

# The Confessor's Tongue for March 26, A. D. 2017

Fourth Sunday of the Fast: Leavetaking of Annunciation; Archangel Gabriel

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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## **An Orthodox Confession Which Leads the Inward Man to Humility** *From "The Way of a Pilgrim"*

Turning my eyes carefully upon myself and watching the course of my inward state, I have verified by experience that I do not love God, that I have no religious belief, and that I am filled with pride and sensuality. All this I actually find in myself as a result of detailed examination of my feelings and conduct, thus:

1. I do not love God. For if I loved God I should be continually thinking about Him with heartfelt joy. Every thought of God would give me gladness and delight. On the contrary, I much more often and much more eagerly think about earthly things, and thinking about God is labor and dryness. If I loved God, then talking with Him in prayer would be my nourishment and delight and would draw me to unbroken communion with Him. But, on the contrary, I not only find no delight in prayer, but even find it an effort. I struggle with reluctance, I am enfeebled by sloth, and am ready to occupy myself eagerly with any unimportant trifle, if only it shortens prayer and keeps me from it. My time slips away unnoticed in futile occupations, but when I am occupied with God, when I put myself into His presence every hour seems like a year. If one person loves another, he thinks of him throughout the day without ceasing, he pictures him to himself, he cares for him, and in all circumstances his beloved friend is never out of his thoughts. But I, throughout the day, scarcely set aside even a single hour in which to sink deep down into meditation upon God, to inflame my heart with love of Him, while I eagerly give up twenty-three hours as fervent offerings to the idols of my passions. I am forward in talk about frivolous matters and things which degrade the spirit; that gives me pleasure. But in the consideration of God I am dry, bored and lazy. Even if I am unwillingly drawn by others into spiritual conversation, I try to shift the subject quickly to one which pleases my desires. I am tirelessly curious about novelties, about civic affairs and political events; I eagerly seek the satisfaction of my love of knowledge in science and art, and in ways of getting things I want to possess. But the study of the Law of God, the knowledge of God and of religion, make little impression on me, and satisfy no hunger of my soul. I regard these things not only as a non-essential occupation for a Christian, but in a casual way as a sort of side-issue with which I should perhaps occupy my spare time, at odd moments. To put it shortly, if love for God is recognized by the keeping of His commandments (If ye love Me, keep My commandments, says our Lord Jesus Christ), and I not only do not keep them, but even make little attempt to do so, then in absolute truth the

conclusion follows that I do not love God. That is what Basil the Great says: 'The proof that a man does not love God and His Christ lies in the fact that he does not keep His commandments'.

2. I do not love my neighbor either. For not only am I unable to make up my mind to lay down my life for his sake (according to the Gospel), but I do not even sacrifice my happiness, well-being and peace for the good of my neighbor. If I did love him as myself, as the Gospel bids, his misfortunes would distress me also, his happiness would bring delight to me too. But, on the contrary, I listen to curious, unhappy stories about my neighbor and I am not distressed; I remain quite undisturbed or what is still worse, I find a sort of pleasure in them. Bad conduct on the part of my brother I do not cover up with love, but proclaim abroad with ensure. His well-being, honor and happiness do not delight me as my own, and, as if they were something quite alien to me, give me no feeling of gladness. What is more, they subtly arouse in me feelings of envy or contempt.

3. I have no religious belief. Neither in immortality nor in the Gospel. If I were firmly persuaded and believed without doubt that beyond the grave lies eternal life and recompense for the deeds of this life, I should be continually thinking of this. The very idea of immortality would terrify me and I should lead this life as a foreigner who gets ready to enter his native land. On the contrary, I do not even think about eternity, and I regard the end of this earthly life as the limit of my existence. The secret thought nestles within me: Who knows what happens at death? If I say I believe in immortality, then I am speaking about my mind only, and my heart is far removed from a firm conviction about it. That is openly witnessed to by my conduct and my constant care to satisfy the life of the senses. Were the Holy Gospel taken into my heart in faith, as the Word of God, I should be continually occupied with it, I should study it, find delight in it and with deep devotion fix my attention upon it. Wisdom, mercy, love, are hidden in it; it would lead me to happiness, I should find gladness in the study of the Law of God day and night. In it I should find nourishment like my daily bread and my heart would be drawn to the keeping of its laws. Nothing on earth would be strong enough to turn me away from it. On the contrary, if now and again I read or hear the Word of God, yet even so it is only from necessity or from a general love of knowledge, and approaching it without any very close attention, I find it dull and uninteresting. I usually come to the end of the reading without any profit, only too ready to change over to secular reading in which I take more pleasure and find new and interesting subjects.

