

The Confessor's Tongue for March 8, 2009

Sunday of Orthodoxy; St. Theophylactos of Constantinople

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.

March 8: St. Theophylactos

At first he was a monk. Knowing his virtuous life, St. Tarasius (see February 25) installed him as the bishop of Nicomedia. As a bishop Theophylactos built temples, hospices and hospitals, helped all the poor and unfortunate, ministered to the sick and leprous and personally washed their wounds. During the time of troubles of iconoclasm, during the reign of Leo the Armenian, St. Theophylactos "was an unshaken pillar of the church, undaunted by the temptations of heretical snares", and for standing up to the emperor he was exiled to a prison in the city of Strobilos in Asia Minor. Here he, undergoing "many sorrows and long-term imprisonment", languished for 30 years up to his death which followed about the year 845. About the year 847 his relics were transferred to Nicomedia.

March 9: The 40 Martyrs of Sebaste

All of them were warriors, distinguished by their strength and courage and suffered for their Christian faith in Sebaste (in Armenia) during the reign of the Emperor Licinius. After being persuaded with kindness and then with threats to reject Christ, they were confined to prison, and there they were subjected to terrible tortures. They stripped them and put them into a lake, covered with ice. Terrible biting cold benumbed the members of the Holy Martyrs; but the valiant long sufferers, being "huddled together in the cold, chanted a hymn to the Lord". To make the torture worse, the torturers built a warm bath on the shore of the lake to tempt the martyrs. One of the forty warriors was tempted and ran to the bath, but at its threshold he fell dead. At 3 o'clock in the morning a light appeared from heaven, which heated the water in the lake and also warmed the Holy Martyrs. At the same time thirty-nine crowns came down from Heaven onto the Holy Martyrs. One of the guards, Aglaius, struck by the courage of the sufferers, believed in Christ and went into the lake. The next day with hammers they broke the legs of the remaining unharmed martyrs. The Holy Martyrs endured all and died with prayers on their lips. Their bodies were burnt and the bones were thrown into the water. *S. V. Bulgakov, Handbook for Church Servers, 2 ed., 1274 pp. (Kharkov, 1900) p. 0493-4 Translated by Archpriest Eugene D. Tarris © January 7, 2004. All rights reserved.*

Concerning Bows

St. Ignatius Brianchaninov

Bows are divided into bows to the ground [prostrations] and bows from the waist. They are generally appointed for the evening rule [the can and should be done in the morning too] before going to bed. It is best to make bows before reading the evening prayers, that is, to begin the rule with bows. Bows tire and warm the body to some extent and reduce the heart to a state of contrition; in such a

state, the ascetic prayers with greater zeal, warmth, and attention. The prayers have a quite a different taste when they are read or said after bows.

Bows must be made extremely unhurriedly, for the bodily labor must be animated by mourning of heart and prayerful cries of grief on the part of the mind. When about to make prostrations, give your body a most reverent attitude, such as a slave and creature of God should have in the presence of his Lord and God. Then collect your thoughts from wandering everywhere, and with extreme unhurriedness, just aloud to yourself, enclosing the mind in the words, and from a contrite and humble heart, say the prayer: *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner.* Having said the prayer, unhurriedly make a prostration, with reverence and fear of God, without excitement, with the feeling of a person repenting and asking for the forgiveness of his sins, as if you were at the feet of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Do not picture to yourself in your imagination the form or figure of the Lord, but have a conviction of His presence; have a conviction that He is looking at you, at your mind and heart, and that His reward is in His hand. The former [mental images] is impermissible fancy, which leads to disastrous self-deception; but a conviction of the presence of the omnipresent God is a conviction of a most holy truth. Having made the prostration, bring the body to reverence and calm again, and again say unhurriedly the above prayer; then make a prostration again in the way described above.

Do not worry about the number of bows. Pay all your attention to the quality of your prayer performed with prostrations. Without speaking of the effort on the spirit, a small number of bows made in the way described above will have a much greater effect on the body itself that a large number made hurriedly, without attention, for quantity. Experience will soon prove this. When you get tired, pass from prostrations to bows from the waist. The extent of the bow from the waist is fixed by this, that when making it, the extended hand should touch the ground or floor.

Regarding it as one's imperative duty in making bows to ensure the soul's abundant working which consists in attentiveness, unhurriedness, reverence, and the intention to offer penitence to God, the ascetic will soon discover the quantity of bows his constitution can stand. By slightly reducing this number as a concession to his weakness, He can make a daily rule for himself; and when it has been approved and blessed by his spiritual father or his superior, or by a monk whom he trusts and whose advice he follows, he can perform the rule daily.

