

The Confessor's Tongue for February 16, A. D. 2014

Sunday of the Prodigal Son

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.

February 16: Martyrs Pamphilus & Porphyrios

They suffered in Caesarea, Palestine in the year 308 or 309. St. Pamphilus, a native of Beirut, received a higher education and was the presbyter in Caesarea. He worked much at correcting the Old Testament texts of the Holy Scriptures damaged by copyists, copied the corrections in his own hand and sent them around to those who wished to have them. Together with these he spread the faith in Christ and true enlightenment. During the persecution of Diocletian, St. Pamphilus underwent cruel torture, together with the aging deacon of the Prophet Elijah Church Valens and Paul, a native of Jamnia. After torture all of them were imprisoned for two years and finally were dismembered by the sword together with five young Egyptians, native brothers, who were also held there and suffered during the persecution in Caesarea, while on the return way from Cilicia where they led 130 confessors into the mines. The servant of Pamphilus, Porphyrius, who asked permission to bury the bodies of the holy martyrs and confessed to being a Christian, was burned. Seleucus, the warrior, was beheaded. Theodulus, the staretz (elder), was crucified on a cross. One young Christian, Julian, approaching Caesarea, saw the mutilated bodies of the holy martyrs, went up to them and kissed them. Warriors, who saw this, informed the governor about him, and when the young man confessed Christ in the presence of the latter, he was burned.

On the Jesus Prayer

Those who hunger to know God and experience His presence rather than just knowing about Him can have recourse to the Jesus Prayer, a tried and true, long-practiced means of achieving intimate communion with God.

The goal of the Jesus Prayer is communion with God, constant awareness or consciousness of God's presence, and union with Him. This experience of God brings peace and great joy, for through it we come to know God and that He is with us and within us and not just somewhere 'out there.'

The Jesus Prayer invokes the name above all names, the only name by which we may be saved. It confesses Jesus of Nazareth as the Son of God and calls upon Him to have mercy on us.

This request for mercy is not simply a request that we not be punished. It is that, but that is the smallest part of it. The request for mercy is really asking that God give to us all the good things of which sin has deprived us. It is to say, "Though I am unworthy of Thy riches, Thy grace, Thy favor, grant it to me anyway in Thy love and goodness." God is merciful in this way, constantly offering to us that which we do not deserve.

The Jesus Prayer is used by many Orthodox

Christians throughout the day as they work to remember God. It also and even more importantly should be used for times of concentrated prayer.

A good beginning in this for newcomers to the Jesus Prayer is to say 300 Jesus Prayers in the morning and 300 at night. One counts them on a prayer rope, which allows one to fulfill the given amount without being distracted by counting. The prayer rope also serves as a focal point and an aid to concentration.

We may stand or sit for the Jesus Prayer. It is good for beginners to pray it audibly, which helps reduce distracting thoughts. It may be prayed slowly, or quickly (praying it more quickly also gives less space in the mind for stray thoughts).

We pray aware that Christ is present; the Kingdom of God is within us, and each of us is a temple of the Holy Spirit. We have to enter the temple of our hearts and stand before the living God who meets us there. But many thoughts and our passions and sins hinder that meeting with God, as does any repressed, hidden spiritual junk in our lives. As we pray the prayer with attention and desire to know the living God, this junk will be exposed, loosened, and have to be flushed out of our system.

Hence, it is vitally important for us who embark on this path to realize that this will happen. We must be prepared to bring all thoughts, feelings, and sinful memories, all our anger and hurt, to Confession, no less than once a month and, perhaps, even more frequently. We may have to confess old junk a number of times before it passes from us. We must never trust ourselves in this, as we can easily be deluded. Hence we make frequent use of Confession and do not rely on our own understanding. We especially need to be careful of any sort of 'experiences' we think we may be having and submit them to our confessor as well. This is for our protection so we do not fall into delusion.

We are created to know God, to experience Him, to be fully conscious of Him. This is not something just for a few saints, but is for all of us who desire it. As the process of purification progresses, we shall begin to taste of the sweetness of God's presence. When we enter into His presence, when our communion begins, we stop saying the prayer "Be still and know that I am God," say the Scriptures, and this we must do. As St. Seraphim puts it, "When the Holy Spirit comes, stop saying 'come, Holy Spirit.'" As we enter this place of quiet communion in God's presence, we may begin to discern His will and hear His voice, which is only possible when we are still and our thoughts are quiet. At this point, we leave saying prayers behind and enter into prayer. A high level of this communion with God is called 'pure prayer.'

