

The Confessor's Tongue for October 16, A. D. 2016

17th Sunday after Pentecost, Fathers of the Seventh Ecumenical Council

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 Commandments of Christ

"If ye love Me, keep My commandments." (John 14:15)

Ye have heard that it hath been said, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy.' But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you, that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven. . . Matthew 5:43-44

Through faith and baptism, Christians are given power to become by grace what the Son of God is by nature: children of God. This emphatically means that we are to take on Christ's character and be conformed to His image of Christ, by which we demonstrate that we are truly children of God. And what is God's character? "He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust" (Matt 5:45). "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). In other words, God indiscriminately loves man, all alike, and Christ commands us to do likewise, not just in loving our neighbors and relatives, but even to the point of loving our enemies and doing good to them that do evil to us. St. Silouan of Athos (+1938) considered love for enemies to be the criterion of whether or not a man has true faith and true communion with God and a sign of the real action of grace in his life (St. Silouan the Athonite, p. 114). He would often say, "The Holy Spirit is love, and He gives the soul strength to love her enemies. And he who does not love his enemies does not know God."

"Who is my enemy?" we might ask. Our enemies are not only those who have set themselves against us, who hate us, and who try to harm us, but also those with whom we are angry, who have offended us, who have not treated us as we would like, who make life difficult for us, whom we are disinclined to like. In short, it is anyone whom we wish 'would just go away.' And we are to love them! We are to overcome any evil they may do to us by doing good to them in return. Thus if they curse us, we bless them. If they hate us, we do good to them. If they mistreat us and persecute us, we pray for them. In this way, we guard ourselves from being overcome with evil, from letting anger and hatred take control of our hearts: we overcome evil by doing good (Romans 12:21).

It is in doing this that we become children of our heavenly Father, for He is love and shows love to all by doing good to all, whether they receive it gratefully or scornfully reject it. As a further incentive to embark upon this path, consider the teaching of a desert father who insists that if you want your prayers answered speedily, pray fervently for your enemies before you pray for yourself, and your request will be quickly met.

But how can we be like God, who loves all men equally, when we love some strongly and others moderately, to some we are indifferent and still others we hate? Moreover, just because we do not hate someone does not mean we love him. St. Maximus tells us that in this condition we are far from perfect love (400 Chapters 2.10). Far as it may be from us, to love all men equally is something we must learn, and we start by resolving not to hate anyone and choosing to pray for and do good to our enemies, even though we may not feel like it. As St. Maximus says, "Strive as hard as you can to love every man. If you cannot yet do this, at least do not hate anybody. But even this is beyond your power unless you scorn worldly things" (400 Chapters, 4.82). Indeed, this will be a process which will involve the ascetical work of dying to self and self-will. The competition for worldly things engenders much of our hate and disdain for others, so learning to love necessarily involves being freed from our attachment to those things. In this we see that the ascetic life the Church teaches us is essential if we are to become free to love. *Fr. Justin Frederick*

On the Lord's Prayer: A Short Interpretation 2

St. Maximus the Confessor

[The seven mysteries hidden in the prayer: These seven are theology, adoption as sons by grace, equality with the angels, participation in eternal life, the restoration of human nature when it is reconciled dispassionately with itself, the abolition of the law of sin, and the destruction of the tyranny that holds us in its power through the deceit of the evil one.]

The Logos has made men equal to the angels. Not only did He 'make peace through the blood of His Cross . . . between things on earth and things in heaven' (Col. 1:20), and reduce to impotence the hostile powers that fill in the intermediary region between heaven and earth, thereby making the festal assembly of earthly and heavenly powers a single gathering for His distribution of divine gifts, with humankind joining joyfully with the powers on high in unanimous praise of God's glory; but also, after fulfilling the divine purpose undertaken on our behalf, when He was taken up with the body which He had assumed. He united heaven and earth in Himself, joined what is sensible with what is intelligible, and revealed creation as a single whole whose extremes are bound together through virtue and through knowledge of their first Cause. He shows, I think, through what He has accomplished mystically, that the Logos unites what is separated and that alienation from the Logos divides what is united. Let us learn, then, to strive after the Logos through the practice of the virtues, so that we may be united not only with the angels through virtue, but also with God in spiritual knowledge through detachment from created things.

The Logos enables us to participate in divine life by making Himself our food, in a manner understood by Himself and by those who have received from Him a noetic perception of this kind. It is by tasting this food that they become truly aware that the Lord is full of virtue (cf. Ps. 34:8). For He transmutes with divinity those who eat it, bringing about their deification, since He is the bread of life and of power in both name and reality.

