

The Confessor's Tongue for November 6, A. D. 2016

20th Sunday after Pentecost, St. Paul 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.

November 6: St. Paul the Confessor

He was born in Thessalonica, and was the successor of St. Alexander. He was a "champion of Orthodoxy, like the Apostle Paul adorned with piety, with courage of soul and endurance in tribulation". For his zealous refutation of "the evil opinions of the Arians" he "endured persecution and tribulation" and four times was removed from the patriarchal throne by Emperor Constantius, who was an Arian. Finally, St. Paul was banished to a prison in Cucusa, Armenia where he died as a martyr "for the Trinity without beginning and one in essence". The Arians killed him, strangling him during the service with his omophorion in the year 350. In the year 381 his uncorrupted relics were transferred to Constantinople and in 1236 to Venice where they remain until today.

November 6: Barlaam of Khutin

The Ven. Barlaam, in the world Alexis, was born in 1156 of pious and rich parents living in Novgorod. Having found an inclination for the monastic life in his youth, he distributed his estate to the poor after the death of his parents, and, with the name Barlaam, accepted tonsure in the Lisitsi Monastery. Wishing to practice asceticism in strict solitude, he left for Khutin, about 10 versts (6.6 miles) from Novgorod. Having built a small cell there for himself he was entirely given to prayer, fasting and labor. The glory of the asceticism of St. Barlaam soon spread in the vicinity. Both princes and boyars, monks and laymen began to come to him for conversation, and he gave each one long instruction. And many lovers of the monastic way of life wished to conduct their life under his leadership and settled around him. Ven. Barlaam built for them the Transfiguration of the Lord Monastery and cells (see the Novgorod Diocese). St. Gregory, Archbishop of Novgorod, ordained the Ven. Barlaam to the priesthood and appointed him the hegumen of the monastery. Being the hegumen of the monastery, the Ven. Barlaam "standing all night in continual prayer" set the high example of virtue through his life. Being taught "in the commandments of the Lord day and night" his "exhaustion" of the flesh through fasting "and vigil", suppressing in himself "all carnal subtleties" and being glorified by the Lord with the gift of wonders and insight, the Ven. Barlaam was very much respected by princes and hierarchs. He died in 1192. His relics, discovered to be incorrupt in 1452, repose in a hidden place in his monastery.

Preparing for the Nativity Fast

The Nativity Fast, the 40-day period of preparation for the Nativity of our Lord, begins Monday, November 15 and lasts until the Liturgy the morning of the Nativity of Our Lord, December 25. The Fast is a time of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving given to us for repentance, healing, cleansing, growth, and, ultimately—for knowing Christ more intimately and being filled afresh with His Spirit. The Fast is a time to lay aside the lesser things choking out the Gospel in our lives to pursue higher things.

The Fast is a wholistic effort of the whole man consisting of three main elements: prayer, fasting, and
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almsgiving. Now nine days before the Fast is the time to prepare. The Nativity Fast is difficult, as the world parties before Nativity, and then, wearied of its excesses, turns to dieting when we are celebrating the twelve days of Christmas. So we do well to plan ahead.

Prayer: During the Fast, we seek to advance our prayer life, keeping our rule of prayer more strictly and adding to it if we can—Psalms, prostrations, prayer ropes, short prayer at the canonical hours of 0900, 1200, and 1500, etc. In everything, we should strive to develop a more constant awareness of God throughout the day. We should attend the corporate prayer of the Church more frequently, as the services will support us.

Almsgiving: Almsgiving helps give our prayer wings. It is an act of love to give up some of the resources God has given us to benefit others who are in need. We offer several outlets for almsgiving: the almsbox and our own "food pantry" for those in need, and the collections of items needed by the local charities. The important thing is that we give alms, which is giving for those in need above and beyond our normal tithes and offerings.

Fasting: In many people's mind, this is what is meant by the Fast, but this is but one part. We abstain from meat, dairy products, fish, wine, and olive oil (see wall calendar for when fish, wine, and oil are permitted) and marital relations (see priest if you have questions) so that we can give ourselves to prayer and have extra means for almsgiving. We eat less: when we get up from the table, we still have "room" in our stomachs. The money we save by eating less and more simply we give as alms (above and beyond our usual tithes and offerings); here fasting has its practical social benefit. We also seek to minimize or eliminate influences in our lives that draw us away from Christ or cause our hearts to grow cold or indifferent to Him. This is a good time to abstain from secular entertainment and unplug ourselves from as much electronic media as we can so we may concentrate on face-to-face relations with friends and family.

Reading: Each person is strongly encouraged to choose a spiritual book for daily reading during the Fast in addition to our daily reading of Scripture, etc. It is wise to consult with your priest or confessor if you are not sure what to read. Put our Library and Bookstore to good use!

