

The Confessor's Tongue for June 25, A. D. 2017

Third Sunday after Pentecost: New Martyrs of the Turkish Yoke

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.

Sunday of the New Martyrs of the Turkish Yoke

Fr. Alexey Young

The following article is condensed from a lecture delivered at the St. Herman Summer Pilgrimage, August, 1982)

On May 29, 1453, the troops of the Moslem leader, Mohammed II, took the great city of Constantinople. For more than 1000 years Orthodox Christians had assumed that the Byzantine Christian Empire would stand until the Second Coming of Christ. They had always called their city the "God-protected City," and indeed, until now it had been protected by Heaven. But when their Emperor, Constantine XI, fell in battle, the holy city of Byzantium became the capital of a new empire, the Ottoman Empire, ruled by a pagan people, enemies of Christ and Christianity, the Moslems. It was a dark, dark time for Orthodox Christians in that part of the world.

In their violent hatred of Christianity, the Moslem Turks embarked on a course of persecution designed to effectively muzzle the flock of Christ. Their strategy was no less cruel than that of atheist communists in the Soviet Union [of the twentieth century]; the parallels are striking. Most of the churches of Constantinople (whose name was changed to Istanbul, just as years later Petersburg was changed to Leningrad) were converted to mosques. Their movable icons were destroyed and whole walls of inspiring and radiantly beautiful mosaics were covered with paint or plaster. Crosses were torn off domes and broken off the roofs of churches. The Moslems guaranteed Christians a definite place in Turkish society; but it was a place of guaranteed inferiority. Orthodox Christians were required to pay an annual head tax, like cattle. To the Turks they were unbelievers, and they had absolutely no rights of citizenship. They even had to wear distinctive dress. They could not marry Moslems, nor could they engage in missionary work of any kind; in fact, it was a crime, usually punishable by death, to convert a Moslem to the Christian Faith.

As if these measures were not enough, the Moslems actively undertook to control the Church itself. The Sultan ironically considered himself the "protector" of Orthodoxy, supposedly guaranteeing the existence of the Church, but actually keeping it in the vise of a terrible stranglehold. Under this system each Patriarch had to pay a stiff fee to the Sultan before he could be enthroned. Unable to raise the funds himself, the Patriarch was forced to exact a fee from each new bishop before installing him in his diocese, and this burden was eventually placed on the flocks. Taking advantage of this financially lucrative situation, the Turks forced re-elections of the Patriarch with undue rapidity. The majority of the Sultans themselves were sick, demon-ridden men, *A publication of St. Maximus Orthodox Church, 2026 West Oak, Denton, TX, 76201 (940) 293-3032*

whose irrational rule and unbridled power only heightened the already demoralizing effect of Turkish rule on the Church. It is not without reason that an Englishman living in Istanbul in the 17th century wrote these words: "Every good Christian ought with sadness to consider and with compassion to behold this once glorious Church tearing and rending out her bowels and giving them as food to vultures and ravens.

The aim of Orthodoxy in the Ottoman Empire became, simply, one of survival. Little could they know, in 1453, that the heavy sword of Islam would weigh upon them not for a generation or two, but for *five hundred years*, five long centuries of darkness and difficulty. But even under such ruinous circumstances, God did not allow the light of Christianity to be extinguished. It was kept alive through the courageous confession of the New Martyrs of the Turkish Yoke.

When speaking of New Martyrs today, one generally thinks of the recently glorified New Martyrs of Russia. But until just last year [1982] the "New Martyrs" listed in the Orthodox calendar of saints referred to those men and women who suffered for the faith under the Turkish Yoke. Their lives are not very well known, and yet they are a rich catalogue of the diversity and generosity of the Holy Spirit acting in the lives of Orthodox believers in time of oppression and persecution. The following examples illustrate the image often used in their Lives which describes them "laboring like diligent bees, gathering the honey of virtue" as they moved through life towards martyrdom.

Guard the deposit; keep safe what has been entrusted to you. (1 Tim. 6:20)

St. Cyprian the New, for instance, was a pious monk from Mount Athos. After fortifying himself with Holy Communion, he went forth and found a Pasha (the ruler of a province). Straight way he witnessed to him that Mohammed was a false prophet and the enemy of God. The Pasha only laughed, thinking he was crazy; he ordered his guards to beat him and cast him out, which they did. St. Cyprian then went to Constantinople, to the Grand Vizier whose position was like that of a prime minister. There he attempted to witness to the Grand Vizier by sending him a written message about the Gospel of salvation. The Vizier thought the saint must be drunk, or mad. But when at last he realized that the saint was quite sober and quite sane, he ordered that he be beheaded and, as his Life says, as he was being led to the place of execution, "his face shone with joy; it was as though he hurried not to execution, but to a wedding banquet."