He restores human nature to itself. First, He became man and kept His will dispassionate and free from rebellion against nature, so that it did not waver in the slightest from its own natural movement even with regard to those who crucified Him; on the contrary, it chose death for their sake instead of life, thereby demonstrating the voluntary character of His passion, rooted as it is in His love for humankind. Second, having nailed to the Cross the record of our sins (cf. Col. 2:14), He abolished the enmity which led nature to wage an implacable war against itself; and having summoned those far off and those near at hand - that is, those under the Law and those outside it - and having broken down the obstructive partition-wall - that is, having explained the law of the commandments in His teaching to both these categories of humankind - He formed the two into one new man, making peace and reconciling us through Himself to the Father and to one another (cf. Eph. 2:14-16): our will is no longer opposed to the principle of nature, but we adhere to it without deviating in either will or nature.

The Logos purifies human nature from the law of sin by not permitting His incarnation for our sake to be preceded by sensual pleasure. For His conception took place miraculously without seed, and His birth supranaturally without the loss of His Mother's virginity. That is to say, when God was born from His Mother, through His birth He tightened the bonds of her virginity in a manner surpassing nature; and in those that are willing He frees the whole of human nature from the oppressive rule of the law which dominates it, in so far as they imitate His self-chosen death by mortifying the earthly aspects of themselves (cf. Col. 3:5). For the mystery of salvation belongs to those who choose it, not to those who are compelled by force.

The Logos destroys the tyranny of the evil one, who dominates us through deceit, by triumphantly using as a weapon against him the flesh defeated in Adam. In this way he shows that what was once captured and made subject to death now captures the captor: by a natural death it destroys the captor's life and becomes a poison to him, making him vomit up all those he was able to swallow because he had the power of death. But to humankind it becomes life, like leaven in the dough impelling the whole of nature to rise like dough in the resurrection of life (cf. 1 Cor. 5:6-7). It was to confer this life that the Logos who was God became man - a truly unheard of thing - and willingly accepted the death of the flesh.

The Lord's Prayer, as I have said, contains a petition for each of these things. First, it speaks of the Father, His name, and His kingdom. Second, it shows us that the person who prays is by grace the son of this Father. It asks that those in heaven and

those on earth may be united in one will. It tells us to ask for our daily bread. It lays down that men should be reconciled with one another and unites our nature with itself when we forgive and are forgiven, for then it is not split asunder by differences of will and purpose. It teaches us to pray against entering into temptation, since this is the law of sin. And it exhorts us to ask for deliverance from the evil one. For the author and giver of divine blessings could not but be our teacher as well, providing the words of this prayer as precepts of life for those disciples who believe in Him and follow the way He taught in the flesh. Through these words He has revealed the hidden treasures of wisdom and knowledge (cf. Col. 2:3) that as pure form exist in Him; and in all who offer this prayer He kindles the desire to enjoy such treasures.

It is for this reason, I think, that scripture calls this teaching 'prayer', since it contains petitions for the gifts that God gives to men by grace. Our divinely inspired fathers have explained prayer in a similar way, saying that prayer is petition for that which God naturally gives men to the manner appropriate to Him, while a vow, conversely, is a promise of what men who worship God sincerely resolve to offer Him. The fathers cite many Scriptural texts to illustrate this distinction such as, 'Make your vows to the Lord our God and perform them' (Ps. 76:11. LXX), and 'I will give Thee, O Lord, what I have vowed' (Jonah 2:10. LXX), which refer to vows. On the subject of prayer they quote such texts as 'Hannah prayed to the Lord, saying, O Lord of hosts, if Thou wilt indeed listen to Thy handmaid and give me a child' (cf. 1 Sam. 1:11), and 'Hezekiah the king of Judah and the prophet Isaiah the son of Amoz prayed to the Lord' (cf. 2 Chr. 32:20), and 'Pray then like this: Our Father who art in heaven' (Matt. 6:9), as the Lord said to the disciples. Consequently, a vow is a decision to keep the commandments, confirmed by a promise on the part of the person making the vow; and a prayer is a petition by one who has kept the commandments that he may be transformed by the commandments he has kept. Or, rather, a vow is a contest of virtue that God welcomes most readily whenever it is offered to Him; and prayer is the prize of virtue that God gives joyfully when the contest is won.

Since, then, prayer is petition for the blessings given by the incarnate Logos, let us make Him our teacher in prayer. And when we have contemplated the sense of each phrase as carefully as possible, let us confidently set it forth; for the Logos Himself gives us, in the manner that is best for us, the capacity to understand what He says. *To be continued.* . .

Upcoming Events 2016

- 21 October 7:30 Pannikhida and filling out of papers regarding last wishes with the Myrrhbearers
- 31 October All-Saints Festival
- 7-8 November Feast Day at Holy Archangels Monastery
- 13 November Parish Thanksgiving Day & Picnic

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!