

The Confessor's Tongue for October 30, A. D. 2016

19th Sunday after Pentecost, Martyrs Zenobius and Zenobia

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.

October 30: Martyrs Zenobius & Zenobia

Holy Martyrs Zenobius and His Sister Zenobia suffered for Christ in Cilicia in 285. St. Zenobius and his sister Zenobia since youth were brought up in the fear of God. After death of their parents, they distributed their estate to the poor and began to lead a life in the asceticism of piety. St. Zenobius for his virtuous life was installed as the Bishop of Aegea and zealously spread the Christian faith among the pagans, healing the infirm by the power of God. For his confession of Christ he was subjected to cruel tortures. His sister, St. Zenobia, seeing his suffering voluntarily confessed herself a Christian woman. After torture both brother and sister were beheaded by the sword.

October 30: SS Stephen, Dragutin, Helen

St. Stephen, the younger son of King Stephen Urosh I and the grandson of the first-crowned king St. Stephen (see Sept. 24), ruled Serbia from 1275 to 1320. With weapons in his hands he protected Orthodoxy from the afflictions of the Papists and Emperor Michael Palaeologus. His relics are now in Sofia, Bulgaria. St. Dragutin, the senior brother of St. Stephen, after a short rule transferred the throne to the latter and practiced asceticism as a hermit in a grave dug out by him in Srem [Syrmia]. He labored much for the conversion of the heretic Bogomils to the true faith. He died in 1316. St. Helen, the wife of the first-crowned king St. Stephen, after the death of the latter, led her life in the asceticism of piety in the city of Scutari [Uskudar, Shkoder]. She died as a nun in 1306.

The Commandments of Christ

"If ye love Me, keep My commandments."

And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly. But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him. After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.... Matthew 6:5-8

Here Christ instructs his disciples in prayer, both negatively and positively, how not to pray and how to pray. They are not to pray like the hypocrite with the motive of being seen by others. Rather, they are to pray in secret so that God may reward them for your prayer. They are not to use vain repetition in prayer

(not all repetition is vain). They are to pray the prayer "Our Father" (and use it as a model for prayer). Here Christ gives His disciples and us pointed instructions on how to pray.

First, pray. He expects us to pray, for He says "when you pray" not "if you pray." As St. Paul commands us to "pray without ceasing," we readily understand that prayer is an integral, constant part of Christian life. We pray not because God needs it but because we need it. Prayerlessness is spiritual weakness and death; prayerfulness is life in the Spirit and power. We must recognize that we do not know how to pray as we ought and that we need to learn, a process that accompanies us through life. Jesus's disciples asked Him to teach them; so can we. What follows is some of that teaching.

Second, pray secretly. If it is to be worthy of a reward from God, prayer needs to be in secret, not before the eyes of others. There are those who pray in order to impress others with their piety and devotion, but who, if no one is watching, would never bother. Christ is not speaking here against corporate worship or prayer, but against private prayer done for public show. It is not always possible, however, to pray "in secret". In a small home, the icon corner may well be a public area. It may not be possible for each member of the family to pray entirely alone. Yet the family praying together prays secretly as a family, and the members of a family, even if not praying entirely alone out of the eyes of other members of the family, are praying secretly when they come before God in the home out of public sight. On a deeper level, though, every Christian is called to cultivate the desert in his heart, that quiet place free from distraction where he may encounter the Lord face to face. In the secret place of the heart, a Christian may pray secretly even in the midst of a crowd.

Third, pray rightly motivated. God is not stingy or hard of hearing. He is not reluctant to give so as need be in need of honeyed words to persuade Him. He is not so busy with others that we have to clamor for His attention. He is not impressed by many words. The pagans thought that by using many words the gods would hear them and respond, and could even be obligated to respond, much like the prophets of Baal asking their god to send fire on their sacrifice during their showdown with Elijah (1 Kings 18). True prayer, however, is not a magic formula: say the right words the right number of times and get the desired result. The challenge for us is to learn to ask for the right things for the right reasons with faith in the right God. Thus, one misuses the Jesus Prayer thinking that saying it thousands of times will impress God and get one what one wants. One prays it properly when it is said to keep oneself constantly aware of God and one's need for Him. One prays it to open one's heart

to the Lord and to stand before Him there in that secret place face to face.