St. Timothy of Esphigmenou is an example of a Christian who betrayed Christ and then returned to suffer martyrdom for his Lord. He was married, but his beautiful wife was abducted by a Moslem who

added her to his harem after forcibly converting her to Islam. In order to get his wife back through the process of Islamic law, St. Timothy himself converted to Islam. His wife was indeed returned and they both secretly repented of having converted to Islam and returned to Christianity. Finally his wife withdrew to a convent and he to Mount Athos, where he became a monk and prepared for the day when he could descend back into the Turkish world, there to witness for Christ and accept martyrdom, which in fact he eventually did.

Sometimes the *family* of a martyr begged him to embrace Islam rather than die. In the life of St. Zlata, a pious virgin-martyr of the 13th century, for example, the parents and sisters of the saint implored her to convert to Islam, saying, "O sweetest daughter, have pity on yourself and on us your parents and your sisters.... Deny Christ just for the sake of appearances." But she turned and said to them: "You who incite me to deny Christ, the true God, are no longer my parents and sisters.... But in your place I have my Lord Jesus Christ as a father, my Lady the Theotokos as a mother, and the saints as my brothers and sisters." She suffered a particularly horrible form of torture and martyrdom, including thrusting a red-hot skewer through one ear and out the other, so that smoke came forth from her nose and mouth. The writer of her life tells us that her sufferings were so terrible "that even the most stout-hearted of men would be humbled." This martyr, he says, "now dances and rejoices together with the prudent and prize-winning virgins in the heavenly bridal chambers, and stands at the right hand of her Bridegroom, Christ."

Another striking example of faithfulness to Christ and His Church is found in the Life of Martyred Monk James and his disciples. This Saint led a very pure life and was often vouchsafed to see angels during the Divine Liturgy. One day, while a guest in the home of a wealthy Turk, St. James declined the meat given at a banquet because it was the Apostles' Fast. This identified him immediately as a Christian. For such a holy one as this, the Moslems devised a particularly painful method of torture and death, which included wrapping bands of cloth around his head and twisting them gradually, crushing the skull

There were many rewards given to those Christians who would convert to the Moslem religion. Sometimes these enticements worked and Orthodox believers gave up the struggle for the true Faith. St. John the Bulgarian was a young boy when he fell into the company of some Moslem youths and was led by peer pressure to renounce Christ and follow Mohammed. It was not long before he came to his senses and, overwhelmed with grief at having renounced Christ, he fled to Mt. Athos and gave himself up to a life of repentance. His conscience, however, would give him no rest until finally he set out for Constantinople in order to preach the Gospel. Dressing as a Turk—something forbidden to Christians—so as not to be detected, he entered a

great mosque. There, in front of everyone, he made the sign of the cross and began to pray, witnessing to all that he had been a Christian and had fallen away, but that he had now been delivered from the error of Mohammed. Concluding with the ringing declaration, "Without Jesus Christ there is no salvation!" St. John was dragged out into the courtyard of the mosque and beheaded.

While many other Christians lived in daily fear and trembling, these noble warriors of Christ marched forth directly into the enemy's camp in order to boldly plant the cross of Christ like a battle banner. Penetrated by the very essence of Christianity, Christ Himself; they were able not only to endure the most frightful tortures, but also to be victorious. The victory of martyrs, however, is understood only from an otherworldly perspective, for they had deep in their hearts the words of Scripture:

What will it profit a man if he win the whole world and lose his soul? What can a man give in exchange for his soul?

To paraphrase the closing paragraph from the life of yet another confessor of the Turkish Yoke:

Where are those Moslems who once saddened and despised the New Martyrs? Where are the mighty of the earth? Where is the Ottoman lord? Where the fearsome guards and Tartars who bound them and beat them and martyred them? Where are their pampered bodies? Oh! They are dispelled as a morning mist. The tombstone of forgetfulness has covered them. And in Jerusalem on high, in the dwelling where are found the blessed souls of the saints who lived in privation in this world so that they might pass through the narrow and afflicted way that leadeth unto life, there rejoices also with them the spirits of these much-suffering martyrs whom we remember today. They reposed in the Lord and received the reward of the labors and toils and pains which they endured for Christ, Whom they loved more than all the fleeting things of this world. And now, wearing crowns in heaven, they rejoice with the choirs of the saints and behold in glory the Prize-bestower, our Lord Jesus Christ Him self. To Him be glory and dominion and worship unto the unending ages. Amen

