

The Confessor's Tongue for February 28, 2010

Second Sunday of the Fast: St. Gregory Palamas

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 Gregory Palamas

The Holy Church calls the second Sunday of Great Lent 'the Sunday of the light creating fasts.' In its Divine services, in line with the destruction of the sinful condition of man, it is descriptively and touchingly represented in the church hymns, which explains the Gospel parable about the Prodigal son, and praises the fast as a means to the beneficial inner light, and posits in this glorification a new impulse for the ascetic effort of the fast.

The Orthodox teaching about fasting as a means for the beneficial inner light is opened with special power in the commemoration on this Sunday of St. Gregory Palamas, Archbishop of Thessalonica and Wonderworker (see Nov. 14). St. Gregory is known as the one who exposed the heresy of Barlaam, the Calabrian monk, who rejected the Orthodox teaching about the blessed light, which illuminates the internal person sometimes openly visible (as for example on Tabor and Sinai), and who did not admit the possibility to achieve this inner light through both prayer and fasting and other individual efforts.* At the Council in Constantinople called in 1341 concerning this heresy Barlaam, his disciple Akindynos, and their other accomplices were condemned for this false teaching.

Subsequently during his life St. Gregory zealously struggled for Orthodoxy, "not once", but "many times many" through his inspired speeches and writings denying the teachings and compositions of the evil followers of Akindynos and Barlaam. For this ascetic effort for the benefit of the Holy Church, and also for the confession and witness for the faith and Christ's flock, for the sanctity of the strict ascetic life and the deep edification for all ascetics through his works, St. Gregory is also glorified in the service on this day by the Holy Church.

Thus the Holy Church, celebrating on the previous Sunday the triumph of Orthodoxy over all heresies, on the present Sunday celebrates the victory of Orthodox ascetic teachings over all false doctrines opposing it. The first celebration is in general for all Orthodox Christians; the second is for the use of ascetics, the monks. Patriarch Philotheus of Constantinople composed the church service in honor of the originator of this latter celebration, for St. Gregory...

*Barlaam propagated in the East the teaching of Abelard that the truth is only true when it is proved exclusively from the beginning of reason, and closely connected to this rationalism the teaching of Thomas Aquinas that God is entirely essence and that the essence and action in Him do not differ. This and other teachings rested on the ruminations and amplifications of the rationalism of Arianism then in the West. The Barlaamites taught that the light of Tabor was something material, created, revealed in space and painted in air because it was seen by the

corporal eyes of people who were not yet consecrated by grace. Through such, i. _ [sic] through the created, they recognized all the divine actions and even the gifts of the Holy Spirit: the Spirit of wisdom and reason and so forth, not being afraid to reduce God to the category of the created, "subverting light and the blessed righteousness in the Kingdom of the Father of Heaven, the power and action of the Trihypostatic Divinity" (see the *Synaxarion*). And in general through their rationalistic Arian teaching the Barlaamites threatened to shake the very bases of Christian teachings on faith, asceticism and morals.

St. Palamas and his fellow Athonite ascetics taught and proved by their very life what could not be proved by philosophical reasoning, but the constant purification of the soul accomplished by silent feelings and thoughts, incessant exercise in meditating on God and intelligent prayer or through intelligent action the person can achieve the inner light from above. But the essence of the Deity which, abiding in the unapproachable light cannot be seen, is inaccessible to our limitations and our sinfulness, and the action of the Deity (*energeia* is an expression used in this sense by Aristotle), i.e. the active movement can be seen as the manifestation of the essence. This active manifestation of the Divine essence usually is opened by silence in the image of the light, which can sometimes be seen even by corporal eyes.

For example, during the revelation of the Divinity of Jesus Christ on Tabor and during all the appearances and revelations of the Deity in the form of light and fire, for example, by Moses and Elijah, or by ancient Christian ascetics, for example, Anthony the Great, all those who have seen God saw with both corporal and noetic eyes the Divine light, the reflection of the Deity. This light of Tabor and all immediate actions, the manifestations of the Deity is called by them the uncreated Divinity, as the essence of God is uncreated. This name in the addition to the moral actions and acts of grace of the Deity stands for better understanding, which the Prophet Isaiah calls the Spirit of wisdom and reason, the Spirit of council and fortress, the Spirit of knowledge and piety, the Spirit of the fear of God. The teaching on the subject of essence is mysterious and incomprehensible for the natural mind, but is convincing, immutable for the believing heart!....
From: S. V. Bulgakov, **Handbook for Church Servers**, 2nd ed., 1274 pp. (Kharkov, 1900) p 516-517. Translated by Archbishop Eugene D. Tarris © 2004. All rights reserved.

