

The Confessor's Tongue for October 13, A. D. 2013

Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost: Fathers of the 7th Council

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 Way Into The Kingdom of Heaven, 2

St. Innocent of Alaska

St. Innocent originally composed this work for publication in the Aleut language in order to provide a summary of Christian life for the native peoples of Russian Alaska.

The Path into the Kingdom of Heaven

The road into the Kingdom of Heaven was made by the Lord Jesus Christ, and He was the first one who travelled it. The Bible teaches that only he who follows Jesus can reach His Kingdom. But how can one follow Him? Hear what our Savior says about this: *Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me* (Mark 8:34).

The words *whoever desires* mean that Christ does not compel anyone to follow Him. He has no need of the unwilling ones, but He desires that each person freely follow Him. Consequently, only those who willingly choose the Savior's path reach the Kingdom of Heaven.

Christian! Your salvation or perdition is entirely in your own hands. In His unspeakable wisdom and love, the Lord has given you freedom to chose what you wish, and He does not force you to do anything against your will. Therefore, if you truly wish to follow Jesus Christ, He will show you the way into the Kingdom of Heaven and will help you along each step. If you do not wish to follow Him, it is your decision. But take care not to disdain the grace of God! Pitying you, Jesus Christ knocks for a long time at the door of your heart, waiting for your decision to save yourself. But woe to you if He, tiring of waiting, turns His face away from you, as a hopeless son or daughter of perdition. Then no one, neither the most powerful and influential person, nor all the angels in heaven, will be able to help you!

That is why it is extremely important to nourish in ourselves the desire and resolve to follow the path of salvation. To make this desire grow in us and strengthen our resolve, we must learn where the path Christ showed us leads and how to follow it. These questions are of such extreme importance we will discuss them in detail.

1. First of all, a Christian must thoroughly study the foundations of the Christian faith. To that end, you must read and reread the Holy Scriptures on a regular basis, especially the books of the New Testament. You must not only learn their contents but also develop an interest in their origin, who wrote them and when, how they were preserved and have been handed down to us, and why they are called Divine and Sacred. You must study the Holy Books with simplicity of heart, without prejudice or excessive inquisitiveness, not trying to discover hidden mysteries but trying to learn that which leads us to self-improvement. Certainly all that is necessary

for us to know for our salvation is revealed quite clearly and in detail in the Scriptures.

It is important also to study our God-given faith in detail, since he who is indifferent toward truth is in danger of becoming easy prey for false teachers. It is so sad that many Orthodox Christians perish simply because of their disregard for Christ's teachings. Having access to the light, they wander in the dark.

The studying of the faith should conform to your aptitudes and knowledge. For instance, for the serious student, in addition to studying the Scriptures, it is also useful to become familiar with the works of the Church Fathers and with the historical and theological books written by other Orthodox authors. These books will help you to comprehend your faith more deeply, which in turn will give you an opportunity to strengthen others in the Orthodox faith, to whom these books are unavailable.

2. When you become convinced that our Orthodox faith is based on Holy Scriptures and is not invented by people and that the Holy Scriptures contain the true word of God, revealed by the Holy Spirit through prophets and apostles— accept it with all your trusting heart. Believe the Holy Scriptures without doubt or philosophizing, pushing aside all heretical explanations. If you humbly accept Christ's truth, then your faith will become strong and will lead you to salvation.

3. Finally, try to nourish a diligence in yourself to follow that which is taught by the Holy Scriptures. But if you do not have such diligence, fall down before the Savior and with a sincere prayer ask Him to send you a zealous wish to live according to His commandments. Then, when the grace of God starts leading you toward salvation, follow it, valiantly repelling the snares of the devil, who will attempt to detract you from Christ's path.

To illustrate what was just said about the path into the Kingdom of Heaven, let's assume that unexpectedly you became the sole heir of a rich relative. This relative, before dying, willed his magnificent mansion on the top of a picturesque mountain to you. Loving solitude, he had not built any roads but reached his mansion by a trail. In order to help you take possession of the property, he left you a map of the mountain, indicating the correct trail on it. The mountain has many other trails, none of which reached the mansion; some lead to a dead end, and others to a steep cliff. Therefore, in order to reach your mansion, you have to take the trail indicated by your loving relative.

Prudence would suggest that, before undertaking such a trip, you should carefully study the map of the mountain, obtaining all the necessary supplies for the climb and being prepared to spend the night on the mountain, if necessary. It would be good to ask a

ranger about landmarks on the mountain and how best to avoid losing your way or straying from the correct trail. Certainly, being a person with common sense, you would make all necessary preparations before setting off on this new trail.

