

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

Second Sunday of Lent: St. Gregory Palamas

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 Gospel of John

"Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him." John 6:27

Christ's commands delineate the path of life and blessedness, and obedience to Him opens the door to His abundant blessing.

The day after Jesus feeds the 5000 by blessing and multiplying five loaves and two fish, Jesus has slipped away across the Sea of Galilee. The crowds, hungry for more food, work at searching for Him until they find Him. Engaging them, He tells them that they make this effort to find Him not because they saw the signs of power He has performed which point to His divinity but because He filled their mouths with food, and they want them to be filled again.

In this context, He offers them the command to labor for food which endures to everlasting life rather than food for the body. The latter food quickly spoils, or, if eaten, it is quickly digested and consumed by the body, and the wastes are eliminated. Despite this transient nature of food for the body, man's whole labor in life is directed to satisfying his physical appetite for food: "All the labor of man is for his mouth, and yet the appetite is not filled" (*Eccles. 6:7*).

Rather than spending all their energy to acquire perishable food for the body, He commands them to labor for "food which endures to everlasting life." Physical food sustains the body during this labor, but it is not the goal: the goal is the food which will feed and satisfy man forever, something the world's good fail to do. For after all, "Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God" (*Matthew 4:4*).

Securing that word by which man lives takes work. God fed the children of Israel in the wilderness, but they had to go out and gather it each day, or they went hungry. The eternal bread also must be gathered with labor. The God offers is freely to those who want it, they must make the effort to gather it and keep it.

Man's life is given to him that he may work to acquire this eternal bread. He still works for his physical bread ("If any will not work, neither should he eat" *2 Thessalonians 3:10*) that his body may be sustained for the greater work of securing the heavenly food for eternal nourishment. That food does not perish, nor does it ever run out. It always satisfies.

Man's whole life is to be directed to this work of securing eternal food for himself and others. Orthodox Christians especially labor to this end during the Great Fast, seeking to acquire a great measure of God's grace through prayer, fasting,

repentance, almsgiving, works of mercy, and spiritual reading. Man deludes himself if he thinks he can secure eternal food without work while he expends all his energy to gain perishable food. Blessed is the man who heeds Christ's words and labors now for the food which endures forever. *Fr. Justin Frederick*

From the Ladder of Divine Ascent

Long sleep produces forgetfulness, but vigil purifies the memory. *Step 20.9*

St. Peter the Aleut Camp

This summer, the annual St. Peter the Aleut Orthodox Summer Camp will be held in North Texas, beginning on midday of Monday, June 30th and lasting until midday on Friday, July 4th. It is time to register!

The spiritual focus theme of this year's camp will be, "Dynamic Life in Christ." As in past years, there will also be special campfire question and answer sessions for the older youth.

St. Peter the Aleut Summer Camp is open to those ages 8 - 18, with older teens and young adults needed as Junior Counselors. Junior Counselors must be ages 17 or older. Senior Counselors must be ages 18 or over, including young and not-so-young adults.

Partial scholarships are available for those who can help out as camp counselors and staff. However, beginning this year, a special Staff Authorization Form must also be completed and submitted for all who would like to serve as camp leadership staff. See the webpage for registration forms:

http://www.dosoca.org/dos_youth_activities.html
Mail all camp registration forms and payment to: St. Seraphim Cathedral; c/o Archpriest John Anderson; PO Box 191109; Dallas, TX 75219-1109

'Crazy John' and Dimitri

Young Dimitri was a boy in his early teens. He was going on fourteen and was in his second year of high school. He lived together with his brother, Paul, who was three years younger than himself, and his parents, just two apartment buildings down from where Crazy John lived. During the past year, unlike the other children his age, he had turned to God. His friends couldn't explain the huge turnaround. They all wondered what had happened to make the high-spirited Dimitri abandon his pranks and mischief and turn to studying and prudence. Even his parents had no idea what was behind his conversion. At first, they actually believed he had been brainwashed by a heretical organization.

But late, they realized that nothing of the sort was lurking behind their son's change. They also noticed that ever since their son turned to God, the problems in their family had begun to diminish.

Quarrelling stopped. Teachers' praises at school had replaced their complaints about his mischief. Dimitri's turnaround had changed the family's course. His parents became even more surprised when they saw their son going to church every Sunday and reading the Holy Bible that Crazy John had given him as a gift.

