

The Confessor's Tongue for December 4, A. D. 2016

24th Sunday after Pentecost, Great Martyr Barbara; St. John of Damascus

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.

December 4: Great Martyr Barbara

The Holy Martyrs Barbara and Juliana suffered for Christ in Heliopolis, Phoenicia about the year 306. St. Barbara was the special daughter of a notable and rich pagan Dioscorus who, after the death of his wife, concentrated all his love on his daughter, cherished and kept her, "as the apple of his eye". Barbara surpassed all her contemporaries in beauty and Dioscorus "built a high pillar for her, and on this pillar built a beautiful chamber and shut his daughter in it, so that his beautiful daughter would not be seen by simple people of low birth, for in his opinion, they are not worthy to be seen by the eyes of the beautiful person his daughter is". Enclosed on the lonely pillar, surrounded by directresses and pagan slaves assigned to her, the young maiden saw only the sky and the ground. Contemplation of objects, natural phenomena and reflection about them instilled in the heart of the wise maiden doubt in the truth of the pagan gods, and, with the help of the grace of God, led her to ideas about the true wise Creator of the world. Day and night she had no rest, fervently wishing to learn about the true God and the Creator of all. Her heart did not attach itself to anything terrestrial. She "did not love gold, nor expensive pearls nor the most precious stones, nor in ornamented clothing, in which maidens adorn themselves, nor in what brothers think, but all her thoughts deepened only towards the One God, to be in the fullness of His love".

When the holy child came of age, Dioscorus began to offer her to various eminent grooms, but the chaste maiden responded to the offer of the father with resolute refusal. Dioscorus, hoping, that St. Barbara would in due course change her mind left her alone, and went on a distant journey and willed to give St. Barbara full freedom to leave wherever she needed to and to do everything that she wished. With the secret guidance of God, St. Barbara gathered together Christian maidens from whom she received her first concepts about the true God and the Lord Jesus Christ. Then, according to her wish to know truth more perfectly, a Christian presbyter in the guise of a passing merchant appeared before her, and opened to her the mysteries of the holy Christian faith, taught her to worship the true God in spirit and in truth, established the rules of the Christian life, enlightened her with holy baptism and, again gave her guidance of the grace of the one God, without revealing the instructor and the director, went away. The wise maiden, united to Christ, decided to always belong to Him alone, so that she had stood in this spiritually mysterious betrothal to the heavenly Bridegroom.

Dioscorus, having found out about the conversion of his daughter to Christianity, was inflamed with mad hatred and rage because of her. Having seized a

sword, he, in an attack of fury, wanted to strike his daughter with it, but she rushed away from him. The mad father pursued and followed after her, for however long she was not hidden from his eyes but she disappeared, by the power of God, into the stony mountain before her. When the holy martyr, being pointed out by one shepherd, was found by her father, he then began to brutally torture her. He unmercifully beat her, dragged her by the hair over sharp stones, secluded her in a dark room and starved her.

But, as his fury and rage was awful, she appeared weak but with wisdom and strong in faith before the young maidens. St. Barbara remained unshakable. To all the efforts of her father to get her to return to believe in the pagan gods, she answered with the wise accusation that the dead idols were vain and that it was madness worshipping them. And her faith could neither be shaken by "sweetness, nor corporal kindness, nor riches, nor torments" nor by any sly tricks in the pagan world.

