

The Confessor's Tongue for February 14, A. D. 2016

37th Sunday after Pentecost; Ven. Auxentius

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.

Zacchaeus Sunday

Not formally a commemoration, the Sunday on which the Gospel about Zacchaeus is read is often referred to as "Zacchaeus Sunday". It is significant in that it marks the end of the series of Gospel readings determined by the length of time after Pentecost and warns us that the following Sunday opens the *Triodion* and the pre-lenten season. Indeed, next Sunday, we open our 'lenten hymnal', the *Triodion*, and begin our preparation for the Great Fast with the Sunday of the Publican and Pharisee followed by a fast-free week. Most of the hymns from the Triodion will be heard at Vigil the night before and not at the Divine Liturgy.

So, I urge you all to make the effort this year to attend the Saturday evening Vigil at least during the Great Fast, not to mention the weekday services of Vespers and Matins, when the powerful hymns from the Triodion are heard throughout the Fast.

Prophetic Poets

Literate nineteenth-century Russians during the Golden Age of Russian literature accorded high status to poets, thinking of them as prophets inspired by a muse or divine spirit able to speak the truth powerfully and effectively through their art. Reading the twentieth-century poet T. S. Eliot, I can understand why great prophets were considered prophets.

Selections from 'Choruses from "The Rock"'

T.S. Eliot

I

The Eagle soars in the summit of Heaven,
The Hunter with his dogs pursues his circuit.
O perpetual revolution of configured stars,
O perpetual recurrence of determined seasons,
O world of spring and autumn, birth and dying!
The endless cycle of idea and action,
Endless invention, endless experiment,
Brings knowledge of motion, but not of stillness;
Knowledge of speech, but not of silence;
Knowledge of words, and ignorance of the Word.
All our knowledge brings us nearer to our ignorance,
All our ignorance brings us nearer to death,
But nearness to death no nearer to God.
Where is the Life we have lost in living?
Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?
Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?
The cycles of Heaven in twenty centuries
Bring us farther from God and nearer to the Dust.

III

The Word of the Lord came unto me, saying:
O miserable cities of designing men,
O wretched generation of enlightened men,
Betrayed in the mazes of your ingenuities.

Sold by the proceeds of your proper inventions:
I have given you hands which you turn from worship,
I have given you speech, for endless palaver,
I have given you my Law, and you set up
 commissions,
I have given you lips, to express friendly sentiments,
I have given you hearts, for reciprocal distrust.
I have given you power of choice, and you only
 alternate
Between futile speculation and unconsidered action.
Many are engaged in writing books and printing
 them.
Many desire to see their names in print.
Many read nothing but the race reports.
Much is your reading, but not the Word of God,
Much is your building, but not the House of God.
Will you build me a house of plaster, with corrugated
 roofing,
To be filled with a litter of Sunday newspapers? . . .

O weariness of men who turn from God
To the grandeur of your mind and the glory of your
 action,
To arts and inventions and daring enterprises.
To schemes of human greatness thoroughly
 discredited.
Binding the earth and the water to your service,
Exploiting the seas and developing the mountains,
Dividing the stars into common and preferred.
Engaged in devising the perfect refrigerator,
Engaged in working out a rational morality,
Engaged in printing as many books as possible,
Plotting of happiness and flinging empty bottles,
Turning from your vacancy to fevered enthusiasm
For nation or race or what you call humanity;
Though you forget the way to the Temple,
There is one who remembers the way to your door:
Life you may evade, but Death you shall not.
You shall not deny the Stranger.

IV

There are those who would build the Temple,
And those who prefer that the Temples should not be
 built.
In the days of Nehemiah the Prophet
There was no exception to the general rule.
In Shushan the palace, in the month Nisan,
He served the wine to the King Artaxerxes,
And he grieved for the broken city, Jerusalem;
And the King gave him leave to depart
That he might rebuild the city.
So he went, with a few, to Jerusalem,
And there, by the dragon's well, by the dung gate,
By the fountain gate, by the king's pool,
Jerusalem lay waste, consumed with fire;
No place for a beast to pass.
There were enemies without to destroy him.

