Winter Service Retreat at St. George's in Pharr
- 31 December – 1 January All Night Vigil for St. Basil

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!