Then the infuriated father goes to the ruler Marcian, and asks him to use all forms of torture to turn his daughter away from Christ the Lord, even to renounce very name of the father. And here the holy maiden is before the ruler, vested with all his authority, surrounded with all sorts of instruments of torture. The torturer offered kindness and persuasion, honor and pleasures to seduce the young inexperienced maiden. The holy woman martyr replies to him with her confession of the one God and with insult to the soulless idols. The embittered torturer orders her to be stripped naked and to beat her dry veins, until the ground was no longer empurpled with her blood, until there was no more flesh to be torn, until there were no more bones to be naked. In silence the holy one suffers this furious tearing of the flesh. All her soul was raised up by faith and hope to heaven, all her heart poured out in silent prayer to her heavenly Bridegroom. The torturers, in order to produce the most severe pain, rubbed with finely chopped up hair the tormented body of the holy woman martyr, and, finally, dragged the half-dead and half-living holy sufferer and thrown her into prison. Here the holy woman martyr fervently prays to the Lord, but not for ending the torments, but about strengthening herself for more tortures. Her body burns from scorching wounds, but her heart burns still with the strongest fire of Divine love. In her mouth blood coagulates, but her spirit rises, as a flame, to the heights, to the mighty God, to life. At midnight a heavenly light brightened the gloomy prison and the Lord Jesus Christ Himself was revealed "in the unapproachable light to the prisoner in the prison, to issue the command, healing both wounds and granting joy". After such consolation with uninterrupted joy the holy maiden went through new tortures even unto death. They hung her up on a tree,

planed her flesh with iron claws, poured out fire baring her ribs, cut off her breasts and beat her head with a hammer. The holy maiden underwent all with courage in her heart, with joy in her person, and with a prayer on her lips.

Finally, all the rage of torturers was exhausted before the patience of the great woman martyr, and condemned her to be beheaded. Her cruel hearted father beheaded her daughter. Before her death, St. Barbara prayed to the Lord for everyone who honors her memory, "that sudden illness would not come near him, and that unintentional death would not take him away".

"When the All-blessed Juliana, seeing the glorious Martyr Barbara during her terrible trial suffering from her many wounds, her body painfully torn in many places," but bearing all the tortures with firmness, convicted the ruler (hegemon) of cruelty and unfairness, after many tortures was beheaded for this. The brutal torturers Dioscorus and Marcian soon "underwent the sudden judgment of God": they were burnt by lightning.

In the Fourth or Sixth century the relics of St. Barbara were transferred to Constantinople where a magnificent temple was constructed in her honor (which was used as a right of sanctuary, and those convicted of crimes and subject to the penalty of the law found safe haven in it). Today the relics of St. Barbara openly rest in Kiev, in the Golden Domed St. Michael's Monastery (see the Kievan Diocese) where they were transferred in 1108. *V. Bulgakov, Handbook for Church Servers. Translated by Archpriest Eugene D. Tarris © All rights reserved.*

December 4: St. John of Damascus

The son of a famous dignitary serving at the court of the Damascus Caliph Abdalmalik, he received a high Christian education and was made the mayor of Damascus. He always valued the higher truth of life and zealously pursued the truth in the hope of salvation. During the reign of Emperor Leo the Isaurian, St. John, "fired up with zeal", revealed as the courageous defender of icon veneration, and full of fervent faith, indestructible persuasiveness and the living eloquence in writing in defense of icon veneration, strongly influenced his contemporaries. The iconoclastic Emperor, wishing to ruin John, sent a slanderous letter to the Caliph accusing John of treason to his master. The Caliph believed the slander and issued an order to chop off John's right hand. But after the prayer of St. John, the hand wonderfully was joined to the joint.

Soon after this, St. John entered the Monastery of St. Sabbas in Palestine as a monk. Here no one wished to be the elder of the well-known learned theologian. When an elder for John was found, he forbade John to write anything. John obediently carried out this obedience for a long time but when one of the brothers persistently asked him to compose a graveside hymn on the occasion of the death of his brother, who was a monk in the monastery, the Venerable John touched by the tears of the

unfortunate one, did not hold back and wrote those highly, poetical, tender hymns, which from then on are sung in our Church during the burial service. The elder forgave his disobedience and gave permission to write only after John explicitly did his special assignments for penance, consisting in the cleaning of all dirty places in the monastery.