From St. Symeon the New Theologian *Selections for Discourse 3*

On the Joy of Worship

Rejoice and leap for joy that you have been found worthy to join the holy angels in singing praise to God! For if one is annoyed with the usual Office and complains of the length of the hymns that are sung and is wearied thereby, he really does not know how the oracles of God are sweet in the throat of those who love Him, and "sweeter even than the hone and the honeycomb" in the mouth of those who know Him. He is nothing but flesh, his mind is carnal and his perception more carnal still. He is unable spiritually to taste what God, as our Benefactor, has

given us. Rather, the things of God all seem bitter to him, and he does not understand the saying, "taste and see how good the Lord is". He who does not clearly understand this is alien to the love and sweetness of Christ. He who has not tasted the things of God and is a stranger to them—woe is me, how unfortunate am I, for I must make my own what is alien to me!—is an enemy of God and an alien to the kingdom of heaven. Tell me, what other hope will he have, to what other love will he cling, what other comfort will he find, either here or after death? But he who contradicts and complains and curses those who rouse him for the divine praise and the glorifying of God, what defense will he find on the day of judgment, when both for himself and for others he has become an offense to cause perdition?

On Our Warfare

Since the devils see us dominated by the will of the flesh, they see that we carry our death with us. For what other reason do they wage war against us? The whole warfare of the demons against us is waged with the one purpose of alienating those who obey them from the glory of God and the grace of the Holy Spirit. But, as I see it, we have already deprived ourselves of such a gift before they have attacked us, because we have forsaken the commandments of God and have not been eager to seek Him with all our soul. Had we sought Him, we should not have lived to idly and carelessly! Had we been concerned for the things of heaven, we should not have shown such great eagerness of the things of earth. Had our thoughts been on things incorruptible, we should not have gaped greedily after the things that are transitory and corruptible. Had we striven for things eternal, we should not thus have pursued things temporal. Had we loved God, we should not thus have turned away from those who guide us to Him. Had we sought to acquire virtues, we would not have abhorred the teachers of virtues. Had we gladly embraced fasting, we should not have complained of the lack of food and drink. Had we fought to gain control over our passions, we should not have given ourselves unrestrainedly to pleasures. Had we a right and firm faith, we should not have performed the works of the faithless. Had we the fear of God in our hearts, we should not have opposed those who are His true servants in every virtue pleasing to God. Had we acquired humility, we should not have been arrogant toward God's servants. Had we been found worthy to attain true love, we should have known God. We should have been eager not only for discipline, but even to suffer dishonor and blows, injustice, curses, every trial and every affliction, for Christ's sake.

On Discerning Thoughts With Scripture

We must, therefore, carefully discern the thoughts that come to us and set against them the testimonies from the divinely inspired Scriptures and from the teaching of the spiritual, the holy Fathers, so that if we find them to agree with these witnesses

and correspond to them, we may with all our might hold fast these thoughts and boldly act on them. But if they are not in harmony with 'the word of truth', we must expel them from us with much anger, as it is written "Be ye angry, and sin not". As from something defiling and from the sting of death, so must we flee from the interior assault of passionate thoughts. Accordingly, we need great soberness, great zeal, much searching of the divine Scriptures. The Savior has shown us their usefulness by saying, "Search the Scriptures". Search them, and hold fast to what they say with great exactitude and faith, in order that you may know God's will clearly from the divine Scriptures and be able infallibly to distinguish good from evil and not obey every spirit nor be carried away with harmful thoughts. Be assured, my brethren, that nothing is so conducive for saving us as the following of the divine precepts of the Savior. Nevertheless, we shall need many tears, much fear, much patience, and persistent prayer, if the full meaning of even one single saying of the Master is to be revealed to us, in order that we may know the great mystery hidden in small words, and lay down over lies unto death even for a single dot of God's commandments. For the word of God is "like a two-edged sword" which cuts off and separates the soul from every bodily lust and feeling. Even more, it becomes like a burning fire to despise all life's painful experiences and to count as joy every trial that assails and to desire and embrace death, which is so frightening to other men, as life and the cause of life.

Prayer of the Incense

Every time a censuring is made, the priest makes the sign of the cross over the censer and prays:

"Incense do we offer unto Thee, O Christ our God, for an odor of spiritual sweetness, which do Thou accept upon Thy most heavenly altar, sending down upon us in return the grace of Thy Holy Spirit."

Incense is an offering made to God. It costs us something to make it, to acquire it, and to burn it. As the Prophet David says, "I will not offer unto the Lord that which costs me nothing." The cost of our offering is a token of all God has given us, including our very selves, which we offer to Him in love and gratitude.

Incense concretely depicts the rising of our prayers to God and the sweetness He perceives in true prayer offered by man made in His image.

Incense also evokes awareness the sweet presence of God's Spirit, who is "everywhere present and fills all things."

Not every offering is acceptable to God. This is evident in the case of Cain. Thus we ask (rather than presume) God to accept our offering on His heavenly altar.