It is that we may be still and know Him to be God that we are encouraged to cut excess noise out

of our lives during Great Lent. We can scarcely experience this state when our minds rush to and fro and are caught up and entangled in all manner of thoughts and images.

One more point is to be made: this meeting of God in the heart is dispassionate rather than emotional, and we have to learn to discern the difference. This is not an emotional or psychological experience, but a spiritual one at the fundamental level of our being. It may take us time to reach it, as we are accustomed to living on the psychological and emotional level.

I strongly urge those who have a desire to know God more intimately to incorporate the Jesus Prayer into their daily prayers during the upcoming Fast. If you have questions, by all means ask your priest. There is much more that can be said about this, and there are good resources available to help you too.

Fr. Justin Frederick

There are three degrees of eating: abstinence, adequacy and satiety. Abstinence is when one is hungry after eating. Adequacy is when one is neither hungry nor weighed down. Satiety is when one is weighed down a little. To eat beyond satiety is the door to gluttony through which lust enters in. And so, examine all this and choose what is suited for your strength, without violating the rules. It is for the perfect, and this is according to the apostle, to go hungry and to be filled and in all things to be strong [Philippians 4:12-13]. *St. Gregory of Sinai*

The Spiritual Power in Guarding the Tongue

When Abba Macarius was praying in his cell on one occasion, he heard a voice from God, which said, "Macarius, thou hast not yet attained to the state of excellence of two women who are in such and such a city." The old man rose up in the morning, and took in his hand a palm stick, and he began to set out on the road to that city. Now, therefore, when he had arrived at the city, and learned the place of the abode of the two women, he knocked at the door, and there went forth one of the women and brought him into the house.

And when he had been sitting down for a little, the other woman came in, and he called them to him, and they came nigh and sat down before him. Then the old man said to them, "On your account I have made this long journey, and have performed all this labor, and with great difficulty have come from the desert; tell me, then, what are thy works?"

And they said unto him, "Believe us, O father; neither of us hath ever been absent from, or kept herself from her husband's couch up to this day; what work, then, wouldst thou see in us?"

Then the old man made apologies to them and entreated them to reveal to him and to show him their spiritual labor, and therefore they said unto him, "According to worldly considerations we are

strangers one to the other, for we are not kinsfolk, but it fell out that the two of us married two men who are brethren. And behold, up to this present we have lived in this house for twelve years, and we have never wanted to quarrel with each other, and neither of us hath spoken one abominable word of abuse to her companion. Now we made up our minds together to leave our husbands and to join the army of virgins, but, although we entreated our husbands earnestly to allow us to do so, they would not undertake to send us away. And as we were unable to do that which we wished, we made a promise between ourselves and God that, until death, no worldly word should go forth from our mouths."

Now when Macarius heard this, he said, "Truly, virginity by itself is nothing, nor marriage, nor life as a monk, nor life in the world; for God seeketh the love of a man, and giveth the Spirit unto him."

St. John of Kronstadt on Prayer

We must carefully tend the field of our heart, let the tares of every vice should grow in it; we must daily weed it—at least by morning and evening prayers—and water it with abundant tears, as with rain.

Our heart dies spiritually every day. Only ardent, tearful prayer can restore it to breath and life. If we do not pray fervently every day, we may easily and speedily overtaken by spiritual death.

With sincere Christians, prayer is continual, because we continually sin; gratitude is perpetual, because every day, every moment, we receive fresh mercies from God, beside the old mercies, which are numberless. Praise is also perpetual, because we perpetually see the glory of God's works in ourselves and in the world, especially the glory of his infinite love towards us.

Prayer for others is very beneficial to the man himself who prays; it purifies the heart, strengthens faith and hope in God, and arouses love for God and our neighbor.

A Question to Guide Fasting

To determine whether you are walking on the royal middle way in your fasting, ask yourself "Do I regularly feel 'light' and at peace in body, frequently a little hungry (*i.e.*, a "humility in flesh," or a measure of bodily weakness)—but not overly distracted or continually troubled by hunger—and disposed towards prayer?" Another similar question is: "Is the food I am about to eat something I *need* for strength of body—that my soul might not be overly burdened with bodily needs—or am I eating out of mere pleasure or boredom?"

Upcoming Events 2014

17-20 February Diocese of the South Pastoral Conference at St. Maximus

2 March Forgiveness Sunday, Vespers, 6:00 p.m.

Everyone should plan on attending this service.

20 April Great and Holy Pascha

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!