

# The Confessor's Tongue for March 12, A. D. 2017

Second Sunday of the Fast: Gregory Palamas, Gregory Dialogus, Theophanes, Symeon  
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.

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## March 12: St. Symeon the New Theologian

Born in Galatia, Paphlagonia, the son of notable parents, with a brilliant education, he, burning with love for asceticism, entered the Studite Monastery while yet a youth, where there were the strictest ascetics. Having been transferred to the Monastery of St. Mamas, he was elected hegumen and ordained a presbyter. For his holy life the Lord granted him the gift of insight and wonders. He died peacefully in 1022. Within 30 years his relics were found incorruptible and became known for many miracles. St. Simeon left many treatises on the spiritual life where he talks about those mysteries of inner asceticism never before heard, and for this he was called the new theologian.

### On Faults Often Considered Trifling

*St. Symeon the New Theologian*

*In honor of St. Symeon, a great mystic and theologian who reposed in 1025, we offer this excerpt from his writings.*

There will be those who, like myself, have been insubordinate and disobedient toward God's commandments who vainly calculate and say, "But I have not committed fornication! Swearing is nothing. I have not committed adultery! But what sin is it to have stolen a penny or a piece of bread?" And again, "I should attain bliss, if I do not commit the foul and sacrilegious vice of homosexuality. But what sin is there in being insulting or jealous, in being flippant or frivolous?" Then again there are those who in their folly think highly of themselves for being pure from the practice of sins of the flesh, and think that they are like angels of God, but take no account of the virtues and passions of the soul. They have nothing but contempt for all the rest of the Lord's commandments and do not force themselves to fulfill them. They refuse to do anything that is strenuous or to undergo any suffering for a commandment of God, and live carelessly.

What benefit, brethren, is there from abstaining from fornication and other impure acts of the body and yet seek after glory and strive for money? The one corrupts the body, and the other corrupts the soul. Moreover, glory from men and love for it makes us to be unbelievers, according to the word of the Lord when He says, "How can you believe, who receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?" What good is it to be innocent of homosexual acts, but to waste away with envy, hatred, and jealousy toward your neighbor? Hatred toward one's brother makes him who feels it into a murderer, for the apostle says, "anyone who hates his brother is a murderer." According to the sacred canons, a sodomite and a murderer are subject to the same penalty, and if they fail to repent they will be subject to eternal condemnation.

## Commentary on the All-Night Vigil 10 Litia & St. Symeon's Prayer

At Vigils, the Evening Litany is followed by the "Litia," also written "Lity." The word comes from the Greek and means "prayer" or "entreaty". Though strictly the Litia is appointed for every Vigil, in parish practice it is often reserved for Great Feasts or high-ranking saints and not done at the weekly resurrectional Vigil. (If the Litia is not celebrated as part of the Vigil, the clergy remain in the altar, and the service continues with the stichera of the Aposticha.)

The Litia begins with the choir singing special stichera (verses) in honor of the temple (St. Maximus for us) and then for the feast or saint. As they sing, the clergy and servers process out the North Door to the narthex of the temple (the Royal Doors remain shut). There is a special reason for the location of this part of the service. The nave of the temple represents the Church in the world, but the narthex represents those not yet united to the Church. A pre-revolutionary Russian liturgist writes, "In the Litia, the Church steps out of its blessed milieu and, with the goal of mission to the world, into the external world or into the narthex, the part of the church which abuts this world, the part which is open to all, including those not yet part of the Church or excluded from Her. From this stems the universal character of Litia prayers, embracing all people." In some times and places, the Litia is even celebrated outside the temple. Properly, all the faithful would process with the clergy to the narthex or outside, but due to the lack of space in most modern narthexes, this is rarely done—only the clergy leave the nave.

When the choir finishes the stichera for the Litia, the Deacon intones a special litany of five longer-than-usual petitions, beginning with the long prayer, "O God, Save Thy People." In this first petition, we ask that God would look upon His world with mercy and compassion, exalt the horn (a Scriptural symbol of power and strength) of Orthodox Christians, and send down upon them His rich mercies through the petitions of the Theotokos and a long list of saints. This reminds us that the Church consists of those of all times and places, not just those who happen to be alive now. Moreover, we call upon those who have successfully completed their earthly course to pray for us, the great cloud of witnesses of which Paul writes in the epistle to the Hebrews.

In the remaining four petitions, we pray for hierarchs, the whole Church and the local Church, the departed, and civil authorities. We pray to be preserved from "wrath, famine pestilence, earthquake, flood, fire, the sword, foreign invasion, and from civil war, and from sudden death..." and we pray that God will hear us sinners and have mercy on us.

