

The Confessor's Tongue for October 10, 2010

20th Sunday After Pentecost: Holy Elders of Optina Monastery

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.

The Holy Elders of Optina Monastery

The Optina Monastery of central Russia, in a period of 100 years from 1821 until the monastery was closed by the Bolsheviks in 1923, produced a most remarkably abundant stream of Orthodox sanctity. The monastery and skete comprising it in that time produced 14 canonized saints. In them God's power was manifestly at work for the benefit of the many people who came to them for physical and spiritual healing. Those people included some of the leading figures in 19th century Russia, including the famous writers Gogol, Tolstoy, and Dostoyevsky.

For those who sought the fullness of true Christian life, victory over the passions, and spiritual health, the God-bearing Elders of Optina were a spring of life and a wealth of wisdom. God gave many of them the gifts of discernment and clairvoyance, the ability to know the secrets of the heart and discern a soul's true condition and apply the needed remedy.

Their lives and example continue to bear fruit until this day. The Lives of most of these Elders are available to us in English. They breathe with the fullness of authentic Christian life and the abundant grace of God. Their lives should be read, re-read, and prayerfully pondered and emulated by all Orthodox Christians seeking to be conformed to Christ's image, for in them we find the Gospel lived and applied in nearly our own time. Truly God is glorified in His saints!

Today, the 10th of October, the Church celebrates both the repose of Elder Ambrose and the synaxis of all the Holy Elders. Let us celebrate their holy memory with love.

O venerable Elders of Optina, pray unto God for us

The Optina 500: Cell-Rule of Saints

The monks of Optina Monastery & Skete attended Matins, Liturgy, and Vespers with Compline every day. In addition, many of them read the following rule in their cells, popularly called "the Optina 500." It included systematic reading of the New Testament, prostrations, bows, and extensive use of the Jesus Prayer. We, too, can use it or draw on it in our own prayer life.

Each day one reads one chapter from the Gospels in order, beginning with Matthew and ending with John, and two chapters from the Epistles, beginning with the Acts of the Apostles and ending with the Apocalypse of St. John the Theologian, with the last seven chapters of the Apocalypse read on the same day. This allowed one to read through the whole New Testament every 89 days.

Read one kathisma from the Psalter each day, beginning with the first and ending with the last. (There are 20 in the Psalter.)

The 500 itself consists of the following: three prostrations with the prayers 1) O God, have mercy on me a sinner; 2) O God, cleanse Thou me a sinner and have mercy on me; 3) Thou hast created me, O Lord, have mercy on me; countless times have I sinner, O Lord, forgive me. Then the "Usual Beginning" according to the morning prayers found in the typical prayerbook:

Through the prayers of our holy Fathers...

Glory to Thee, our God, glory to Thee.

O Heavenly King...

Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal...3

Glory to the Father...now and ever...

All Holy Trinity, have mercy on us...

Lord, have mercy. (3)

Glory to the Father...now and ever...

Our Father, who art in heaven...

Through the prayers of our holy Fathers, Lord Jesus Christ our God, have mercy on us. Amen. [*In place of "For Thine is the kingdom..."*]

Lord, have mercy. (12)

Glory to the Father...now and ever...

Come let us worship God our King.

Come let us worship and fall down...

Come let us worship and fall down...

Psalms 50 "Have mercy on me, O God..."

The Symbol of Faith (Creed)

"Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, have mercy on me the sinner," (100-the Jesus Prayer), with a full prostration with each of the first 10, full bows for the next 20, and a full prostration with the last one. The prayers are counted by use of a knotted prayer rope.

Prayer to the Theotokos (11th of morning prayers) as follows:

O most holy Theotokos, my lady, through thy holy and all-powerful prayers, turn away from me, thine unworthy servant, despair, forgetfulness, unreasonableness, indifference, and all unclean, evil, and blasphemous thoughts from my wretched heart and darkened mind. Extinguish the flame of my passions, for I am poor and wretched. Deliver me from my numerous memories and fantasies. Free me from all evil acts, for thou art blessed by all generations, and thy most honorable name is glorified unto ages of ages. Amen. *Prostration* Then two more identical sets of 100 Jesus Prayers with the prayer to Mary.

The fourth 100 follows the same pattern but with this prayer to the Theotokos: "My most holy Lady Theotokos, save me a sinner."

The fifth 100 consists of 50 prayers to one's Guardian Angel: "O holy Angel of God, my guardian, pray to God for me a sinner," with full prostrations with the first five, bows with the next 10, 34 without bows, and the last with a prostration. The final 50 prayers follows the same pattern of bows and prostrations, but with the prayer: "All Saints, pray to God for me a sinner."