Similarly, to reach the Kingdom of Heaven, we should determine which path leads to it, how not to falter, what we must beware of, etc. Our map is the Holy Scriptures and other Orthodox books; the rangers are the pastors of the Church, whose duty it is to help the faithful on their way toward Paradise. The provisions are the Mysteries (Sacraments) of the Church, which reinforce our spiritual strength. Sometimes the path leading to Paradise may become narrow, steep and overgrown with bushes, whereas other paths may seem wider and easier to travel. It is very important not to stray from the correct path. The Lord Jesus Christ and His Apostles repeatedly warned that there is but one path that leads to the Kingdom of Heaven, the one given in the Gospel. All others, especially the wide and comfortable ones, lead to perdition.

Let us now examine more closely the path indicated to us by our Lord Jesus Christ. He said: *Whoever desires to come after Me must: 1. Deny himself, 2. Take up his cross, 3. Follow Me*

Thus, a follower of Christ must begin by denying himself. This means that you must disown all bad habits, free your heart from sinful bonds (like hunger for money, luxury, fame, power over others, etc.), squelch impure thoughts, harbor no lustful desires, distance yourself from situations leading to sin, and, in general, do nothing because of stubbornness or ego but do all for the love of God and with the desire to contribute to the glory of His Holy Name. In other words, to deny yourself is *to be dead indeed to sin but alive to God*, as St. Paul has explained in Rom. 6:11.

Then, it is necessary for a disciple and follower of Christ to take up his cross. The *cross* means the various difficulties and sorrows associated with a Christian life. Crosses may be external as well as internal. To take up your cross means to tolerate everything without complaining, regardless of how unpleasant things might become. For example, if someone has insulted you or laughed at you or provoked you, bear it all without anger or resentment. Similarly, if you helped someone and he, instead of showing gratitude, made up deceitful tales about you or if you wanted to do something good but were unable to accomplish it, bear it without despondency. Did some misfortune befall you? Did someone in your family become ill, or despite all your efforts and tireless labor did you repeatedly suffer failure? Has some other thing or person oppressed you? Bear all with patience in the name of Jesus Christ. Do not consider yourself punished unjustly, but accept everything as your cross.

To *bear your cross* means not only to accept patiently all difficulties that befall you but also to strive for spiritual perfection, as the Scriptures teach

us. For example, we must do good to others: work for the prosperity of your parish, visit the sick and imprisoned, help the needy, collect money for the poor, and assist in spreading spiritual enlightenment. In other words, we must seek out tasks which will lead to the salvation and welfare of those around us and then, with perseverance and meekness, strive in that direction by our actions, words, prayer, and advice.

Should the prideful thought arise that you are better or smarter than others, quickly cast it aside because it will undermine all your good efforts. Blessed is he who carries his cross with prudence and humility, because God will never allow such a person to perish but will guide and strengthen him with His Holy Spirit.

In following Jesus Christ, it is not enough to carry only an outward cross. Indeed, external crosses are borne not only by Christians but by everyone; there exists no person free from one or more sorrows. He who wishes to become a true disciple of Christ must also carry his own inner cross.

An inner cross comes more readily than an outer one. In a state of repentance, you need only direct your thoughts inward to study your soul, and instantly a multitude of crosses will appear. For instance, reflect on how you were created and what is the purpose of your life. Are you living according to Christ's teaching, are you accomplishing something good, are you growing spiritually? Meditate about this in some depth, and soon you will come to realize that you are failing in many important areas. God created you so that with all your works, life, and being you should contribute to the spreading of good and the strengthening of His Kingdom. You, however, have not only failed in this, but, by your sins, you have rejected and even insulted Christ. Reflect on what awaits you beyond the grave and on what side you will find yourself at the Last Judgment: with the righteous or with the evildoers? And if you seriously reflect on all this, you will naturally become distressed and will regret your many words and deeds—and these painful feelings and the desire for repentance will become your inner cross. If you continue attentively to study yourself, you will find many other inner crosses. For instance, hell, which you have so carelessly avoided considering until now, will suddenly appear to you as a very real threat. Paradise, which the Lord has prepared for you and which has barely crossed your mind, will vividly present itself to you as it really is: a place of eternal and pure joy from which you have deprived yourself by your careless way of life.

If, in spite of the inner turmoil brought about by such reflections, you firmly resolve to repent and amend your ways and, if, instead of consoling yourself with earthly enjoyments, you diligently pray to the Lord to save you and you decide to surrender yourself totally to His will, then the Lord will reveal to you more clearly the state of your soul so that you may be totally healed. Our problem is that the actual

condition of our spiritual sickness is hidden from us under a thick mantle of self-love and passions. Only occasionally, thanks to our conscience, do we get a glimpse of our major and most obvious spiritual wounds.