Here is Dimitri's account of what happened: "One day, my mother sent me to Mr. Apostoly's bakery to buy bread. As I was buying the bread, I also did something bad—something that I often used to do with my friends. Well, I stole a chocolate bar," said young Dimitri, lowering his head with a kind of embarrassment. "Mr. Apostoly didn't notice, and I was sure that no one had seen me take it," he continued. "But from the next day on, as I left the house to go to school, I would find two similar chocolate bars outside our door, like the ones I had stolen. This went on for about twenty days. I asked my mother who kept putting the chocolates there, and she told me that every morning Crazy John usually rang the doorbells in the building.

"That guy does such crazy things," my mother said. That was when I realized that the fool must have spotted me when I grabbed the chocolate, and this was how he was taking his revenge. I'll show that madman who's trying to make me feel bad for a measly chocolate that I stole—that was how I used to think, at the time.... The next day, I found chocolates again—one for me and one for Paul, my brother, along with a note that had the Ten Commandments written on it, with the commandment 'Thou shalt not steal' underlined. I became angry.

"So, as soon as school was out, I went straight to Crazy John's apartment building and rang his doorbell. He opened his door and said with a smile, 'I'm sorry, my Dimitri. I know you came here to give me a couple of punches for the chocolates. I'm a fool; I deserve those punches. Come one; hit me as hard as you can. Let your anger out.'

"I was at a loss and was going to leave. I got scared. How did the fool know that I had gone there to beat him, seeing I hadn't told anyone? As soon as this thought crossed my mind, he remarked, 'My dear boy, you must be wondering who told me you were coming here to beat me, aren't you?'

"I nodded affirmatively.

"Well, you see, just before you came, St. Dimitrios was here—who is your guardian—and the Holy Mother also, and they told me. You know, they love you very much, and they often talk about you. For example, yesterday, with your schoolmate Helen—when you slapped her for disagreeing with you—you made them very sad, and they were crying here, along with me.'

"That was an incident that I hadn't confessed to anyone.

"My dear Dimitri, I will tell you a big secret, under the condition that as long as I am alive, you will not tell it to anyone. Do you accept?'

"Yes,' I replied, watching Crazy John, who was radiant with joy.

"Our Lord Jesus, dear Dimitri, wants to come over to your place, but every time He comes to visit you, He hears quarreling, and He departs very sorrowful. So, He told me to give you His commandments to read, to learn them well, and to observe them all, and only then will He return to live with you continuously. Do you know what it means to live in the same house together with Him who created the entire world? Now, leave, go home, because your mother will be getting worried.'

"I began to leave, but while walking me out, Crazy John said with a smile, 'Hey, where are you going, little Dimitri? You forgot to give me those punches!'

"I left for home as though flying on wings. As soon as my mother saw me, she asked me why I was late, and I told her that I was at the fool's house to tell him not to leave any more chocolates on the doorstep because I would get fat. I went to my room, thinking about everything that had happened at Crazy John's house. After a while I went back to my mother, 'Mom, give me thirty drachmas to give to Mr. Apostoly the baker because I bought something, but didn't have enough money to pay for it.'

"She gave me the money, and I went running to the bakery and handed it to Mr. Apostoly. He was surprised when I told him that I had taken a chocolate bar along with the bread, but had forgotten to pay for it.

"Well, I was indeed surprised, because I know you to be a mischievous one, dear Dimitri. But as soon as you made that move, I told myself I shouldn't condemn anyone, because you never know what kind of heart is inside each person. From that moment on, I became very fond of you," the baker explained.

The baker then pulled young Dimitri towards him and gave him a kiss, while patting hi on the head. His mother, Polyxeni, and her husband, Panayiotis, who were witnessing the scene, were obviously emotionally moved.

Mrs. Polyxeni then decided to say her part. "To us, Crazy John was the support of our family. He was the one who contributed towards us making the turn towards Christ. Our life changed, and he made us partakers of the miracle of salvation. He brought blessings into our home, and with his meaningful interventions, he managed to break the wall of egotism that alienated us from our neighbor. to my, Panayiotis, and my children, he was a friend and a brother."

from Crazy John: A Sainly Fool for Christ vol. 1, Athens, 2010.

Upcoming Events 2014

20 April Great and Holy Pascha, Picnic

26 May Memorial Day Picnic

30 June—4 July St. Peter the Aleut Youth Camp

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!