From St. Gregory Palamas

There are three degrees of eating: self-control,, sufficiency, and satiety. Self-control is to be hungry after having eaten. Sufficiency is to be neither hungry nor to be weighed down. Satiety is to be slightly weighed down. To eat again after reaching the point of satiety is to open the door of gluttony, through

which unchastity comes in. Attentive to these distinctions, choose what is best for you according to your powers, not overstepping the limits. For according to St. Paul, only the perfect can be both hungry and full, and at the same time be strong in all things (Philippians 4:12).

The Sayings of St. Anthony the Great

Abba Anthony said, "Some have afflicted their bodies by asceticism, but they lack discernment, and so they are far from God."

Saying 8 in *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*

Commentary: Man has a propensity for getting caught up in the form of something without attaining the substance. Indeed, St. Paul warns us about those who "have a form of godliness", who outwardly look pious in some ways, but who "deny the power thereof," who have not entered into the essence and experienced its power, who confess Christ with their lips, but have not come to know Him in the depths of their heart. It is possible to use the right forms, have the right externals, and the right dogma, and still have one's heart far from God and His transforming power.

For this reason St. Seraphim of Sarov instructs us that the goal of the spiritual life is acquisition of the Holy Spirit, a filling that overflows and guides our whole life. The externals are means to acquire this.

Discernment is a spiritual gift that enables the possessor to see to the heart of things, to know their true nature. Those lacking it, unless they have wise guidance from another person, can easily confuse form with substance. Consider the many who will say on the day of judgment "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name? and in Thy name cast out devils? and in Thy name done many wonderful works?", to whom Jesus will respond, "I never knew you, depart from Me ye that work iniquity." This is a tragic case. They thought they were serving God but, lacking discernment, they actually were serving themselves, doing their "own thing."

Monastics are susceptible to this temptation along with the rest of us. "I eat once a week. I have no possessions but the rags on my back. I sleep but two hours in twenty-four. I do 3000 prostrations and read through the Psalter and Gospels each day while standing." Such ones confuse the strictness of their ascetic practice with true knowledge of God; they may, in fact, do these things because they take pleasure in their own strictness, or the reputation it wins them in the eyes of men. They take pleasure in comparing themselves to their neighbor and finding themselves stricter. They readily fall prey to judging their weaker brethren. All their self-directed ascetic activity, in fact, makes them worse.

Thus, in the Church, a moderate asceticism that curbs the body's passions so that the body may be subject to the spirit without doing harm to the body or giving ready grounds for pride is recommended. And our activity should always be guided by someone

other than ourselves, for "He who chooses himself as his spiritual guide has chosen a fool."

Our goal in Christian life is to come to know and love God with all our heart and to love one another as Christ has loved us. This is only possible through the grace of God filling us and transforming us. Proper ascetic practice brings us closer to this goal, while a deluded practice brings us into pride and vainglory.

Fr. Justin Frederick

St. John Cassian (Feb 29)

He was born in Southern Gaul, near Marseilles. In his youth he left his country and practiced asceticism in Bethlehem, the Thebaid and Nitria. In Constantinople he was ordained a deacon by St. John Chrysostom. Then Ven. Cassian went to Rome. Ordained a presbyter in Rome, he left for Marseilles where he founded two monasteries, one for men and the other for women. He died in the year 435. His relics are in the St. Victor Monastery in Marseilles where he was the rector. The Church glorifies him as a humble, gentle and strict ascetic. St. Cassian left a collection of the Lives of the Saints, canons of monasticism and compositions against the Nestorians. His *Conferences*, a work detailing his conversations with ascetics in the Egyptian desert, is a first-rate work explaining spiritual life in Christ. His discussion of the passions and their connections to one another is particularly helpful.

The Lenten Prayer of St. Ephrem is said as part of our morning and evening prayers with prostrations, if we are physically able. It is not used liturgically from Friday night to Sunday night.

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

But the spirit of continence, of humility, of patience, and of love, do Thou grant unto me Thy servant. (*Prostration*)

Yea O Lord and King, grant unto me to perceive mine own offences and not to judge my brother; for blessed art Thou unto ages of ages. Amen. (*Prostration*)

Then 12 bows to the waist while saying:

O God, cleanse Thou me a sinner and have mercy on me. (12)

or

O God, have mercy on me a sinner. (3)

O God, cleanse Thou me a sinner and have mercy on me. (3)

Thou hast created me, O Lord, have mercy on me. (3)

Countless times have I sinned, O Lord, forgive me. (3) *Then repeat the prayer once with a prostration.*

Upcoming Events 2010

28 March, Palm Sunday

28 March – 3 April, Holy Week

4 April, Holy Pascha, the Feast of Feasts: Midnight Vigil & Liturgy, 3:00 p.m. Vespers and Picnic

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!