Usually the devil, knowing how good it is for us to recognize our moral illness, uses all his wiles to prevent us from doing so and tells us that all is well and there is no need to worry. But when he sees that we are really serious about becoming true Christians and with God's help are on the way to restoring our spiritual health, then the devil uses craftier means: he presents to us our internal illnesses in such a hopeless condition that we become bewildered and despair of our salvation. If the Lord permitted the devil to use this trick on all of us, few of us would find the strength to continue the struggle. However, the Lord, as a knowledgeable physician, protects us from despair. He heals our spiritual ulcers and encourages us as we heal.

Therefore, as the Lord restores your spiritual sight, you will begin to comprehend more clearly that your heart is corrupt and that your passions obstruct your path to God. You will begin to understand also that the little good you have to your credit so far is damaged by your selfishness and conceit. Then you will certainly grieve, and you will become frightened and saddened: frightened because you are in danger of perishing forever, saddened because you have declined for so long to listen to the gentle voice of God who was calling you to salvation, and saddened because you have accomplished so little good.

Although these inner crosses present themselves as burdensome, do not despair and do not think that the Lord has abandoned you. No! He is always with you and invisibly sustains you, even when you forget Him. He will not burden you with trials beyond your capacity. Fear nothing, but with total humbleness and devotion bear your cross and pray. He is the gentlest of fathers that could be wished for. If on occasion He allows His faithful servants to be tempted, it is only to remind them of their feebleness and to completely cleanse their hearts from pride. In our hearts is where He intends to reside with His Son and His Holy Spirit.

In time of sorrow do not seek comfort from people. Most people are not experienced in affairs of salvation and are poor advisors. Make the Lord your only helpmate, comforter, and tutor, and from Him alone ask help. The man to whom the Lord sends afflictions is blessed a hundredfold, because it is afflictions that cure our souls. In enduring sorrows, a Christian is likened to Jesus Christ, who suffered for us. We should consider sorrows a gift from the Lord and a sign of His care for our salvation.

If you bear your cross with perseverance and seek comfort only from Him, then He, through His mercy, will not abandon you but will touch your heart and will impart to you the gifts of the Holy Spirit. It is then that you will feel an indescribable delight, a

wonderful inner peace and joy such as you have never experienced before, and at the same time you will feel an influx of spiritual strength; prayer will become easier and your faith stronger. Then your heart will be kindled with love of God and all people. All these are gifts of the Holy Spirit.

When the Lord decides to honor you with such gifts, do not consider them as rewards for your labors, and do not think that you have attained perfection. Such thoughts come from pride. The comforts and grace of the Holy Spirit are not rewards but gifts of divine mercy. Occasionally the Lord allows us to get a foretaste of future blessings so that we will put forth a greater effort in seeking His eternal Kingdom.

Finally, a disciple of Christ must *follow Him*. This means that in all deeds and actions we must try to be like our Lord Jesus Christ in His virtues. We must strive to live and act as He lived and acted. For example, Jesus Christ always thanked His Heavenly Father and constantly prayed to Him. Thus we also should constantly thank God and pray to Him in all circumstances, whether successful or difficult.

Jesus Christ revered His Mother and submitted to lawful authority. Thus we also should revere our parents and educators; we too should respect those in positions of responsibility—provided their requests are not in conflict with God's commandments.

Jesus Christ fervently and with love performed the task for which His Father sent Him. We should also conscientiously and zealously perform the duties which are laid upon us by God and civil authorities.

Jesus Christ loved everyone and did good to all. So should we love our neighbor and do good to as many people as possible. Jesus Christ did everything possible for the salvation of mankind. So must we do good to others, not sparing our own well-being and time.

Jesus Christ voluntarily suffered and died for us. Therefore we too must not grumble when some unpleasantness befalls us but be ready to make sacrifices with humility and devotion to God. Jesus Christ not only forgave His enemies their ingratitude and animosity but wished them well. So we also must forgive our enemies, repaying them with good for their evil while blessing those who revile us.

Jesus Christ, the king of heaven and earth, lived in poverty and obtained His daily necessities through His own labor. So we also must be industrious and content with what God has given us and not be consumed with desire for riches for their own sake. In the words of the Savior: *It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God* (Matt. 19:24).

Jesus Christ, being meek and humble of heart, never strove for adulation but directed all toward the glory of His Father. We also must not parade ourselves or seek recognition. For instance, do you help your neighbors, do you give alms, do you live more piously than those around you, are you wiser than your friends, or are you in some way above

others? Do not brag about it. Remember that all your praiseworthy attributes are not yours but gifts of God. Yours are the weaknesses, mistakes and sins.

Following Jesus Christ means accepting with faith and submitting to all that Christ taught without question and with simplicity of heart. He who accepts Jesus Christ's words becomes His disciple, but he who fulfills His commandments with complete devotion becomes His true and devoted follower.