Elevated to the rank of presbyter by the Jerusalem patriarch, Ven. John lived for a short time in Jerusalem. A few times he was imprisoned for his zeal for Orthodoxy. The rest of his days the Ven. John lived in the St. Sabbas Monastery where he practiced asceticism up to an extreme old age in deep humility and obedience, and wrote the famous theological treatises and those wonderful church hymns, which the Orthodox Church sings from that time until today. His *Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* presents his first work of learned Christian theology, and serves hitherto as a paradigm for theologians. Besides the tender hymns for the Burial Service, the Ven. John wrote some especially remarkable hymns: The Octoechos, the service for Pascha, the Canons for Christmas, Epiphany, Ascension, etc. He wrote 64 Canons in all. The Ven. John was called the "Golden Strings" for his soul-inspiring church hymns. He died in 777. *V. Bulgakov, Handbook for Church Servers. Translated by Archpriest Eugene D. Tarris © All rights reserved.*

The Commandments of Christ

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

Ask, and it shall be given you; seek and ye shall find, knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for everyone that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened. Matthew 7:7-9

Christians may desire God's grace and good things which God desires to give in abundance but fail to obtain them for a number of reasons. Most simply, sometimes they do not obtain because they do not ask (James 4:2). God responds to man's requests which reflect the deep desires of man's heart. Hungry children outside of mealtime must ask their mother for food if they desire a snack but will not get food without making the request. Other times believers don't receive because they give up and stop asking (Luke 18:1-8). Sometimes they don't gain what they seek because they don't pray fervently (James 5:16). And in some cases, God does not give what is requested because the requester asks it with wrong motives (James 4:3)—to consume it upon his lusts.

Despite these possibilities for failure in our requests and seeking the good things of God, Christ promises that we shall receive, find, and have the door opened if we ask, seek, and knock. These verbs of the command indicate a repeated, persistent action of seeking, asking, and knocking, not a one-time casual request. If only we believed Christ's words! If only we would pray fervently and persistently for our families, our friends, our relative, our leaders, our enemies, believing Christ's promise to walk in obedience to His command.

We need to understand that our Lord does not distribute His treasures to the sluggard. He does not reveal Himself to the casual inquirer. He will not open to the timid. He will not share His holy treasures with those whose hearts are not set on Him. To produce the necessary condition in us to receive His good things, He commands us, to keep asking (or we shan't receive), to keep seeking (or we shan't find), to keep knocking (or it won't be opened).

Do you face trouble in your marriage, problems with your children, difficulties from enemies or your circumstances in life? Pray fervently, keep asking of God, keep seeking His face and His solution to your problem. Show God that you care about the matter. "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." *Fr. Justin Frederick,*

On Renunciation *St. Dorotheos of Gaza*

St. Dorotheos's book 'Discourses and Saying's is a book given to new monks. Thus it is accessible to any of us who seriously desires to live the life in Christ. This first chapter contains a most excellent summary of the Christian faith.

In the beginning when God created man He set him in Paradise (as the divine holy Scripture says, adorned with every virtue, and gave him a command not to eat of the tree in the middle of Paradise. He was provided for in Paradise, in prayer and contemplation in the midst of honor and glory; healthy in his emotions and sense perceptions, and perfect in his nature as he was created. For, to the likeness of God did God make man, that is, immortal, having the power to act freely, and adorned with all the virtues. When he disobeyed the command and ate of the tree that God commanded him not to eat of, he was thrown out of Paradise and fell from a state in accord with his nature to a state contrary to nature, i.e. a pray to sin, to ambition, to a love of the pleasures of this life and the other passions; and he was mastered by them, and become a slave to them through his transgression. Then little by little evil increased and death reigned. There was not more piety, and every where was ignorance of God. Only a few, I say, of the Father moved by the law of nature acknowledge God; such were Abraham and the rest of the Patriarchs, and Noah and Jacob. And to speak simply, very few and rare were those who knew about God. For then the Enemy deployed all his wickedness so that sin ruled. Then idolatry began and the worship of many gods, divining, murders, and the rest of the devil's wickedness. Then God in His goodness had mercy on His creatures and gave Moses as written law in which He forbade some things and allowed others, saying 'This you shall do, that you shall not do'. He gave the commandments and said 'The Lord, your God, is one Lord,' so as thereafter to turn their minds from polytheism, and then: 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your soul and with all your mind,' everywhere proclaiming that God is one, and there is no other. For in saying 'You shall love the Lord, your

