

# The Confessor's Tongue for October 27, A. D. 2013

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost: Martyr Nestor

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.

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## The Way Into The Kingdom of Heaven, 4

*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.*

In summary, it is impossible to enter the Kingdom of Heaven or even come close to it without the assistance of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, we should implore the Holy Spirit with all earnestness to come dwell in us and help us, just as He helped the Holy Apostles. In order for the Holy Spirit to be kind toward us, to descend and reside within us, it is important to know what draws Him to us and what pushes Him away.

Jesus Christ said that the Holy Spirit *blows where it wills and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes* (Jn. 3:8). This means that a person cannot force the Holy Spirit to come to him or predict the time when He may decide to do so. You can only feel His touch when this happens. Indeed, the book of Acts states that when the Holy Apostles and other Christians received the gifts of the Holy Spirit, it was always unexpectedly. He seldom descends immediately on those beseeching Him but does so when it suits Him, as God, to do so. No one should attempt to foretell when or what gifts, if any, he will receive or to consider himself worthy of His descent! The Grace of the Holy Spirit is a gift of His endless mercy. And gifts by definition are given when it suits the giver, and only those deemed suitable by the giver.

It is the Holy Spirit Himself Who established within the Church the means of distributing His blessings to the faithful: the Holy Mysteries and other liturgical services. Non-Orthodox Christians are sadly mistaken when they assert that they can always, whenever it suits them, receive the Holy Spirit through well-known means (which are unfortunately also used during spiritual seances and pagan mysteries). Those who dare to orchestrate these means will not only remain empty of the divine gifts but also commit a terrible sin against the Holy Spirit.

Anyone who considers asking the Holy Spirit for beneficial gifts must know that these gifts are meant only for those who possess true faith. Indeed, the Lord first of all enlightened the Apostles with the true doctrine and then bestowed upon them the Holy Spirit. Similarly, the Apostles did not bestow beneficial gifts upon newly baptized Christians immediately, but only after a certain period of testing and affirmation in the true faith. That is why the Lord called the Holy Spirit *the Spirit of Truth*, and His Church, the beatified community of the faithful, is called in Scripture *the pillar and ground of the truth*.

Therefore, when a Christian, humbly and obediently, has accepted Christ's faith in all its

purity, without any corrections or misinterpretations, then the following are the requirements to receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit: purity of heart and chastity, humility, listening to the voice of God, prayer, self-denial, reading the Holy Scriptures, and the Sacraments of the Church, especially Holy Communion.

Only he who does not want to pray will not find time for prayer. *St. Innocent of Alaska*

To receive gifts from the Holy Spirit, you must, first of all, cleanse your heart of sin, self-love, and pride. The Holy Spirit always surrounds us and wishes to fill us, but the evil nesting within us, like a wall, impedes His path. Any sin keeps the Holy Spirit away from us, but carnal impurity and pride are especially offensive to Him. So, if we do not want the Holy Spirit, Whom we received in Baptism, to depart from us, or if we have pushed Him away through our sinful life and now want Him to return, here is what we must do:

1. *Cleanse* yourself with repentance and sincere confession. Then shun all sinful thoughts and wishes. In view of the terrible lewdness of contemporary society, a Christian must protect himself from all that may pollute his soul and keep his flesh from lustfulness. Indeed, our body was designed to be the temple of the Holy Spirit. When a person is clean internally and externally, the Holy Spirit settles within him. In the presence of chastity, the only obstacle for the Holy Spirit is your pride in your righteousness and your regard of His gifts as your just reward. If you have unfortunately defiled yourself, then stop sinning and repent. With a contrite heart regret that you have offended God, your most loving Father, and strive to live with greater vigilance. Then even you will be able to receive the Holy Spirit.

2. One of the surest ways of attracting the Holy Spirit is by *humility*. Even if you are an honest, just, good, and merciful man, in a word, even though you may have achieved much goodness, keep considering yourself as an unworthy servant of God. Indeed, if we examine our good works more closely, we will see that none of them are completely beyond reproach. For example, if we give alms or help someone, how often do we add conceited, regretful, self-interested, judgmental, or other such unkind thoughts to our alms or help. Of course, every good deed always remains good, even when it is imperfect. It can be likened to gold which has value even before it is purified. But as gold becomes more precious when an experienced craftsman purifies and works it, so let us entrust our good deeds to the Heavenly Master that He will make them even more valuable.

