

The Confessor's Tongue for April 27, A. D. 2014

Second Sunday of Pascha: Thomas Sunday

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.

Thomas Sunday & Antipascha

This Sunday commemorates the appearance of the Lord to the Apostles after His resurrection and the touching of His wounds by the Apostle Thomas. The circumstances of these events are sung in all the stikhera and troparia of the canon on Apostle Thomas Sunday and in the stikhera of the other days of this week. The appearance of the risen Lord to the Apostle Thomas and all the eleven is selected for the first Sunday after the Paschal Sunday because the circumstances of this appearance serve as the indisputable proof of the resurrection of the Lord from the tomb, "as from the chamber, with His immaculate flesh". It assures not only believers and the amazed of the joy of all the followers of the Lord, but even the infidel pagans and the enemies of Christ the Savior - the Judeans. It assures that by the power of His Divinity Jesus Christ is risen again from the tomb, that after the resurrection He did not have an imaginary or illusory flesh in which form the bodiless spirits or inhabitants of heaven are vested when they sometimes appear to us or to the holy brethren, but the real immaculate flesh which He has assumed from the womb of the All-holy Theotokos, with which He was nailed to the cross and on which there remained wounds even after the resurrection.

The eighth day after Pascha as the ending of the celebration of Bright Week was a special celebration since ancient times, as if it replaced the very same Day of Pascha and was called Antipascha, which means 'instead of Pascha.' From this day the cycle of Sundays and weeks of the entire year begins. On this day the commemoration of the resurrection of Christ is updated for the first time. This Sunday of the Antipascha was called the New Sunday, i.e. the first day of renewal or simply renewal. The more proper name is the real day, the eighth day after Pascha, that on this eighth day the Lord Himself willed the renewal of the joy of His resurrection with a new appearance to the Holy Apostles.

St. Gregory the Theologian says in his Homily on this Sunday, "With the ancient and good purpose, it is to honor the day of renewal as established law, or better to say, to honor the new benefactions with the day of renewal. But was not the day of renewal also the first Resurrection Day, followed by the blessed and radiant night? Why you give this name to the present day? That was the day of salvation, but this day is the commemoration of salvation. That day differentiates the burial and the resurrection in itself, but this day is purely of the new birth. It is the first day among those following it and eighth among those coming before it".

Commemorating this day of "renewal" the Holy Church inspires in us the necessity for our beneficial spiritual renewal. "The real renewal", the same Holy

Father teaches, "we now celebrate, is the going from death to life. And so we put off ourselves the old man and renewed ourselves; that we too might walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:4)". "The old has passed away, behold, the new has come" (2 Cor. 5:17).

From "How to Live a Holy Life" What To Do During Sleeplessness at Night

If you cannot fall asleep for a long time after you go to bed, then, after lying down, try to imagine the Lord Jesus Christ in His sufferings on the cross and pray to Him in your heart about everything that comes into your heart: pray that the Lord God may deliver you and your family from all sins, from every evil will, and from every sinful impurity, from deadly plague, from hunger, from lightning and storms, from sudden death, and especially from eternal death.

Pray that the Lord God may bring all sinners to heartfelt repentance and correction, that He may give to His Church faithful pastors who will zealously care for its purity, firmness, and glory; that He may subdue the enemies of His Church and persuade everyone of its purity and holiness, and that He may dispose everyone to sincere acceptance of its truth and principles.

Or try to imagine yourself at your death and think something like this: "If I were to die right now, what would become of me...? Now I lie in bed and find it annoying that I have not been able to fall asleep; but how hard will it be to lie in hell if I go there because of my sins. In hell there is never any sleep, not even for a moment."

When you happen to wake up in the night, always turn your thoughts immediately to the Lord God, taking care lest some foolish thought enter your heart, signing yourself with the sign of the Cross.

If you still do not sleep, it is better to get out of bed, stand before the holy icons, and read psalms with full attention, make full prostrations, or do prostrations with the Jesus Prayer until you are tired and peace enters your soul and you can go to bed.

The Prayer of an Orthodox Christian What level did the saints reach?

"There is a loftier prayer of the perfect, a certain rapture of mind, a complete detachment from everything felt with the senses, when through unutterable groanings of the spirit man becomes closer to God, who sees the heart open like a book and expressing its will through innumerable images." (St. Nilus of Sinai, *Philokalia*)

In this form of prayer, which is impossible for the mind alone to attain, one's whole being enters into blessed and ceaseless repentance.

Does Holy Scripture provide any examples of oral prayer addressing God with the heart and mind together?