A word about "vain repetition is in order." The concept is conveyed by one verb, *battologesete*. It means "to babble or talk foolishly". The emphasis is not so much on the notion of repetition as on the content of the prayer. This word is variously translated in English: the King James along with Young's Literal, the World English Bible, the Darby Bible, the ASV have "vain repetition"; the NIV has "do not keep babbling like pagans", the ESV "do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do", the HCSB "don't babble like the idolaters," and the Douay-Rheims "speak not much as the heathens". The Church teaches us in prayer not to babble or speak foolishly and that repetition in itself is not necessarily vain or empty. In the prayers the Church puts in our mouth, every word is carefully chosen in wisdom for speaking fitly to the living God who is and has revealed Himself in Christ. These prayers, even when long, keep us from babbling foolishly and from speaking blasphemies against God while instructing us in how and what to ask.

Fourth, pray the prayer Christ gave. Yes, the Lord's Prayer is a model of prayer, a school of prayer, which, when unpacked, gives expansive scope to prayer beyond the literal words. But, first and foremost, it is a prayer to be prayed while it teaches us the right things to ask for the right reasons with faith in the right God. Thus, the Church in her daily services uses the prayer sixteen times (twenty-two during Great Lent). A Christian in his private prayers will at least say it morning and evening and before each meal. It is difficult to conceive of spiritual progress or success in prayer without using this prayer the Lord gave and applying its deep teaching.

May we apply Christ's commands concerning prayer to our own prayer and reap the rewards of obedience to our Lord.

On the Lord's Prayer: A Short Interpretation 5

'Thy Kingdom Come'
St. Maximus the Confessor

While this section on the kingdom is long and somewhat difficult, it will richly reward those who read and ponder it.

'It is thus fitting that, anger and desire repudiated, we should next invoke the rule of the kingdom of God the Father with the words 'Thy kingdom come' (Matt. 6:10), that is, 'May the Holy Spirit come'; for, having put away these things, we are now made into a temple for God through the Holy Spirit by the teaching and practice of gentleness. 'For on whom shall I rest,' says Scripture, 'but on him who is gentle and humble, and trembles at my words?' (cf. Isa. 66:2). It is dear from this that the kingdom of God the Father belongs to the humble and the gentle. For 'blessed are the gentle, for they will inherit the earth' (Matt. 5:5). It is not this physical earth, which by nature occupies a middle place in the universe, that God promises as an inheritance for those who love

Him - not, at least, if He is speaking truly when He says, 'In the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels in heaven' (Matt. 22:30), and 'Come, you whom my Father has blessed, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world' (Matt. 25:34), and elsewhere again to someone else who has striven with goodwill, 'Enter into the joy of your Lord' (Matt. 25:21). And after the Lord St Paul also says, 'The trumpet will sound and first the dead in Christ will rise up incorrupt; then we who are alive and remain will be caught up with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall be with the Lord forever' (cf. 1 Thess. 4:16-17).

Since these things have been promised to those who love the Lord, what man prompted by intelligence and wishing to serve it would ever say, from a literal reading of Scripture alone, that heaven, and the kingdom prepared from the foundation of the world, and the mystically hidden joy of the Lord, and the perpetual dwelling with the Lord enjoyed by the saints, are to be identified with the earth? In this text (Matt. 5:5) I think that the word 'earth' signifies the resolution and strength of the inner stability, immovably rooted in goodness, that is possessed by gentle people. This state of stability exists eternally with the Lord, contains unfailing joy, enables the gentle to attain the kingdom prepared from the beginning, and has its station and dignity in heaven. It also permits the gentle to inherit the principle of virtue, as if virtue were the earth that occupies a middle place in the universe. For the gentle person holds a middle position between honor and obloquy, and remains dispassionate, neither puffed up by the first nor cast down by the second. For the intelligence is by nature superior to both praise and blame; and so, when it has put away the sensual desire, it is no longer troubled by either the one or the other, having anchored the whole power of the soul in divine and unassailable liberty. The Lord, wanting to impart this liberty to His disciples says, 'Take my yoke upon you and learn from Me; for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you will find rest for your souls' (Matt. 11:29). He calls the rule of the divine kingdom 'rest' because it confers on those worthy of it a lordship free from all servitude.

If the indestructible power of the pure kingdom is given to the humble and the gentle, what man will be so lacking in love and so completely without appetite for divine blessings that he will not desire the greatest degree of humility and gentleness in order to take on the stamp of the divine kingdom, so far as this is possible for men, and to bear in himself by grace an exact spiritual likeness of Christ, who is by nature the truly great king? In this likeness, says St Paul, 'there is neither male nor female' (Gal. 3:28), that is, there is neither anger nor desire. Of these, the first tyrannically perverts judgment and makes the mind betray the law of nature; while the second scorns the one dispassionate cause and nature, that alone is truly desirable, in favor of what is inferior, giving

preference to the flesh rather than to the spirit, and taking pleasure more in visible things than in the magnificence and glory of intelligible realities. In this way with the lubricity of sensual pleasure it seduces the intellect from the divine perception of spiritual realities that is proper to it.