Thus, if you wish your good deeds to please God, do not boast about them. You are not the master but

only an apprentice. As craftsmanship gives value to gold, so a pure and unselfish Christian love, which stems from the Holy Spirit, gives value to our good deeds. Everything that is done without Christian love, i.e., without the Holy Spirit, is not yet a fully valued good deed. Without the Holy Spirit a person remains poor and pitiful.

But humility consists not only of realizing your unworthiness but also of bearing the various sorrows and adversities of life with *patience* and without grumbling, considering them as sent or allowed by God for our benefit. Do not say, "How unfortunate I am!" But say, "I deserve a still greater punishment for my sins!" And ask God not so much to deliver you from adversities as to give you patience and courage to bear them.

3. The Holy Spirit can also be received by listening attentively to *the voice of God*. God speaks to us by means of the internal voice of our conscience and through external circumstances. It is very important to develop sensitivity in order to hear more clearly what God suggests to us. He, as a most loving Father, cares for you. Daily He calls you to Himself, warns you and enlightens you. For instance, are you unhappy, has someone offended you, has misfortune befallen you, or are you ill? In these you can hear the voice of God, calling you to repent and improve. In time of sorrow, instead of seeking help from others or consoling yourself by frivolous distractions and amusements, turn to God and seek guidance and help from Him alone.

Or suppose that you are prospering and living well and that everything flows smoothly. Consider this also to be the voice of God. Here God teaches you to be as merciful to those in need as He is merciful to you. It is dangerous and sinful to ignore the voice of God, to remain unrepentant and unimproved during times of hardship, to fail to thank God, or not to help others when you have plenty. Even more ruinous is to do the opposite of that to which God is leading us: to grumble and become embittered in difficult circumstances or to forget God and live only for pleasure in fortunate surroundings. What might then result is that God, after repeated teachings, will turn away from you as from a stubborn child and will abandon you to your own desires. Then passions will easily overcome you, your intellect and conscience will become dulled, and you might reach a point at which you will justify even your vilest crimes as natural and common human weakness. In order to avoid such a fall, it is necessary to become sensitive to the voice of God in the Holy Spirit and to follow His admonitions.

4. The Holy Spirit can be received through *prayer*. Prayer is the simplest, surest, and most available means to receive the Holy Spirit. Because we are composed of body and soul, they both should participate in prayer. The primary elements of prayer are *concentration and sincerity*, which are attained by inner effort. Nevertheless, the body should not remain uninvolved; it can and must assist the soul in prayer by standing in reverence, making prostrations, making the sign of the cross, raising the hands, and reading the prayers aloud. Other favorable external conditions also help in prayer: solitude, silence, ikons with burning lampadas before them, incense, and when in church, church art and architecture along with soft and harmonious singing, beautiful ceremonies, etc.

But to achieve concentration and warmth during prayer is not easy. Here, first of all, it is important to establish a regular time for prayer (for instance, mornings and evenings), and to develop stability and patience. You should constantly overcome haste, distraction, indifference

and insincerity. In addition, you must strive to warm your heart with love for God. Only a sincere prayer brings comfort and peace to the heart. Much effort is necessary in order to learn to pray properly, and, as we well know, all the righteous ones strove throughout their lives to learn the art of prayer. Nevertheless, your personal effort is not enough. It is the Holy Spirit who makes our prayer to be fervent and to come from the bottom of our heart. This was well known to the saints who, inspired by the Holy Spirit, stood day and night in prayer in sweet rapture, failing the while to notice the time fleeting away.

Pray even though at first your prayer may be weak and imperfect because of your sinfulness and estrangement from God. Pray with diligence and fervor; train yourself to be sincere in your conversation with God. Thus, little by little you will learn to pray and will start to feel a sweet comfort. The Holy Spirit will have mercy on you and will come and reside in you if you show faithfulness in your efforts at prayer.

The Holy Scripture teaches: *Pray without ceasing* (1 Thess. 5:17). How is this possible for people living in a secular world? If you are to pray all the time, how then are you to perform your other duties? The advice of perpetual prayer is directed not toward outward but toward inner prayer. If desired, you can turn to God internally whether you are alone or with others. Only he who does not want to pray will not find time for prayer.

5. Fasting and works of mercy aid prayer. The Fathers of the Church recommend: *If you want your prayer to fly up to God, then give it two wings, fasting and almsgiving.*

What is fasting and why is it necessary? *Fasting* is a voluntary self-restriction in food, drink, and pleasure. The purpose of fasting is to quiet or calm and lighten the body and to make it obedient to the soul. Overfilled flesh demands comfort and rest, disposing us to laziness, which hinders prayer and meditation. In the manner of an unbridled servant, the well-fed body rises up against its master, the soul, and wants to rule over it. While fasting, you should limit not only the type of food (dairy and meat products) but also its amount, restricting yourself to the minimal needs of the body. Then your fasting will become useful.