Then: Meet it is in truth to bless thee, O Theotokos...*prostration.*

Glory to Thee, O God, glory to Thee.

Glory to the Father...now and ever...

Lord, have mercy. (3)

Through the prayers of our holy Fathers, Lord Jesus Christ our God, have mercy on us. Amen.

The prostrations are not done on Sundays, Great Feasts, Pascha through Pentecost, on Forefeasts, for the duration of Feasts, or any day when a Vigil is served. The rule is completely set aside during Bright Week and from December 24 – January 7.

The Sayings of St. Anthony the Great

A brother in a monastery was falsely accused of fornication, and he arose and went to Abba Anthony. The brethren also came from the monastery to correct him and bring him back. They set about proving that he had done this thing, but he defended himself and denied that he had done anything of the kind. Now Abba Paphnutius happened to be there, and he told them this parable: 'I have seen a man on the bank of the river buried up to his knees in mud, and some men came to give a hand to help him out, but they pushed him further in up to his neck.' Then Abba Anthony said this about Abba Paphnutius: 'Here is a real man, who can care for souls and save them.' All those present were pierced to the heart by the words of the old man and they asked forgiveness of the brother. So admonished by the Fathers, they took the brother back to the monastery.

Saying 29 Sayings of the Desert Fathers

Commentary: How ready we are to accuse others falsely! True, we usually don't do it maliciously and consciously, but how often we jump to false conclusions about our brother and pass judgment on him, often on the sketchiest of evidence. This readiness to leap to conclusions, think the worst, and condemn does great harm to ourselves and others and reveals a lack of love in our hearts for our brother.

Love demands that we think the best of others, that we put the best possible construction and interpretation on their ambiguous words and actions rather than thinking the worst. How much trouble we suffer ourselves and inflict on others due to our choosing to think the worst!

Notice, too, how quickly the monks repent and ask forgiveness for their mistaken words and actions. When they realized they were wrong, they immediately humbled themselves and asked forgiveness. If only we would follow that example!

Now suppose that the brother had committed the sin of which he was accused, a serious matter. Even in such a case, one must be careful: one may be right but still be wrong: right concerning the sin and judgment on it, but wrong in dealing with the sinner. The brethren had come to correct the brother and bring him back to the monastery. This reveals their good intent: to restore their brother. But they didn't know how, and they were not fully operating out of love for their brother and so fell to arguing with him about his supposed guilt, which helped no one. Their

sense of being right and their brother wrong kept them from helping him effectively. We tend to notice and judge sins in which we ourselves are guilty or complicit. Hence we must always be on guard when dealing with the sins of others lest we be proud or condemning and thereby end up shooting the wounded and then falling ourselves, often into the same sin. St. Jude thus writes, "Keep yourselves in the love of God...Have mercy on some who are doubting; save others, snatching them out of the fire; and on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment polluted by the flesh." (Jude 21-23 NAS). *Fr. Justin F.*

The Short Prayer Rule of St. Seraphim

From the Optina Monastery Prayerbook 2003

In extreme cases, if there is no possibility of reading the morning or evening prayers, the short rule of St. Seraphim of Sarov is used.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Meet it is in truth to bless thee, O Theotokos, who art every blessed and all-blameless and the Mother of our God, more honorable than the Cherubim, and more glorious without compare than the Seraphim, who without corruption gavest birth to God the Word, verily, Theotokos, we magnify thee.

Our Father who art in heaven...*(thrice)*

Rejoice O Virgin Theotokos, Mary full of grace, hte Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, for thou hast borne the Savior of our souls. *(thrice)*

Nicene Creed: "I believe in one God..."

O Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner. *(thrice)*

O Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, through the prayers of Thine immaculate Mother, our venerable and God-bearing fathers, and all the saints, save us. Amen.

Prayer for the Beginning of Any Work

St. Anthony of Optina

O God, attend unto my help, O Lord, hasten to help me. Direct, O Lord, all that I do, read, and write, all that I think, say, and understand, to the glory of Thy holy name, that from Thee all my works may receive their beginning, and in Thee they may find their end.

Grant, O God, that I not deny Thee, my Savior, in word, in deed, or in thought, but that all my deeds, advice, and thoughts may be to the glory of Thy most holy Name. O God, attend unto my help, O Lord, hasten to help me.

From the Optina Monastery Prayerbook, Fr. Justin Trans.

Upcoming Events 2010

15 November: Pan-Orthodox Unction Service at SS. Constantine & Helen, 7:00 p.m.

22 December, Wednesday: Metropolitan Jonah visits at Vespers.

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!