It is our aim to make the intelligence stand alone, stripped through the virtues of its affection for the body; for this affection, even when totally dispassionate, is still natural. The spirit, completely triumphing over nature, has to persuade the intellect to desist from moral philosophy in order to commune with the supra-essential Logos through direct and undivided contemplation, in spite of the fact that moral philosophy helps the intellect to cut itself off from, and to go beyond, things pertaining to the flux of time. For when the intellect has become free from its attachment to sensible objects, it should not be burdened any longer with preoccupations about morality as with a shaggy cloak.

Elijah clearly reveals this mystery in a typological manner through his actions (cf. 2 Kgs. 2:11-14). For when he was borne aloft he gave Elisha his cloak, that is, the mortification of the flesh which constitutes the chief glory of moral conduct. He did this so that Elisha should have the support of the Spirit in his battle against hostile powers and should triumph over the flux and instability of nature, typified by the Jordan; so that, in other words, he would not be immersed in the turbidity and slime of material attachment and thus prevented from Crossing over into the holy land. Meanwhile, Elijah himself advanced freely towards God, Unencumbered by attachment to any created thing. His desire being undivided and his will unmixed, he made his dwelling with Him who is simple by nature, carried there by the interdependent cardinal virtues, harnessed spiritually to one another like horses of fire.

Elijah knew that in the disciple of Christ there must be no imbalance of dispositions, for such diversity is proof of a lack of inward unity. Thus the passion of desire produces a diffusion of blood around the heart, and the incensive power when roused causes the blood to boil. He who already lives and moves and has his being in Christ (cf. Acts 17:28) has annulled in himself the production of what is imbalanced and disunited: as I have said, he does not bear within him, like male and female, the opposing dispositions of such passions. In this way, the intelligence is not enslaved by the passions and made subject to their fickleness. Naturally endowed with the holiness of the divine image, the intelligence urges the soul to conform itself by its own free choice to the divine likeness, in this way the soul is able to participate in the great kingdom that exists in a substantive manner in God, the Father of all, and to become a translucent abode of the Holy Spirit, receiving - if it may be expressed in this way - the whole authority of the knowledge of the divine nature in so far as this is possible. Where this authority prevails, the production of what is inferior

automatically comes to an end and only what is superior is generated; for the soul that through the grace of its calling resembles God keeps inviolate within itself the Substance of the blessings bestowed upon it. In souls such as this Christ always desires to be born in a mystical way, becoming incarnate in those who attain salvation, and making the soul that gives birth to Him a Virgin Mother; for such a soul, to put it briefly, is not conditioned by categories like those of male and female that typify a nature subject to generation and corruption.

Let no one be shocked to hear me speak of the corruption that is inherent in generation. For when one has justly and dispassionately examined the nature of what comes into being and ceases to be, one will clearly see that generation begins with corruption and ends in corruption. Christ, and the Christ-like way of life and understanding, as I have said, are free of the passions characteristic of such generation. At least, this is the case if St Paul was speaking the truth when he said that in Christ Jesus "there is neither male nor female" (Gal. 3:28), meaning by these terms the characteristics and passions of a nature subject to generation and corruption. For in Christ and the Christ-like way of life there is only a deiform understanding imbued with divine knowledge, and a single disposition of will and purpose that chooses only virtue.

Moreover, in Christ there is neither Greek nor Jew (cf. Gal. 3:28). By this is meant differing or, rather, contrary views about God. The Greek affirms a host of ruling principles and divides the one fundamental principle into opposing operations and powers, devising a polytheistic worship full of contradictions because of the multitude of objects to be venerated, and ridiculous because of its many modes of veneration. The Jew affirms a fundamental principle which, although one, is narrow, imperfect and almost non-existent, since it is devoid of immanent consciousness and life; and so he falls into an evil which is just as bad as that into which the Greek falls for the opposite reason, namely disbelief in the true God. For he limits the fundamental principle to a single Person, one that exists without Logos and Spirit, or that merely possesses Logos and Spirit as qualities; for he fails to realize what kind of God this would be if deprived of these two other Persons, or how He could be God if assigned them as accidents by participation, as is the case with created intelligent beings. Neither Greek nor Jew, then, has any place at all in Christ. In Him there is only the principle of true religion and the steadfast law of mystical theology, that rejects both the dilatation of the Divinity, as in Greek polytheism, and the contraction of the Divinity, as in Jewish monotheism. In this way the Divine is not full of internal contradictions, as it is with the Greeks, because of a natural plurality, nor is it regarded as passible, as it is by the Jews, because of being a single Person, deprived of Logos and Spirit, or only possessing Logos and Spirit as qualities, without itself being Intellect and Logos and Spirit.