While fasting outwardly you should also fast *internally*, restraining your tongue from sinful, idle chatter and moderating your desires and your anger while driving off unkind thoughts and impure fantasies. Experience shows that there is nothing harder than to stop the wandering of thoughts and to direct your mind to thoughts of God and prayer. This may be likened to the taming of wild horses who have long been stubborn and unruly.

Non-spiritual people do not even suspect how difficult it is to control the wandering of thoughts. Being occupied with worldly affairs, they consider their thoughts to be busy with worthwhile concerns. Only when they begin to strive toward a spiritual life and try to reflect on spiritual topics, do they begin to notice that their thoughts are murky. This is somewhat like the waters of a shallow lake. As long as its surface remains undisturbed, it looks clear; but when it is stirred, the silt from its bottom darkens the water, making it appear murky. Likewise, in the depths of our heart there lay various passions. Like silt, they rise and darken the soul when a Christian attempts to expose and struggle with them. As the Holy Fathers have explained, when people turn to God, the devil strives to darken their soul with bad thoughts and feelings in order to confuse them and distract them from their good intentions. But do

not yield to his snares, and do not stray from the path of salvation. Remember that no one can simultaneously think about two subjects. If you occupy your mind with good thoughts (reading spiritual books or studying some worthwhile subject), the bad ones will not be able to linger in your mind.

Love reveals itself in *works of mercy*. Among such works are to feed the hungry, to give drink to the thirsty, to clothe the naked, to visit and help the sick and the imprisoned, to give refuge to the homeless, and to be concerned about orphans. All this should be done with sincere and unselfish love, without any boasting or expectations of gratitude. The Savior teaches regarding this: *Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly* (Matt. 6:3-4).

6. The Holy Spirit may be received by piously *reading and listening to the Holy Scriptures*. Being the Word of God, they hold a great treasury of spiritual enlightenment and wisdom. The Holy Scriptures are one of God's greatest blessings, which can be used by anyone wishing to do so. In them, the divine wisdom is presented in such an easy, approachable manner that even the simplest and most uneducated person can understand it. Many cases are recorded throughout Church history and in the lives of the saints, in which the simplest of people, while studying Holy Scripture, were enlightened, became pious, and received abundant gifts of the Holy Spirit even while some scholars and intelligentsia read the Holy Scripture and became confused and fell into heresy. The difference was that while the first read it with simplicity of heart, seeking in it spiritual direction, the second approached it with criticism, attempting to uncover inconsistencies. Considering themselves wise and all-knowing, these last succumbed to pride and even became false teachers. Be aware that our small and imperfect intellect cannot encompass God's wisdom. God enlightens those who with a pure and kind heart turn to Him in search of enlightenment. Therefore, in reading the Holy Scriptures, lay aside all worldly wisdom and inquisitiveness. Submit to the word and the will of Him who speaks to you through Holy Scripture, and beseech Jesus Christ to enlighten you and show you the path to salvation.

There are many other books besides Holy Scripture that are beneficial for reading: the works of the Holy Fathers, the lives of the saints, inspirational stories, sermons, and other praiseworthy writings of Orthodox authors. From the books available to you, read those that are based on Holy Scripture and are in accord with the teaching of the Orthodox Church. Beware of those poisoned by heresies and non-Christian ideas.

7. *Communion* is another source for receiving the Holy Spirit. Regarding it, Jesus Christ said: *He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood, abides in Me, and I in him. (He) has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day* (Jn. 6:54-56). When Christians partake of Holy Communion they unite inexplicably with Jesus Christ and start partaking of His divine life. Therefore, you must go to Communion with faith, having cleansed your soul by repentance, with a realization of your unworthiness, and with the hope of God's mercy. Since God is one and indivisible, when Christians accept Jesus Christ into their heart, they accept the Holy Spirit and the Heavenly Father at the same time and thus become a living temple of God.

As witnessed in the Acts of the Apostles and other ancient Christian writings, the faithful of the first

centuries took Communion every Sunday, which then was called the Lord's day. Undoubtedly, because of this constant communion with Jesus Christ, they were as "*of one heart and one soul*" (Acts 4:32). My God, what a difference there is between them and us! How many among us seldom partake of Holy Communion, sometimes avoiding it for years!