“Lord, have mercy” is sung many times after each of these petitions (originally 40, 50, and 30 times for the first three petitions, now customarily reduced to 12 times). After the priest’s exclamation, he then offers a prayer to Christ through the intercessions of the Theotokos and a long list of saints (sometimes omitted): “...make our prayer acceptable, grant us forgiveness of our trespasses, shelter us under the shelter of thy wings, drive away from us every enemy and adversary, give peace to our life, O Lord. Have mercy on us and on Thy world and save our souls, for Thou art good and lovest man.”

After this prayer, the people and clergy process back into the nave while the choir sings the stichera of the Aposticha commemorating the feast or saint, alternating with psalm verses chanted by the reader. The clergy stand before a table on which five loaves (evoking the five loaves Christ used to feed the 5000), wheat, wine, and oil are placed. They remain there until after the “Our Father” has been read and the dismissal troparia have been sung, and then the priest blesses the loaves, wheat, wine, and oil. The ancient custom was then to distribute the wine and bread to strengthen the faithful to keep the long all-night Vigil yet ahead. Now, the bread dipped in the wine is distributed during Matins when the faithful come to venerate the Gospel or Festal icon and be anointed with the blessed oil.

Following the Litia and Aposticha is St. Symeon’s Prayer, “Now dost Thou dismiss Thy servant, O Master, according to Thy word, in peace...” which expresses the last theme of Vespers: that of the end. At daily Vespers, the prayer is read by the reader, but at Great Vespers it is sung. The words of this prayer come from the lips of St. Symeon the God-Bearer (Luke 2:22-35). St. Symeon had spent his entire life in constant expectation of the coming of the Messiah, for he had been told in a vision that he would not die before he had seen the Promised One of Israel. When Mary and Joseph brought the Child Jesus to be presented to God in the Temple, he was there and received the Christ-child into his arms, and spoke the words we now sing at Vespers:

Now dost Thou dismiss Thy servant, O Master, according to Thy word in peace. For mine eyes have seen Thy salvation, which Thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to enlighten the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel.

St. Symeon had been waiting all his life, and then, at last, the Christ-child was given to him: he held the Life of the world in his arms. He stood for the whole world in its expectation and longing, and the words he used to express his thanksgiving have become our own. He could recognize the Lord because he had expected Him; he took Him into his arms because it is natural to take someone you love into your arms; and then his life of waiting was fulfilled. He had beheld the One for whom he had longed. He had completed his purpose in life and was ready to die.

But death to St. Symeon was no catastrophe. It was only a natural expression of the fulfillment of his

waiting. He was not closing his eyes to the Light he had at last seen; his death was only the beginning of the more inward vision of the Light. In the same way, Vespers is the recognition that the evening of this world has come, which announces that day that has no evening. In this world, every day faces night; the world itself is facing night. It cannot last forever. Yet the Church is affirming that an evening is not only an end, but also a beginning, just as any evening is also the beginning of another day. In Christ and through Christ, it may become the beginning of a new life, of the day that has no evening. For our eyes have seen salvation and light which will never fail. And because of this, the time of this world is now pregnant with new life. We come into the presence of Christ to offer Him our time, we extend our arms to receive Him, and He fills this time with Himself. He heals it and makes it—again and again—the time of salvation.

Following St. Symeon’s Prayer, the reader chants the Trisagion Prayers through the “Our Father.” At the exclamation, the lights are turned up and the Royal Doors are opened. The hymn “O Theotokos, Virgin, Rejoice...” is sung three times. (At Great Vespers served alone, this hymn is not taken, but rather the appropriate dismissal troparia and theotokion.) If a Litia was served, the Deacon now censes the loaves, wheat, wine, and oil and the Priest reads the prayer of blessing. He then gives the dismissal and returns to the altar. The Royal Doors are closed, the Church is darkened, and the bell rings to announce the beginning of Matins. *Fr. Justin Frederick*

### From St. Gregory Palamas

There are times when illness is better for sinners than good health, because it helps them towards salvation and blunts their inborn evil impulses. Inasmuch as it repays the debt of sin by means of suffering, it makes them able to receive healing of their souls in the first instance, then healing of their bodies. This happens most of all when the sick person, understanding that the affliction is a remedy from God, bears it courageously, falls down before God with faith, and asks for forgiveness, through whatever works he can manage.

*Homily 10 on Mark 2:1-12*

### Upcoming Events 2017

25 March Annunciation  
9 April Palm Sunday  
10 April—15 April March Holy Week  
16 April: Pascha

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!