The Savior Himself, entering His great moment of trial as He and the disciples were heading to the Garden of Gethsemane, gave us an example of prayer aloud: *And when thy had sung a hymn, they went out into the Mount of Olives* (Matt 26:30). The Lord gave thanks to God the Father in the hearing of all when He had raised Lazarus (John 11:41-42). Likewise, St. Anna, the mother of the prophet Samuel, prayed with her lips: *Now Anna, she spake in her heart; only her lips moved; then Eli answered and said, Go in peace, and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of Him... I Kings 1:13-18. By Him, therefore, let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His name* (Hebrews 13:15).

How do we learn to pray with our lips, and then with our mind?

1. If our childhood habits have been forgotten, then it is possible to learn to pray aloud (that is, step onto the first level of prayer) by using a prayerbook and paying close attention to the standard Church prayers. "The church wisely established hymns and various troparia on account of the weakness of our mind, so that we, although foolish, might be attracted by the sweetness of the singing and thus praise God even against our will" (St. Peter of Damascus). The Church accepted hymns and troparia so that we would be humbled and rise to excellent thoughts as if upon a ladder.

2. Christ's teaching demands that our faith and our way of living be inseparable. For this reason, every Christian, in order to live in constant prayer, must have a daily order of prayer; that is, to establish under the guidance of a spiritual father a prayer rule. As St. Augustine said, "Once we were cleansed by baptism; but every day by prayer."

3. "Every established prayer, be it for home or church use, merely imparts to prayer an outer form; the soul or essence of prayer, however, is born by every person within, in the mind and heart. Our entire cycle of church prayers, as well as every prayer designed for home use, is filled with invocations to God...it is impossible to argue with the fact that mental prayer is necessary for all Christians; and if it is necessary, then no one can say that it is impossible, for God does not force us to do the impossible. That it is difficult—certainly. But then everything worth doing is difficult; and all the more so should prayer be, since it is the source of everything good in our lives...(St. Theophan the Recluse, *Letters to Various Persons*, Letter 66).

The Kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force (Matt. 11:12).

What is the practical significance of a prayer rule?

"A prayer rule is an arrangement of several prayers written by holy and God-inspired Fathers, which are adapted to a specific time and circumstances" (St. Ignatius Brianchaninov).

"The purpose of a rule is to increase the number of prayerful thoughts and feelings...and so that they be correct, holy, and perfectly pleasing to God." "The soul, left to her own devices, would not be able to follow the correct path of prayer. She would become distorted: either through daydreaming, or through illusions of lofty visions, inspired by vainglory."

"Thus, the soul, filled and nurtured by prayerful thoughts and feelings selected from a ready-made prayerbook, begins of its own accord to live these thoughts and feelings" (St. Theophan).

How long should a prayer rule be?

The rule of prayer is for the person, not the person for the rule. When determining a rule, it is necessary to adapt it to, and not exceed, the individual's strength. A rule is meant to further spiritual advancement, and not to serve as an excuse for self-opinion. "It is better to alter parts of a rule, or even invent an entirely new one, lest prayer become a mere ritual" (St. Theophan).

"I prefer a brief rule that is continually performed to a long rule that is quickly abandoned: (St. Matoes, *Alphabetical Patericon of Scetis*).

"In the day of His judgment, God will not condemn us for leaving off psalms or abandoning prayers, but for allowing demons to enter us because we ceased our rule" (St. Isaac the Syrian, Homily 71).

Q & A

Question: What is the meaning of the "artos" or special bread that was blessed in the church on Pascha and then distributed the following Sunday?

Answer: The prayers prayed over the artos (Greek for 'leavened bread') on Pascha and Bright Saturday express the meaning of it. The Artos is an offering we make to God in commemoration of Christ's Resurrection by which 'we have received freedom and release from eternal slavery of the enemy and the indissoluble bonds of Hades'. We pray that God will count us worthy who offer, kiss, and taste it to become partakers of God's heavenly blessing and be delivered from sickness and infirmity. As bread, it is a symbol of Jesus Christ our God, 'the Angelic Bread, the Bread of life eternal' who came down from Heaven and has 'nourished us on these bright days with the spiritual food of Thy divine benefits'. We ask that the artos will be blessed as Christ blessed the five loaves in the wilderness to feed the multitude. Having been blessed with holy water and prayer on Pascha, the artos sits on a table before the open royal doors with an icon on top of it. It is normally distributed on Bright Saturday, but sometimes on Thomas Sunday.

Upcoming Events 2014

26 May: Memorial Day Picnic

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

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!