4. I am full of pride and sensual self-love. All my actions confirm this. Seeing something good in

myself, I want to bring it into view, or to pride myself upon it before other people or inwardly to admire myself for it. Although I display an outward humility, yet I ascribe it all to my own strength and regard myself as superior to others, or at least no worse than they. If I notice a fault in myself, I try to excuse it, I cover it up by saying, 'I am made like that' or 'I am not to blame'. I get angry with those who do not treat me with respect and consider them unable to appreciate the value of people. I brag about my gifts: my failures in any undertaking I regard as a personal insult. I murmur, and I find pleasure in the unhappiness of my enemies. If I strive after anything good it is for the purpose of winning praise, or spiritual self-indulgence, or earthly consolation. In a word, I continually make an idol of myself and render it uninterrupted service, seeking in all things the pleasures of the senses, and nourishment for my sensual passions and lusts.

Going over all this I see myself as proud, adulterous, unbelieving, without love to God and hating my neighbor. What state could be more sinful? The condition of the spirits of darkness is better than mine. They, although they do not love God, hate men, and live upon pride, yet at least believe and tremble. But I? Can there be a doom more terrible than that which faces me, and what sentence of punishment will be more severe than that upon the careless and foolish life that I recognize in myself?

### **Commentary on the All-Night Vigil 12 Matins: Great Litany and Kathisma Hymns**

At the conclusion of the Six Psalms, the Deacon exits the sanctuary to intone the Great Litany (*discussed previously at Vespers above*) before the Royal Doors, and the Priest re-enters the sanctuary. After the Litany, the Deacon makes the solemn proclamation, "God is the Lord and hath revealed Himself unto us. Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord." At a Resurrectional Vigil, 'God is the Lord' is then sung by the choir in the troparion tone of the week.

The first part of this proclamation is taken from Psalm 117, and the second part from the Gospel (Mt 21:9; Lk 13:35). All the verses are from the psalm. By the deliberate joining of the psalm with the Gospel, the prophecy and its fulfillment is made clear. "Lord" refers here to Christ; He is God and has come to us in the name of the Father for our salvation. The Lord, the God of Israel, has revealed Himself and dwelt among us in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ.

These words are solemn, but most joyous. In the words of the anaphora of the Divine Liturgy, God is "inexpressible, inconceivable, invisible, incomprehensible, ever in being, eternally the same." But in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is Himself God, the fullness of divinity dwelt and is revealed to us. Thus Christ can say to Philip, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father."

This proclamation is made at Matins, at the dawning of the new day, for the manifestation of God

in the flesh brings the light of a new day to a dark world.

The proper troparia follow "God is the Lord." At a Resurrectional Vigil, normally the troparion of the Resurrection in the tone of the week will be sung twice, followed by Glory..., a troparion from the *Menaion* for a saint or saints, Now and ever..., and the resurrectional theotokion in the tone of the week.

The kathisma readings from the Psalter follow. Two kathismata are appointed for the Resurrectional Matins, the second (Psalms 9-16) and the third (Psalms 17-23). Local parish practice usually abbreviates them or leaves them out altogether. (*Our local practice is to read one stasis of the six on rotation*). Each kathisma is followed by a Little Litany and two kathisma hymns, which treat the theme of the Resurrection, separated by a Psalm verse, and followed by Glory...now and ever...and a Theotokion (a hymn about the Theotokos). These kathisma (or sessional) hymns contemplate the empty tomb from the perspectives of the soldiers, the myrrhbearing women, Mary Magdalene, and the Angels, and well as the scene in Hades below when the God-man descends to that place of death. The empty tomb on the earth's surface contemplated by the Myrrhbearers and the Apostles not only proclaims Christ's personal resurrection, but is an image of Hell (Hades) once it has been visited by Christ: it has been emptied of every righteous soul and has no inherent right or power to hold any soul henceforward. Every grave on earth will one day resemble Christ's tomb: it will be empty, as every human who ever lived is reconstituted as a human being through the reunion of his soul and body that he might stand before the dread judgment seat of Christ to give an account of how he lived in the body on earth. *Fr. Justin Frederick*

### **The Passion of Lust St. Theophan the Recluse**

It is necessary to distinguish manifestations of unlawfulness in the passion of sexual lust. Fleshly movements are natural in the body, and there is no sin in them. Sin is in how a person responds to them with his freedom and conscience. Whoever delights in these movements, willing excites them, and is ready to satisfy them—he indulges lust. Whoever by his frequent gratification of this lust forms in himself an inclination to its gratifications is ill with lustful passion, which weighs heavily on him, oppresses him, and torments him tyrannically. In this condition, lust takes possession of the whole person, who begins to conduct his life only among such arrangements as allow him to feed and delight his lust. For the sake of the sweetness obtained by satisfying this pleasure, it is called voluptuousness. In accordance with its destructive actions on the soul and body this passion was called by the apostles "evil lust" (Col. 3:5) and in accordance with the degradation by it of a rational being—"passion of dishonor" (Romans 1:26).

*Translation by Fr. Justin Frederick*

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!