This is the meaning of denying yourself, taking up your cross, and following Jesus Christ. This is the only straight path into the Kingdom of Heaven. Christ walked this path and calls us to follow Him. There never was and never will be any other path to salvation but this one, shown to us by Jesus! To the beginner this path may seem too narrow and steep. But it seems this way only because our understanding of divine blessings and happiness has become distorted. Many of us regard the bitter as sweet and the sweet as bitter. However, as we come closer to God, much of what seemed difficult or bitter before will become easy or sweet, and what seemed to please before will come to seem boring and harmful.

Of course, there will be trying periods in our life when the path of ascension toward God will seem exceptionally difficult. Then we should think that for every step taken there are a thousand rewards being prepared. Sufferings along this path are momentary, but the rewards are eternal. Therefore, do not fear the path of Christ, for a smooth and wide path ends in hell, but a thorny and narrow one leads to Heaven.

To be continued...

Spiritual Alertness

The Christian is commanded to be alert, to be watchful, to be sober-minded because his adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. He is called to resist the prowling enemy, but will not be able to offer effective resistance if he is not alert.

In dealing with human enemies, the mind and its alertness is a man's most important weapon. A well-known teacher of self-defense with a pistol, Jeff Cooper, developed the following color codes for levels of alertness to help his students be mentally prepared for self-defense. Here they are as described by William Levinson:

Condition White means a person is daydreaming, talking on a cell phone, or is otherwise unaware of what is going on around him. Criminals love to catch victims in Condition White because the usual result of a surprise attack is total paralysis. Many carjacking victims are shot not because they resist, but because they freeze so thoroughly that they cannot even obey the robber's order to surrender the vehicle.

It is noteworthy, by the way, that the Nazis were able to murder upward of 10 million people at a relatively low cost to their own lives (the Warsaw Ghetto uprising was one of the few exceptions) by keeping them collectively in Condition White. Jews and other victims were not told they were being taken to extermination camps; they were told they were being "relocated."

Humans, and possibly domestic livestock, are the only animals that live even part of their lives in Condition White. All wild animals live their entire lives in Condition Yellow, and law enforcement experts suggest that law-abiding people should do so as well.

Condition Yellow is a prudent level of vigilance, and this vigilance stops many potentially deadly confrontations before they even begin. This is because there is not much difference between the decision processes that criminals and predatory animals use. If a carnivore wins a fight, he gets a meal. If a criminal wins a fight, he gets the victim's property, or the enjoyment of a sexual assault. In either case, however, the attacker cannot risk anything but the most trivial injuries. If the predatory animal is hurt badly in a fight, the meal it just killed will be its last, because it will be unable to catch another. No rational criminal wants to get hurt, either, and even a non-fatal gunshot wound will almost certainly lead to an arrest. No rational criminal will therefore attack somebody who is in Condition Yellow; he does not know for sure that even a smaller and physically weaker victim won't do him some damage.

Pearl Harbor was obviously not caught in Condition White on December 7, 1941. A military base is always at no less than Condition Yellow because there are always sentries and lookouts, and Pearl Harbor also had a rudimentary radar system. The Japanese attack succeeded because the base did not go to Condition Orange when the radar operators saw things of whose identity they were uncertain.

Condition Orange means the identification of a potential threat -- a situation that "makes you uncomfortable." There is probably a good reason for this; our instincts, like those of all other animals, evolved to prevent us from becoming meals. Condition Orange is what police instructor Massaad Ayoob calls "bare fear," as opposed to "reasonable fear." You are justified in taking countermeasures to avoid the situation in question. You are emphatically not justified in even drawing a gun, much less aiming it at somebody, in Condition Orange.

If Condition Orange is the rustling in the woods that tells you a wolf might nearby, **Condition Red** means you can see the wolf. This is the condition that the law calls reasonable fear, and under which you may be justified in drawing a firearm. It is at this point that you decide, "If he does so-and-so [which is a direct threat to your life or that of another person], I will have to use a weapon, or a potentially lethal martial arts technique."

Cooper's color codes for levels of alertness can be readily translated into spiritual terms assist us in our daily spiritual combat with our prowling enemy. To that we shall turn in a week to come.

[Source:http://www.americanthinker.com/2013/07/how_the_cooper_color_code_explains_stand_your_ground_and_prevents_crime.html]

Upcoming Events 2012-2013

- 20 October IOCC Fundraising Dinner at Holy Trinity, GOC, Dallas
- 31 October All Saints Night, Thursday, 6:00 p.m.
- 15 November Nativity Fast begins.
- 31 Dec - 1 Jan All-Night Vigil for the Feast of St. Basil, Circumcision of Our Lord, and New Year

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!