Mystical theology teaches us, who through faith have been adopted by grace and brought to the knowledge of truth, to recognize one nature and power of the Divinity, that is to say, one God contemplated in Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It teaches us to know God as a single unoriginate Intellect, self-existent, the begetter of a single, self-existent, unoriginate Logos, and the source of a single everlasting life, self-existent as the Holy Spirit: a Trinity in Unity and a Unity in Trinity. The Divinity is not one thing in another thing: the Trinity is not in the Unity like an accident in a substance or vice versa, for God is without qualities. The Divinity is not one thing and another thing: the Unity does not differ from the Trinity by distinction of nature; the nature is simple and single in both. Nor in the Divinity is one thing dependent on or prior to another: the Trinity is not distinguished from the Unity, or the Unity from the Trinity, by inferiority of power; nor is the Unity distinguished from the Trinity as something common and general abstracted in a purely conceptual manner from the particulars in which it occurs: it is a substantively self-subsistent essence and a truly self-consolidating power. Nor in the Divinity has one thing come into being through another: there is within it no such mediating relationship as that of cause and effect, since it is altogether identical with itself and free from relationships. Nor in the Divinity is one thing derived from another: the Trinity does not derive from the Unity, since it is ungenerated and self-manifested. On the contrary, the Unity and the Trinity are both affirmed and conceived as truly one and the same, the first denoting the principle of essence, the second the mode of existence. The whole is the single Unity, not divided by the Persons; and the whole is also the single Trinity, the Persons of which are not confused by the Unity. Thus polytheism is not introduced by division of the Unity or disbelief in the true God by confusion of the Persons.

When Christian doctrine avoids these errors it achieves a genuine splendor. By Christian doctrine I mean the teaching of Christ, the new proclamation of truth in which there is neither male nor female, that is, the signs and passions of human nature when subject to birth and decay; neither Greek nor Jew, that is, contrary views of the Divinity; neither uncircumcision nor circumcision (cf. Col. 3:11), that is, the different kinds of worship appropriate to these views, the first divinizing nature because of the passions and setting the creature against the Creator, and the second because of its misuse of symbols of the Law vilifying visible creation and slandering the Creator as the source of evil. Both constitute equally an insult to the Divine and lead equally to evil. Neither in Christian doctrine is there barbarian or Scythian, that is, the deliberate fragmentation of the single nature of human beings which has made them subject to the unnatural law of mutual slaughter; neither is there bond or free, that is, the fortuitous division of this same nature which leads to one person

despising another although both are by nature of an equal dignity, and which encourages men to dominate others tyrannically, thus violating the divine image in man. 'But Christ is all and in all' (Col. 3:11), in spirit fashioning the unoriginate kingdom by means of that which lies beyond nature and law.

This kingdom is characterized, as we have shown, by humility and gentleness of heart. It is the combination of these two qualities that constitutes the perfection of the person-created according to Christ. For every humbler person is invariably gentle and every gentle person is invariably humble. A person is humble when he knows that his very being is on loan to him. He is gentle when he realizes how to use the powers given to him in a manner that accords with nature and, withdrawing their activity completely from the senses, places them at the service of the intelligence in order to produce the virtues. In this way his intellect moves incessantly towards God, while where his senses are concerned he is not in the least perturbed by any of the things that afflict the body, nor does he stamp his soul with any trace of distress, thereby disrupting his joy-creative state. For he does not regard what is painful in the senses as a privation of pleasure: He knows only one pleasure, the marriage of the soul with the Logos. To be deprived of this marriage is endless torment, extending by nature through all the ages. Thus when he has left the body and all that pertains to it, he is impelled towards union with the divine; for even if he were to be master of the whole world, he would still recognize only one real disaster: failure to attain by grace the deification for which he is hoping.

Let us, then, 'cleanse ourselves from all pollution of the flesh and spirit' (2 Cor. 7:1), so that when we have extinguished our sensual desire, which indecently wantons with the passions, we may hallow the divine name. And with our intelligence let us bind fast our anger, deranged and frenzied by sensual pleasure, so that we may receive the kingdom of God the Father, that comes to us through gentleness.

To be continued. . .

Upcoming Events 2016

31 October All-Saints Festival
7-8 November Feast Day at Holy Archangels Monastery
13 November Parish Thanksgiving Day & Picnic
31 December Feast Day at Holy Nativity Monastery
31 December New Year's Eve Vigil 8:00 p.m.

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!