And spies and self-seekers within,
When he and his men laid their hands to rebuilding
the wall.
So they built as men must build
With the sword in one hand and the trowel in the
other.

VI

It is hard for those who have never known
persecution,
And who have never known a Christian,
To believe these tales of Christian persecution.
It is hard for those who live near a Bank
To doubt the security of their money.
It is hard for those who live near a Police Station
To believe in the triumph of violence.
Do you think that the Faith has conquered the World
And that lions no longer need keepers?
Do you need to be told that whatever has been, can
still be?
Do you need to be told that even such modest
attainments
As you can boast in the way of polite society
Will hardly survive the Faith to which they owe their
significance?
Men! polish your teeth on rising and retiring;
Women! polish your fingernails:
You polish the tooth of the dog and the talon of the
cat.
Why should men love the Church? Why should they
love her laws?
She tells them of Life and Death, and of all that they
would forget.
She is tender where they would be hard, and hard
where they like to be soft.
She tells them of Evil and Sin, and other unpleasant
facts.
They constantly try to escape
From the darkness outside and within
By dreaming of systems so perfect that no one will
need to be good.
But the man that is will shadow
The man that pretends to be.
And the Son of Man was not crucified once for all.
The blood of the martyrs not shed once for all,
The lives of the Saints not given once for all:
But the Son of Man is crucified always
And there shall be Martyrs and Saints.
And if blood of Martyrs is to flow on the steps
We must first build the steps;
And if the Temple is to be cast down
We must first build the Temple.

IX

... In our rhythm of earthly life we tire of light. We
are glad
when the day ends, when the play ends; and ecstasy is
too much pain.
We are children quickly tired: children who are up in
the night

and fall asleep as the rocket is fired; and the day is
long for work or play.
We tire of distraction or concentration, we sleep and
are glad to sleep,
Controlled by the rhythm of blood and the day and
the night and the seasons.
And we must extinguish the candle, put out the light
and relight it;
Forever must quench, forever relight the flame.
Therefore we thank Thee for our little light, that is
dappled with shadow.
We thank Thee who hast moved us to building, to
finding, to
forming at the ends of our fingers and beams of our
eyes.
And when we have built an altar to the Invisible
Light, we may
set thereon the little lights for which our bodily vision
is made.
And we thank Thee that darkness reminds us of light.
O Light Invisible, we give Thee thanks for Thy great
glory!

Message of Elder Zacharias Pre-Lenten Retreat 2008

How To Become A Temple of the Holy Spirit

What follows is a summary of Elder Zacharias's talk (of St. John's Monastery, Essex, England) generated from Fr. Justin's notes. His talk will be available in audio and video from North Texas Orthodox Missions (NTOM).

Christ became man for us, so we men must become God-like by grace for Him. We are called to be a "temple of the Holy Spirit", but we are also warned not to receive the grace of God in vain.

Many means of grace are given to us in the Christian life. We shall examine three essential ones: the Divine Liturgy, the Name of Christ, and God's Word.

The Word of God is powerful. Christ's words are the Father's words: they cannot be separated one from another. God's words transmit the energy of the Trinity to us when we accept them. As we accept them and act upon them (keep Christ's commandments), we are gradually re-generated. To accept Christ's words is to partake of the energy of the Kingdom of God. "The Word of God is the incorruptible seed of grace sown in the heart of man to regenerate man." Just as we eat physical food three times a day, so we must hasten to eat of the spiritual table laid out for us in God's Word.