Man offers incense, something material, the basic ingredients of which God has made and given to man in the first place, to God who is Spirit. In return for this small offering, we ask not something material but

something immaterial and of immense value: the grace of the Holy Spirit, God's uncreated energies which penetrate, sanctify, and empower us.

In church, every time we offer incense, we should remember the great boon we ask of God: His very presence and power to come upon us. To have this awareness with each censuring will help us humbly to open our hearts to God who gives us so much in exchange for so little. *Fr. Justin Frederick*

Liturgical Prayer for the Non-Orthodox

The pious that know well our divine services, understand that when the Church gathers, She prays first for those of the household of Faith, and then for "all mankind." In the prayers of the Liturgy of St.

Basil the Great, we pray most comprehensively:

"... raise the infants, guide the young, support the aged, encourage the fainthearted, reunite the separated; lead back those who are in error and join them to Thy holy, catholic, and apostolic Church; free those held captive by unclean spirits; sail with those who sail, travel with those who travel by land and by air; defend the widows; protect the orphans, free the captives, heal the sick. . . . And remember Thyself, O God, all those whom we have not remembered through ignorance, forgetfulness, or the multitude of names; since Thou knowest the name of each even from his mother's womb."

At the liturgical services of our Orthodox Church and more particularly during the Divine Liturgy, we do pray for non-Orthodox people—be they Christians or non-Christians. We pray for all mankind.

We do not, however, pray *by name* at the Divine Liturgy or other liturgical services for any non-Orthodox. In private prayers in our homes we may, do, and should pray by name for non-Orthodox people, but not in the assembly of the Church by name. Why?

St. Philaret of Moscow (+1867) provides us with an understanding. He writes:

"It is one thing to pray that non-Orthodox churches be united to the Orthodox Church in a broad structure of prayers which embrace the whole world, and it is another to commemorate non-Orthodox in the diptych (the Commemoration Books of the Living and Departed) during the Mystery of the Eucharist. The heterodox, by their very heterodoxy, have separated themselves from the communion of the Mysteries of the Orthodox Church. In consequence of this, they are not commemorated during the Mystery of the Eucharist and are excluded from the diptychs."

Again, while we pray in general for all mankind, we do not at the public services pray particularly by name for the non-Orthodox. If the Church allowed for this kind for prayer, harm would be done. How and in what way?

The Elder St. Joseph of Optina (+1911) says the following:

"Are many Orthodox Christians firm in the Faith they confess? Do not the greater portion of them have something of a weak faith, like a spark which might be extinguished at any give moment? And if such people

were to hear in Orthodox Churches the commemoration for the health or repose of Roman Catholics or Protestants, would they not quickly come to the conclusion that it must be that it is all the same no matter what you believe? And by this there would be even more frequent apostasy from the Orthodox Church, if not formally, then at least in spirit. And this would be the greatest woe. The person thus led astray would not even notice that he is Orthodox in name only, while, in fact, he does not believe correctly, or even does not believe at all."

The elder adds: "Likewise, the Christians of other confessions, seeing that the Orthodox Church prays for them, must of necessity come to the same conclusion concerning the equality of all faiths. This may even dissuade from union with the Orthodox Church the heterodox who would desire this. They will say, 'After all, the Orthodox pray for us, even without this.'"

So we are taught to pray for the non-Orthodox in a manner that is not self-willed, that is, praying as we wish and in whatever manner we so desire. Our Mother the Church teaches us, that even prayer should be done "properly and according to order." While we do pray for all mankind at the Divine Services, we may also pray for the non-Orthodox particularly, if so inspired, personally and privately lifting their names to the Lord during the services. *Fr. Justin Frederick*

From Elder Porphyrios of Greece (+1991)

About Vigils

You should love vigils. Vigils are very important {He has in mind literal all-night vigils, but even our two-hour vigils are of benefit.}. Do you understand this? They are a very important thing. Heaven opens up. We speak with God.

During our vigils up there [on Mt. Athos], up until about midnight I would get a little drowsy. My eyes would get very heavy. Afterwards, my mind would open up, and I lived in prayer until the morning. When it finished, I was so motivated, that, if there was a way for it to begin again from the beginning, I would have welcomed it. In the skete, we read the canon clearly and with meaning. When the vigils took place in the Kyriakon [main church of a skete—he was at Kapsokalyvia], we chanted it.

Elder, I Get Angry

One day, I told the Elder, "Elder, I get angry. Lately, I get angry very easily."

"Anger is a good thing," he said. I thought he was joking, and I interrupted him.

"A good thing?"

"Certainly. God put anger inside us. It is the nerve center of the soul. It is strength. He gives anger to us so that we can fend off our passions and the devil. This is the correct use of anger. We take this strength from the devil and give it to Christ. You give yourself to Christ with strength, with nervous energy."

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!