For the spiritual guidance of our beloved brethren, we shall not be silent about the following: bows performed for number, and not animated by the right working of the mind and heart, are more

harmful than profitable. Having performed them, the ascetic begins to rejoice. 'There,' he says to himself like the Pharisee mentioned in the Gospel, 'God has granted me again today to make 300 prostrations! Glory to God! Is that an easy matter? In these times, 300 prostrations! Who keeps such a rule nowadays?' And so on. We must remember that bows heat the blood, and by heating the blood excessively, they help to stimulate mental activity. Having reached such a state, the poor ascetic, just because he has not idea of the soul's true working, surrenders to vainglorious thoughts and fancies, based on his ascetic labor, through which he thinks he is making progress. The ascetic enjoys these thoughts and fancies, cannot have enough of them, adopts them, and so plants within himself the fatal passion of conceit. conceit soon begins to make its appearance in the secret condemnation of neighbors and in an open disposition to preach to them. Obviously, such a disposition is a sign of pride and self-deception; unless a monk considered himself above his neighbor, he would never dare to teach him. Such is the fruit of all bodily labor, unless it is animated by the intention to repent and unless it has repentance as its sole aim, if the labor is given a value in itself.

True monastic [and Christian in general] progress consists in this, that the monk sees himself to be the most sinful of all men. 'A brother said to Saint Sisoës the Great, "I see that my thought is constantly with God." The holy man replied, "It is no great thing when your thought is unceasingly with God; it is a great thing when a monk sees himself beneath every creature.'" Such was the manner of thought of the true servants of God, true monks. It was formed in them from the right working of the soul. Accompanied by the right working of the soul, even bodily labor has vast significance, being the expression of repentance and humility by acts of the body. See my humility and my labor, and forgive me all my sins, cries holy David prayerfully to God, combining in his pious effort bodily labor with deep penitence and profound humility. Chapter 21 from The Arena

The Prayer of St. Ephrem

*O Lord and Master of my life,
the spirit of idleness,
of despondency,
of love of power,
and of idle words, grant me not.*

What is it we request when we pray these words during the Fast?

In this first portion of the prayer, we ask to not be granted four things. Some translations as God to "take from me" these sinful things, but the same word "grant" or "give" is used here as it is in the second part when we request the virtuous spirit. It should not be understood that God gives us this vicious spirit. No, it is already within us; but we ask Him exercise his power to free us, to grant that we not be dominated by these sinful passions which are common to man.

We would be delivered, first, from "the spirit of idleness." The Greek word *argia* means "sloth, apathy, idleness, indolence, laziness, lassitude, torpor, inertia, a total and perhaps even demonic lack of capacity to act, to live, to be productive, or take personal responsibility for the direction of one's body or soul. *Argia* persuades us to turn our mind away from God, to avoid praying, to skip Church, not to tithe or give alms, and to do other things in place of reading the Bible or the Fathers." The word in Russian is *prazdnost*.

We would be delivered, second, from "despondency", a translation of the Greek *pereirgia*, which denotes an idle curiosity, being perturbed, being without peace of mind, impertinence, insolence, presumption, arrogance, audacity, a spirit of meddling, futile questioning, being a busybody, interfering in the affairs of others. *Pereirgia* becomes *unynia* in Slavonic, which means despondency, depression, or faintheartedness. Idle curiosity can be the cause of despair or despondency. *Pereirgia* persuades us to be always on the lookout for some new spiritual experience or knowledge as if what we have been given is insufficient; it motivates one to acquire more information about spiritual things without thereby becoming more humble or pious. One commentator makes this note about the cause of the difference between the Greek and Slavonic versions: "It must be granted that Greeks are hopelessly lazy and curious, while Russians are famously gloomy."

We would be delivered, third, from "love of power." The Greek word *philarchia* indicates a love of rule, the desire to be in charge, to control others, and have one's own way, the belief that no can do it better than I. How many of our troubles come from insisting on getting our own way! This passion can enslave us, making us and others miserable. The Russian word is *lyubonachaliya*, love of being first, or of occupying the first place.

We would be delivered, fourth, from "idle words". *Argologia* [*prazdnosloviya*] means empty words, idle talk, gossip, chatter, sitting around running the mouth for no reason other than to hear oneself speak and impress others. It is speech that has no ultimate purpose beyond *philarchia*, being in charge, in control, being the center of attention and being recognized. What competition ensues when several people dominated by *argologia* are together! Even spiritual conversations can become idle talk if we speak to display our knowledge or impress others. *When there are many words, sin is unavoidable*, as Solomon tells us in the Proverbs. I dare say this also includes the idle chatter to self we carry about in our heads!

May God deliver us from these!

Fr. Justin with primary credit to Rick Joines for research.

Upcoming Events 2009

12 March, Thursday: Abbot Gerasim here!
12-18 April, Holy Week; 19 April, Pascha

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!