The Name of Christ is another powerful means of grace by which we become the temple of the Holy Spirit. As St. Paul said, "There is no other name in heaven or in earth by which we must be saved." The name of Jesus has great power and grace, for this name was given to Him by revelation: the Archangel Gabriel told the Virgin Mary what to call him, and said "He shall be called 'Jesus', for He shall save His people from their sins." It is also written that "whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." In the Jesus Prayer, we confess the Trinity in the first

half "Lord Jesus Christ son of God" and in the second half we confess our need "have mercy on me the sinner." In response to Solomon's prayer, God hallowed the temple he had built by putting His name on it. In the New Testament, all is made new. There is no more temple made with human hands, but the one who calls on the name of the Lord enters into His living presence. In doing this, we gradually accumulate divine energy and God's temple is built in us. One must persevere in calling on the name of the Lord.

Third, the Divine Liturgy is given to us as a most powerful means of grace. In it we receive the very body and blood of Christ, our true food and drink. Jesus said that one cannot have life without eating this food; thus man is spiritually dead without it. He who eats of it will live no longer for himself but for the Lord, and to be pleasing to God, he will live according to the commandments.

At Baptism, we made an agreement with God to be dead unto sin and alive unto God. At the Divine Liturgy, we make an exchange of our little life for God's limitless life. How is this? The priest offers bread and wine to God on behalf of the faithful, indeed, in behalf of the whole world. He and those present fill those gifts with their faith, humility, repentance, and desire for God. The priest elevates the gifts, offering them to God with the words "Thine own of Thine own, we offer unto Thee on behalf of all and for all." All things are God's. The wheat and grapes from which the bread and wine were made are gifts from God. [Even we ourselves—our very life and existence—are a gift God has given us.] We take of what God has given us and offer it back to God, including ourselves as living sacrifices. We do this because Christ commanded it: "This do in remembrance of Me."

Thus man offers his little life to God in the Liturgy, and God reciprocates by giving His limitless life back to man, filling the gifts offered with His Holy Spirit. Just before Communion, the priest proclaims "the holy things are for the holy!" Through the priest, Christ speaks to us these words as if to say, "You have filled the gifts with yourself in offering them to Me, now I will fill them with My holy self for you."

As we come to understand this dynamic process, we shall be more attentive at the Divine Liturgy and come better prepared to make this exchange of our life for God's life as complete as possible. When we properly participate in the Divine Liturgy, the words we joyously sing at the end, "We have seen the true Light, we have received the heavenly Spirit, we have found the true faith, worshipping the undivided Trinity, who hath saved us" will resound in our ears and hearts.

This is but an imperfect summary of what Elder Zacharias said in his talk, but what he said is so important for us, that it is better you hear it in this sketchy form than not at all.

The Divine Liturgy is not just a matter of 'going to

church'. It is the central moment of our lives from which all life flows. This notion of exchanging our lives for God's is powerful. It shows why we must prepare ourselves with the Vigil the night before and at home; why we must come on time, why we must be attentive, why we must not go in and out without necessity, and so forth. The Liturgy is a work of the people which requires our active participation and utmost concentration so that we can make that exchange of our life for His as complete as possible, as the Elder puts it.

Starting in May and running for eight weeks, our Basics of Orthodox class will be going through the Liturgy line by line. Anyone who has not had opportunity to do this is strongly encouraged to attend.

Spiritual Reading for Lent

Spiritual reading, the reading of the Scriptures, lives of the Saints, patristic literature, and other Orthodox Christian literature that nourishes our faith and cleanses our minds, should be a normal part of our spiritual life. Just as we eat food each day to sustain our body, so we need spiritual food regularly to nourish our souls. This spiritual food includes not only spiritual reading but also Holy Communion.

Part of our ascetic effort during the Great Fast is to cut back on or cut out "spiritual junk food"—stuff we might consume that offers no nourishment to our souls or even does harm. What is spiritual junk food must be honestly discerned in the light of Christ by each one of us, but certainly it would include much of what the "entertainment industry" offers us: television, movies, magazines, novels, video games, secular music, internet, radio (yes, even talk shows!), etc. We cut back on this so that our attention is not so scattered and dispersed on so many things, so that we can focus on Christ with less distraction, and so we can grow in our relationship with Him, which will not grow unless we devote time to it, much like any other earthly relationship. We cut out what is harmful, we cut back on what is not nourishing and profitable, and we feed our souls on what will give them true nourishment.

