

The Confessor's Tongue for December 11, A. D. 2016

25th Sunday after Pentecost, Sunday of the Holy Forefathers

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.

On Renunciation, part 2

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.

Continued from last week: See brethren, what arrogance does? See what lowliness is able to do? What need was there for all these contortions? If from the beginning man had humbled himself and listen to God and obeyed His command, there would have been no fall. Again, after Adam had done wrong, God gave him a chance to repent and be forgiven, and yet he kept on being stiff-necked and unrepentant. For God came to him and said, 'Adam, where are you?' instead of saying, 'From what glory are you come to this? Are you not ashamed? Why did you sin? Why did you go astray?'—as if urging him sharply to say, 'Forgive me!' But there was no sign of humility. There was no change of heart but rather the contrary. He replied, 'The wife that *You* gave me'—mark you, not 'my wife'—'deceived me.'; 'the wife that *You* gave me,' as if to say, 'this disaster *You* placed upon my head'. So it is, my brethren, when a man has not the guts to accuse himself, he does not scruple to accuse God Himself. Then God came to Eve and said to her, 'Why did you not keep the command I gave you?' as if saying, 'If you would only say, "Forgive me", to humble your soul and be forgiven.' And again, not a word! No 'forgive me'. She only answered, 'The serpent deceived me!'—as if to say, if the serpent did wrong, what concern is that to me? What are you doing, you wretches? Kneel in repentance, acknowledge your fault, take pity on your nakedness. But neither the one nor the other stopped to self-accusation, no trace of humility was found in either of them.

And now look and consider how this was only an anticipation of our own state! See how many and great the evils it has brought on us—this self-justification, this holding fast to our own will, this obstinacy in being our own guide. All this was the product of that hateful arrogance towards God. Whereas the products of humility are self-accusation, distrust of our own sentiments, hatred of our own will. By these one is made worthy of being redeemed, of having his human nature restored to its proper state, through the cleansing operation of Christ's holy precepts. Without humility, it is impossible to obey the Commandments or at any time to go towards anything good. As Abba Mark says: without a contrite heart it is impossible to be free from wickedness or to acquire virtue. Therefore, by compunction of hart you get a grip on the Commandments, are free from evil, gain virtue, and what is more, peace of mind returns to you. The holy men of old thoroughly understood

this and through all their training and guidance in humility were zealous in uniting themselves to God. Thereby becoming friends of God, they were able, after Holy Baptism, not only to cut out sins arising from evil passions, but to conquer the passions themselves and to acquire complete control of their passions. Such were Saint Anthony, Saint Pachomius, and the rest of the God-bearing Fathers.

Their aim was to purify themselves, as the Apostle says, 'from every blemish of the flesh and the spirit'. They knew that by the keeping of the Commandments the soul is purified and the mind, too, is enlightened, and they perceived that it starts functioning as nature intended it to. 'The command of the Lord gives light and enlightens the eyes.' Being in the world they knew very well that it was not possible, without trouble, to make progress in virtue, and they worked out for themselves an unusual kind of life, a strange way of passing their time, I mean the solitary life. They began to flee the world and to live in the desert, in watching and fasting and sleeping on the bare earth and other forms of mortification. Having left their homeland and their relations, riches, and possessions, they simply crucified themselves to this world. And not only did they keep the commandments, but made a gift to God.

The commandments were given to all Christians, and it is understood that every Christian observes them; this is, as it were, the tribute appointed to be paid to the King. Anyone who says, 'I will not pay tribute,' will he escape punishment? There are, however, in the world great and illustrious men who not only pay the appointed tribute, but also offer gifts, and they are thought worthy of great honor, great benefits and esteem. So also the Holy Fathers not only kept the commandments but also offered gifts to God. These gifts are virginity and poverty. These are not commanded but freely given. Nowhere is it written, you shall *not* take wife or beget children. Neither did Christ give the *commandment*, 'Sell your property?' He did not choose to do so when the lawyer approached him saying, 'Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?' He replied, 'You know the Commandments. Do not kill, do not steal, do not commit adultery, do not bear false witness against your neighbor' etc. When the answer came, 'All these things I have kept from my youth', He added, 'If you want to be perfect, sell your property and give the money to the poor,' etc. See, He did not say 'sell your property' as a commandment, but as a counsel. This is clear from the condition imposed, '*if* you wish to be perfect.'