God,' he showed that God is one and one is the Lord.. So also in the Decalogue: 'The Lord your God shall you adore, Him only shall you worship. You shall adhere to Him and swear by His name. Then He adds, 'You shall have no other gods, nor any likeness to anything in heaven above or on earth beneath'—for they used to bow down before all sorts of creatures.

The good God, then, gave the law as a help, for their conversion, for putting right what was evil but they did not reform. He sent the prophets, but they were able to do nothing. For evil prevailed as said Isaiah, 'no injury, no bruise, no wound was cauterized; no chance of soothing dressings; no oil, no bandaging o wounds' as much as to say that the evil was not in one member, or in one place, but in the whole body. It took in the whole soul and all its powers.

Everything was a slave to sin, everything was under the control of sin. As Jeremiah said, 'We would heal Babylon, but she would not be healed.' That is to say, we have revealed your [God's] name, we have announced your commandments, your benefits, and your warnings. We have put Babylon on her guard against enemy risings. All the same, she is not healed; she has not been converted, she has not feared, she has not turned from her wickedness. In another place he says, 'they have not submitted to discipline', that is, correction and instruction. And in the psalm it says, 'Their soul abhors all nourishment and has come near to the gates of death.'

The at last the good, man-loving God sends His only-begotten Son. It was for God alone to heal and prevail against such miseries; and the prophets were not ignorant of this. Wherefore David clearly said, 'O you, who are seated above the cherubim, show yourself; stir p your power and come to save us.' And again, 'Lord, bow down the heavens and come down' and more to the same effect. The other prophets also, each in his own way, proclaim many things about it, now begging Him to come down, now revealing that He certainly will come. Therefore our Lord did come, by being made man for our sakes, so that, as the Scripture says, like should be healed by like, soul by soul, flesh by flesh, for He became completely man—without sin. He took our very substance and took His origin from our race and He became a New Adam, like the Adam He Himself had formed. For He renewed man in his nature, and restored the depraved senses and sensibility of human nature to what it had been in the beginning. Having become man, he lifted fallen man up again. He freed him from slavery to sin which had mastered him by force. For with violence and tyranny the Enemy was leading man to sin, reluctantly, without really wanting to sin, as the Apostle speaking in our person says, 'I do not the good which I would but the evil I would not, that I do.' Having become man, then, for our sakes, God freed man from the Enemy's tyranny. He took away his power, broke his strength, took us out of his hand, and freed us fro slavery to him—unless we spontaneously choose to obey him by sinning. For the Lord gave us power, as He told us, to trample on

serpents and scorpions and all the power of the enemy, since He cleansed us of all sin by Baptism. For Holy Baptism purges us of iniquity and washes away all stains. Therefore gain, recognizing our weakness and knowing for certain that even after Baptism we would fall again—as it is written, ‘For the heart of man is prone to evil from his youth’—God from His goodness gave us holy precepts which purify us, so that, if we really want to, through the keeping of these commandments, we can be purified not only from our sins but from those innate tendencies which lead us to evil. Sin is one thing but instinctive reaction or passion is another. These are our reactions: pride, anger, sexual indulgence, hate, greed, and so on. The corresponding sins are the gratification of these passions: when a man acts and brings into corporeal reality those works which were suggested to him by his innate desires. It is impossible to exist without nature desires arising, but not to give way to them is by no means impossible.