If we are to have any success in this upcoming Fast, we must give this matter some thought. What will I cut out? What will I cut back on? How much? And what will I put in its place to nourish my soul?

The Scriptures should come first. They contain words inspired by the Holy Spirit for the nourishment and illumination of our souls. During Lent, the Church reads through Proverbs and Genesis (and the first part of Exodus and a little from Job). A chapter a day of each will get us through them in the course of the Fast. Genesis tells us where we come from, what God intended for us, how man messed things up, and what God did to begin to restore man. Proverbs shows us what virtue and wisdom look like so that we have a standard to which we can compare our lives and strive for virtue.

In addition to these Old Testament books, pick a Gospel or two and read through them: at a chapter a day, you can read Mark and Luke in 40 days. Pick a short epistle: James, I John, Philippians, Colossians,

and read through it several times during the Fast. Really get to know it. Let its words sink into your soul. For those who are more ambitious, we have a reading plan that will take you through the whole New Testament in the forty days of the Fast.

Whenever we read Scripture, we must pray first, making the sign of the Cross and asking God to illumine and nourish us through the reading of His Word. The Scriptures will never be opened to us through reason and intellect alone; we must put the teaching into practice.

Besides Scripture, take an Orthodox book out of the library, purchase a book from the bookstore, take a book off your shelf you've always meant to read but haven't—whatever you do, pick a book and read it.

Go to oca.org and find the daily lives of the saints, and read those short lives for each day of the fast. Read the life of Sts. Seraphim of Sarov, Nektarios of Aegina, Silouan of Athos, Sergius of Radonezh, or any of the Optina Elders. Nourish your mind and soul on their good example. It will be just the opposite of the lives you find displayed before you in the grocery store checkout line.

You feed your body daily, even though you know it will die one day and rot. Your soul is immortal. Don't let it go into eternity starving. What we expend on the body is lost in the end, but what we give to the soul is ours forever. Starve your body and senses (relatively) and feed your soul this Lent!

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, wouldest 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."

By the Waters of Babylon Psalm 136 (137)

At Matins for the Sunday of the Prodigal Son, and then also for the Sundays of Meatfare and Cheesefare, after singing the Polieley of the Psalms: "Praise the name of the Lord" and "O give thanks unto the Lord", we sing also Psalm 136: "By the rivers of Babylon", "with the beautiful alleluia", i.e. in the known chant with special tenderness, with sweet singing. This psalm arouses in the sinners to understand their unfortunate condition in their captivity in sin and by the devil, similarly to the Jews in captivity in Babylon, who understood their bitter situation and repented, and represents the sorrowful soul nostalgic for the heavenly fatherland.

The last verse of this psalm: "Blessed shall he be who shall seize and dash thine infants against the rock", in translation means: the one is blessed who has the courage and power to break on the rock of faith sin in its infancy—those things which give birth to evil thoughts, the depraved stirrings of the heart, and the shameful impulses of the will—before they take possession of one's soul. *Bulgakov Handbook*

February 14: St. Auxentius

Born in Syria, at first he was the courtier for the Emperor Theodosius the Younger, and later, having entered monasticism, left for Bithynia and practiced asceticism on Mount Oxa, near Chalcedon. He was present at the Fourth Ecumenical Council where he zealously struggled against the Eutychian and Nestorian heresies. The Venerable One healed the sick through the strength of his prayers and had the gift of spiritual insight. He died in about the year 470.

His relics rest openly in the St. Anthony caves.

Upcoming Events 2015-16

22-26 February: Fr. Justin gone, continuing education.
14-19 March: Clean Week: Plan now to set aside as much of this week as possible for prayer.

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!