

The Confessor's Tongue for February 28, A. D. 2016

Sunday of the Prodigal Son; Ven. Basil the Confessor

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 28 Fool-For-Christ Nicholas (+1576)

Blessed Nicholas of Pskov lived the life of a holy fool for more than three decades. Long before his death he acquired the grace of the Holy Spirit and was granted the gifts of wonderworking and of prophecy. The Pskov people of his time called him Mikula [Mikola, Nikola] the Fool. Even during his lifetime they revered him as a saint, even calling him Mikula the saintly.

In February 1570, after a devastating campaign against Novgorod, Tsar Ivan the Terrible moved against Pskov, suspecting the inhabitants of treason. As the Pskov Chronicler relates, "the Tsar came ... with great fierceness, like a roaring lion, to tear apart innocent people and to shed much blood."

On the first Saturday of Great Lent, the whole city prayed to be delivered from the Tsar's wrath. Hearing the peal of the bell for Matins in Pskov, the Tsar's heart was softened when he read the inscription on the fifteenth century wonderworking Liubyatov Tenderness Icon of the Mother of God (March 19) in the Monastery of St Nicholas (the Tsar's army was at Lubyatov). "Be tender of heart," he said to his soldiers. "Blunt your swords upon the stones, and let there be an end to killing."

All the inhabitants of Pskov came out upon the streets, and each family knelt at the gate of their house, bearing bread and salt to the meet the Tsar. On one of the streets Blessed Nicholas ran toward the Tsar astride a stick as though riding a horse, and cried out: "Ivanushko, Ivanushko, eat our bread and salt, and not Christian blood."

The Tsar gave orders to capture the holy fool, but he disappeared.

Though he had forbidden his men to kill, Ivan still intended to sack the city. The Tsar attended a Molieben at the Trinity cathedral, and he venerated the relics of holy Prince Vsevolod-Gabriel (February 11), and expressed his wish to receive the blessing of the holy fool Nicholas. The saint instructed the Tsar "by many terrible sayings," to stop the killing and not to plunder the holy churches of God. But Ivan did not heed him and gave orders to remove the bell from the Trinity cathedral. Then, as the saint prophesied, the Tsar's finest horse fell dead.

The blessed one invited the Tsar to visit his cell under the bell tower. When the Tsar arrived at the cell of the saint, he said, "Hush, come in and have a drink of water from us, there is no reason you should shun it." Then the holy fool offered the Tsar a piece of raw meat.

"I am a Christian and do not eat meat during Lent", said Ivan to him. "But you drink human blood," the saint replied.

Frightened by the fulfillment of the saint's prophecy and denounced for his wicked deeds, Ivan the Terrible ordered a stop to the looting and fled

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from the city. The Oprichniki, witnessing this, wrote: "The mighty tyrant ... departed beaten and shamed, driven off as though by an enemy. Thus did a worthless beggar terrify and drive off the Tsar with his multitude of a thousand soldiers."

Blessed Nicholas died on February 28, 1576 and was buried in the Trinity cathedral of the city he had saved. Such honors were granted only to the Pskov princes, and later on, to bishops.

February 28 Martyr Kyranna (+1751)

Our Orthodox Church today celebrates the memory of the New Martyr Kyranni or Kyranna. Saint Kyranna came from the village of Ossa near Thessaloniki. Because she was very beautiful, one day a certain janissary who came to the New Martyr's village in order to collect taxes, upon seeing her, wanted to make her his wife. Even though he tried to persuade her to change her religion with flatterings and gifts in order for her to marry him, the modest girl stubbornly refused to resign to his flattering. Then he began to bully and to threaten her that if she did not give up her faith, he would torture and kill her.

But the saint did not change her mind, neither with the threats nor his bullying. He therefore captured her and brought her to the Muslim judge in Thessaloniki, where before the judge he lied by saying that Kyranna cheated him by promising him that she would become Muslim in order to marry him, but at the end she refused to do so. When the Saint was asked to defend herself, she confessed before all who were present her faith in Christ, and right after, the Turks imprisoned her.

Inside the prison, the Saint went through daily torture from the janissary and the prison guards. One would hit her with a stick, another with the flat of his sword, and another would kick or punch her. Then when they left, the jailer would come and hang her by her arms and beat her until he was tired out, despite the cries of outrage and rebukes of the common prisoners. Despite these torments, Kyranna would remain strong and courageous, and seemed unaffected by the pain as if someone else were suffering, and she refused the food offered her.