All Orthodox Christians should make the effort to prepare themselves to make Confession and receive Holy Communion during the Fast.

If you have any questions about how to keep the fast in your particular circumstances, please consult your Confessor or Priest.

The Commandments of Christ

"If ye love Me, keep My commandments."

Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you. Matthew 7:6

The faith we hold is both “most holy” and “precious” (Jude 20, 2 Peter 1:1) and is to be treated as such. Holy things are those set aside for special, not common, use, and in this case, are things set aside or consecrated for the Lord. Pearls are precious things, for they are not so easy to find and good ones are rare, beautiful, and highly prized. Here ‘pearls’ suggest wisdom and knowledge of the deeper things of God that can be learned only by searching them out with labor in purity of heart and having God respond to the search by opening Himself to the seeker.

In ancient times, dogs were not household pets, but were unclean wild animals, ravenous scavengers, and a threat to man’s livestock and even to man himself. Swine were unclean animals not to be eaten or even touched by Jews. To give something holy to a dog is to despise the holy thing and to give a pearl to a pig who cannot appreciate it is folly and a waste. In this command, dogs and swine refer to certain types of men, men who have not set their hearts to seek God and have not yielded themselves to Him, who live unclean lives dedicated to the pursuit of base pleasures. They are unbelievers who resist or attack the things of God.

The holy things and precious things of our faith are not to be given to fools, to mockers, to scoffers, to unclean men who are not seeking truth. If we do, they will only treat our holy things with disdain and perhaps attack us further because we have not fed their carnal desires. And even if someone sincerely seeks the Truth, there are things that cannot be profitably conveyed to him until he has had the cleansing bath of baptism, which renders clean him who formerly was unclean.

Christ’s command first implies that we need to know the difference between what is holy—set aside for God—and what is for common use. A normal husband and wife do not hide their marriage from the world, but they do not talk to others of their intimate relations, for that if for them and for them alone. So it is in the Church, the household of God, the Bride of the Lamb. Some things belong to the public witness of the Faith to the world. Other things, holy things, belong to the inner life of the Church accessible only to those initiated by Baptism and practicing their faith.

Hence at the Divine Liturgy right before Communion, the priest declares “The Holy Things are for the Holy”, and we declare to God in a prayer before Holy Communion that we “will not speak of Thy Mysteries to Thine enemies”. This bears witness to the holiness of Communion, which is referred to as “Holy Things”. Only the faithful who are living in repentance and who have prepared themselves may partake of them.

The basic principle is this: not everything contained in our faith is for common consumption, to

be talked over publicly or put in advertisements. We have to discern what a particular person needs or is ready to hear and not reveal all our spiritual riches to just anyone willing to listen—as King Hezekiah foolishly did when he revealed all the treasures of his house to the messengers from Babylon. A man who doubts that Jesus Christ is God is in no wise capable of hearing with profit details of the Eucharist, relics, the Theotokos, and the like. It is no use to argue with him about them, and it exposes the holy things of God to ridicule and misunderstanding and ourselves to avoidable unpleasantness. *Fr. Justin Frederick*

On the Lord’s Prayer: A Short Interpretation 6

*‘Thy Will Be Done’
St. Maximus the Confessor*

Having done all this, we may go on to the next phrase of the prayer, saying, ‘Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven’ (Matt. 6:10). He who worships God mystically with the faculty of the intelligence alone, keeping it free from sensual desire and anger, fulfills the divine will on earth just as the orders of angels fulfill it in heaven. He has become in all things a co-worshipper and fellow-citizen with the angels, conforming to St Paul’s statement, ‘Our citizenship is in heaven’ (Phil. 3:20). Among the angels desire does not sap the intellect’s intensity through sensual pleasure, nor does anger make them rave and storm indecently at their fellow creatures: there is only the intelligence naturally leading intelligent beings towards the source of intelligence, the Logos Himself. God rejoices in intelligence alone and this is what He demands from us His servants. He reveals this when He says to David, ‘What have I in heaven, and besides yourself what have I desired on earth?’ (Ps. 73:25. LXX). Nothing is offered to God in heaven by the holy angels except intelligent worship; and it is this that God also demands from us when He teaches us to say in our prayers, ‘Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven’ (Matt. 6:10).

Let our intelligence, then, be moved to seek God, let our desire be roused in longing for Him, and let our incensive power struggle to keep guard over our attachment to Him. Or, more precisely, let our whole intellect be directed towards God, tensed by our incensive power as if by some nerve, and fired with longing by our desire at its most ardent. For if we imitate the heavenly angels in this way, we will find ourselves always worshipping God, behaving on earth as the angels do in heaven. For, like that of the angels, our intellect will not be attracted in the least by anything less than God. *To be continued. . .*

Upcoming Events 2016

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!