As we said, therefore, the Fathers offered to God beside all the other virtues, their virginity and poverty as a gift. They crucified the world to themselves, and struggled to crucify themselves to the world. As the Apostle says, 'The world is crucified to me and I to

the world.' What is the difference? The world is crucified to a man when a man renounces the world to become a solitary, and leaves parents, wealthy, possessions, business dealings, and the giving of present [sic]. Then he is crucifying the world to himself, for he has left himself, and this is what the Apostle means by, 'the world is crucified to me.' But then he adds, 'and I to the world'. How can a man be crucified to the world? When, after being freed from external things he begins the combat against pleasure itself, against the desire of having things, against his own will, and he puts to death his evil passions. Then he himself is crucified to the world and is worthy to say with the Apostle, 'the world is crucified to me, and I to the world.' *To be continued...*

The Commandments of Christ

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

But I say unto you, swear not at all . . . but let your communication be Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil. Matthew 5:37

With this command, Christ calls His followers to keep their word and to do what they say. Many people resort to swearing to convince others that they will do what they say: "I swear I'll do it!"; the more important the matter, the more important the thing by which they swear. Of course, when no oath is given, then all bets are off as to whether such a person will keep his word.

Christ keeps His word. He does what He says He will do; He does not do what He says He will not do. He does not resort to swearing oaths to convince us that He is serious. He simply says He will do it, and He does. 'Yes' in Christ's mouth means 'yes' and not 'maybe'. So should it in our mouths.

We speak far too carelessly, treating our words as light, trivial things. We say we will do things to please others with words while having little intention of carrying them out; or we say 'yes' to something and promptly forget. But the person who heard our 'yes' will not forget that word as quickly as we do. Our word has created an expectation in him, and our failure to keep our word brings him disappointment.

The command to let our yes be yes and our no, no, is more important than we adults might think. Very often, it is a parent's failure to keep his word, to let his yes be yes, that allows bitterness and the beginning of estrangement to creep into a child's heart. A child hears his father promise to take him fishing. He is excited. He anticipates. The day arrives, and no fishing. Dad had some business come up and felt he could release himself from his promise to attend to it. How does the child feel? He is disappointed, and the possibility of a root of bitterness springing up in his heart that will hinder free relations with his father is now present.

But what about those things that "come up" to interfere with things we told others we would do? In Psalm 14 (15):4, we read that a righteous man "swears to his own hurt and does not change." In other words,

once a righteous man gives his word, he keeps it, even though it is not to his immediate advantage so to do.

There is a story told about the young Thomas Jackson, long before he became known as "Stonewall". He had agreed with a local man to bring him a fish once a week or so for a certain price. One day in his fishing for his employer, he caught a whopper and nothing smaller. He brought the princely fish to the man to fulfill his bargain, who on seeing the size of the fish, wanted to pay Thomas more for it. Thomas refused, saying he had agreed to bring a fish for such and such a price and he couldn't accept more.

In the case above, the father would need to tell the business associates that he had a prior engagement that day that he could not break and that he'd meet another time for business.

May God help us keep to saying "yes" and "no" and to doing what we say. *Fr. Justin Frederick*

December 11: Sunday of the Forfathers

The Sunday of the Holy Forefathers occurs between the 11th and the 17th of December. This Sunday commemorates all the ancestors of the people of God, the holy patriarchs living up to the law, given on Sinai, and under the law, - from Adam to Joseph the Betrothed; together with them are commemorated "those who preached Christ" the holy prophets - from Samuel to Zechariah and to John the Baptist, and all the Old Testament righteous men, who were righteous in the faith in the coming of the Messiah. Especially in the service for this day are praised "the pious youths" Ananias, Azarias, and Misael, who "in faith were thrown into the fiery furnace" and . . . who are mystically a prototype of the Trinity and the incarnation of Christ" from the Virgin. . . .

On this day, the holy Church appoints the Gospel reading about those invited to a lord's supper but then at the last minute declined to come, warning us, that we can be distracted from worthily meeting the Lord by permitting the predominance of flesh over spirit, the attachment to the terrestrial, the blinding by gleam of worldly goods, the predilection for vanity, the unwillingness to deny one's self-love and pride everyday, the enslavement to passions and covetousness. The Epistle reading directly commands us to destroy our earthly members: fornication, impurity, passion, evil lust and cupidity, to lay aside anger, evil, blaspheming, slander, lies, and in general to take off the old man and put on the new in the image of the Creator (Col. 3:4-11).

V. Bulgakov, Handbook for Church Servers. Translated by Archpriest Eugene D. Tarris © All rights reserved.

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!