One night, after seven days of such torment, on the 28th of February 1751, Kyranna was severely beaten by the jailer with a piece of wood and he left her hanging dead. This was done because the jailer had illegally allowed others in to beat Kyranna, and one Christian prisoner threatened to reveal this to the pasha. In the morning the body of the Saint was covered by Holy Light and gave off a celestial fragrance, as her soul was delivered to God, and the Christian prisoners upon seeing that, started to glorify the Lord, but the Muslims and Jews were afraid because they thought it was fire. When the Christian prisoner went to bring down the body of

the Saint and found out that she was dead, he took care of it, and the next day it was given to the Christians who buried it. This Christian reprimanded the jailer, who came to repent of his evil deed.

Today, in the village of Ossa, a great church exists dedicated to the New Martyr, Saint Kyranna, who is also the patron Saint of the community, and for this reason it is dedicated to her memory, since she was born and lived in Ossa. According to the historian Asterios Thilikos, the church was built in 1840, or according to its foundation date, it was built in 1868. The miraculous icon of Saint Kyranna is kept inside the church, which was painted around 1870, by Christodoulos Ioannou Zografos from the village of Siatista.

The church is a center of reverence for the villagers of Ossa, a place of worship throughout the region and her memory there is celebrated on January 8. In a Codex of Great Lavra her memory is listed for celebration on January 1. Generally her memory is celebrated on February 28th. The reason why her feast is celebrated in January is because it often happens that February 28th lands during the somber season of Great Lent when celebrations are discouraged.

On Sins After Baptism

St. Maximus the Confessor, Ad Thalassios 6

Father Maximos is translating St. Maximus's great work Ad Thalassios into English. The work contains some 65 questions on the meaning of Scripture while addressing Thalassios's questions about the operation of the passions. Fr. Maximos gave me permission to share this text, which he shared with us last week, with you. Fr. Maximos teaches at Holy Cross Orthodox Seminary and is known as the translator of the Ambigua of St. Maximus, published in 2014. He also composed the Eclogue we sang at Vigil in honor of St. Maximus this year.

In question six here, St. Maximus address the question of how is it possible for Christians to sin after baptism, when Scripture says those born of God do not sin.

Question 6: If, according to St. John [the Theologian]: "He who is born of God does not sin, because God's seed is in him, and he cannot sin" (1 John 3:9), and if he who is "born of water and Spirit" is himself born of God (John 3:5-6), then how are we who are born of God through baptism still able to sin?

Answer: The mode of our spiritual birth from God is twofold: the first bestows on those born in God the entire grace of adoption as entirely present in potential (Rom. 8:15); the second ushers in this grace as entirely present in actuality, transforming voluntarily the entire free choice of the one being born so that it conforms to the God who gives birth.

The first possesses this grace in potential according to faith alone; the second, in addition to faith, realizes on the level of knowledge the active, most divine likeness of the God who is known in the one who knows Him.

In those whom the first mode of birth is observed, it happens that—because the disposition of their will has not yet been fully extracted from its passionate fixation with the flesh, and because they have not been completely imbued by the Spirit with the active participation in the divine mysteries that have taken place—it happens, I say, that their inclination to sin is never very far away for the simple reason that they continue to will it. For the Spirit does not give birth to a disposition of the will without the consent of that will, but to the extent that the will is willing, He transforms and divinizes it. Whoever has shared in this deification through experience and knowledge is incapable of reverting from what he, once and for all, truly and precisely became cognizant of in actual deed, to something else besides this, which merely pretends to be the same thing—no more than the eye, once it has seen the sun, could ever mistake it for the moon or any of the other stars in the heavens.

In those, on the other hand, undergoing the second mode of birth, the Holy Spirit takes the whole of their free choice and transposes it completely from earth to heaven, and, through true knowledge realized in actual deed, refashions the intellect with the blessed beams of light of God the Father, so that it is deemed another God, experiencing, through permanent state obtained by grace, that which God does not experience but simply *is* according to His essence. In them, their free choice clearly becomes sinless in conformity with their state of virtue and knowledge, since they are unable to negate what they have become cognizant of through actual experience.

So even if we should possess the Spirit of adoption—which is a life-giving seed that bestows the likeness of the Sower upon those who are born of it—but do not offer Him a disposition of the will pure of any propensity of inclination toward something else, we will, as a result, willingly sin even after "being born through water and the Spirit" (John 3:5). But if, to the contrary, we were to prepare the disposition of our will to receive cognitively the operations of the water and the Spirit, then, through our ascetic practice, the mystical water would cleanse our conscience, and the life-creating Spirit would actualize in us the unchanging perfection of the good through knowledge acquired in experience. What is lacking, therefore, in each of us who is still able to sin, is the unequivocal desire to surrender our whole selves, in the disposition of our will, to the Spirit.

Upcoming Events 2015-16

13 March: 6:00 p.m. Forgiveness Vespers
14-19 March: Clean Week: Plan now to set aside as much of this week as possible for prayer.
24-30 April: Holy Week, keep it as free for church as you can.
1 May Holy Pascha

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!