Therefore, the God-man gave us instructions, as I said, which purify our passions and those evil dispositions which come from our inner man. He instilled in man’s inner conscience the power to judge good and evil; He woke it from sleep; He showed the causes from which sins rise, and he says to us, ‘The Law says, “Do not commit adultery”, but I say to you, do not entertain desire. The Law says “Do not murder”, but I say, do not give way to anger. If you do entertain a fleshly desire and today you do not commit adultery, it does not cease inwardly troubling until it whips you into action. If you are irritated and stir up your anger against your brother, then you strike him, speak evil against him, then plot against him and so go forward little by little and at last you come to murder him.’ Again, the Law says, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth,’ etc., but our Lord admonishes us not only to bear patiently the blows of one who strikes us, but humbly to turn to him the other cheek. And so the object of the Law is to teach us not to do to others what we do not wish to suffer, and therefore it cuts away our wrong-doing through our fear of suffering. Now the object must be, as I am always saying, to cast away our hatred, our love of pleasure, our vainglory, and the rest of our unruly desires.

I repeat that the aim of Christ, our Master, is precisely to teach us how we come to commit all our sins; how we fall into all our evils. First he sets us free through Holy Baptism, as I have already said, giving us the forgiveness of our sins, and He has given us the power to do good if we desire to and no longer to be dragged down into sin, so to speak, by force. For one who has consented to sin is weighted down and dragged away by it. As it is written: ‘By his sins is everyone put in bondage.’ Then He teaches us by his holy precepts how to be cleansed from our passions so that we do not fall again into those same sins. Finally, He shows us how we come to despise and disobey the commandments of God and adds the medicine that all may be able to obey and be saved. What, then, is

the medicine and what the cause of our contempt? Listen to what the Lord Himself tells us: ‘Learn of me, for I am meek and humble of heart and you shall find rest for your souls.’ There you have it in a nutshell: he has taught us the root and cause of all evils and also the remedy for it, leading to all good. He shows us that pretensions to superiority [pride] cast us down and that it is impossible to obtain mercy except by the contrary, that is to say, by humility. Self-elevation begets contempt and disobedience begets perdition, whereas humility begets obedience and the saving of souls. And I call that real humility which is not humble in word and outward appearance but is deeply planted in the very heart; for this is what He meant when He said that ‘I am meek and humble of heart.’

Let anyone desiring to find true humility and rest for his soul learn lowliness of mind and see that in it is all joy and all glory and all tranquility, and in pretensions to superiority, just the contrary. From where do all those afflictions of the mind come to us? Is it not through our arrogance, our thinking too much of ourselves? Is it not through extolling ourselves and our evil self-preference? Is it not the bitterness of ourselves that will master us? But how did this come about? Was man not created in all comfort, in all joy, in perfect peace, and in all glory? Was he not in Paradise? He was sent away. Why? God said you shall not do this, and he did do it! Do you not see the pride in that, the obstinacy, the insubordination? And so God said, the man is mad; he does not know how to be happy, unless he experiences evil days he will go away and completely perish. Unless he knows what tribulation is he will never know what rest is. He then gave him what he deserved and expelled him from Paradise. Then He delivered him to his own self-will and to his own desires, that he may grind down his own bones and learn that he cannot go straight on his own, but only by the command of God’ so that learning the poverty of disobedience may teach him the tranquility that comes by obedience. AS the prophet says, ‘Your rebellions shall teach you.’ Nevertheless, the goodness of God, as I have said many times, did not despise what He had formed, but again urged him to obey, again exhorted him. ‘Come to me,’ He said, ‘all you who labor and are heavily burdened, and I will refresh you’—as much as to say, ‘See how you have to work! See the misery you have brought on yourself! See how you are tried by evil and your unruliness! But come, change your ways....Learn of Me, for I am meek and humble of heart, and you shall find rest for your souls. *To be continued...*

Upcoming Events 2016
15 November – 24 December Nativity Fast
22 December Holy Unction, 7:00 p.m.
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!