Those who neglect to take Holy Communion do not love Jesus Christ and will not receive the Holy Spirit, and consequently will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven. So, for the sake of your salvation, partake of Communion as often as possible. The Body and Blood of Christ is a true cure for many spiritual and bodily infirmities. And who among us is perfectly healthy? Who would not want to receive helpful relief? The Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ is the nourishment which sustains us on the path to the Kingdom of Heaven. Is it possible to complete a long and difficult journey without sustenance? The Body and Blood of Jesus Christ is the holiness bestowed on us by Jesus Christ Himself for our sanctification. Who would refuse to be a partaker of such holiness? Therefore, do not be lazy in stepping up to the Chalice of Life, but approach it with faith and fear of God.

In summary, these are the means of receiving the Holy Spirit: purity of heart, chastity, humility, listening to the voice of God, prayer accompanied by fasting and charity, reading Holy Scripture, meditation, and partaking of Holy Communion. Of course, each of these individually is effective for receiving the Holy Spirit, but it is best to resort to all of them for our salvation.

To this it is necessary to add that if we somehow fall into sin and thereby distance ourselves from the Holy Spirit, we should not despair and think that we have irrevocably lost all blessings, but let us quickly prostrate ourselves before God with deep repentance and prayer, and the All-merciful Holy Spirit will again return to us.

### Conclusion

Without faith in Jesus Christ no one can return to God and enter the Kingdom of Heaven. No one, even though he believe in Jesus Christ, can regard himself to be His disciple and share His glory in Heaven if he does not act as Jesus Christ did. And no one is able to follow Jesus Christ if he does not receive help from the Holy Spirit.

To receive the Holy Spirit, we must use the means granted us by God.

We should remember that the path into the Kingdom of Heaven that has been opened to us by Jesus Christ is the only one, and there never was and never will be another path that leads to salvation. At times this path may appear difficult, but, again, you should remind yourself that this is the only one that leads toward your objective. At other times the Christian will encounter such consolations and delights on this path as cannot be found in any worldly thing. The Lord Jesus Christ assists us on this path. He gives us the Holy Spirit, He sends His angel to protect us, He provides instructors and leaders, and even He Himself takes us by the hand and leads us to salvation.

If the path into the Kingdom of Heaven seems difficult, then consider how incomparably more dreadful are the eternal torments in fiery Gehenna. If the path toward heavenly bliss seems difficult, compare it with the path toward earthly happiness, and you will see that the path toward earthly happiness is not really easier at all. Just observe how much people toil to amass earthly things, how many disappointments, fights, sleepless nights and

deprivations they bear. Or remind yourself of how much effort and expenses it takes to achieve some meaningless and fleeting pleasure! And for what? Instead of the expected happiness, you are left with disappointment and weariness. When you carefully examine the heart of the matter, it becomes evident that people stay away from the Heavenly Kingdom not because the path to it is more difficult than the other paths of this world, but because it appears that way to them. Besides, the devil, an experienced and crafty deceiver, misleads people into believing that the path to salvation is difficult and the paths to perdition are easy, and he often succeeds in this.

So, my brethren, in order to avoid eternal perdition, let us definitely concern ourselves with our future. We know that beyond the grave there awaits one of the following two outcomes: either the Heavenly Kingdom or everlasting perdition in hell. There is no middle state, only everlasting bliss or everlasting torment. As there exist only two conditions past the grave, so there exist only two paths in this life. The one that seems wide and easy is taken by the majority. The other that seems narrow and thorny is taken by few. Those who follow the narrow path will be a hundredfold more happy than those who do not.

Brethren, if any of you who walk the wide path should suddenly die, what will happen to you? To whom shall you turn? To the Lord? You refuse to listen to Him now, so you must expect He will refuse to listen to you then. Now He is your merciful Father; then He will be your righteous judge. Who will defend you against His righteous rage? Ah! How frightful it is to fall into the hands of the living God! Therefore, concern yourselves now with the salvation of your soul while you still have time!

Work for your salvation while it is still daylight, for the night will come in which there will be no chance to change anything. Strive for the Heavenly Kingdom while you can still walk. Walk even a little bit, even if by crawling, but do it in the right direction. Then in eternity you will truly rejoice for every step you have taken!

May the All-merciful Lord help us all in this! Glory and thanksgiving be to Him throughout the ages of ages. Amen.

### The Nativity Fast

The Nativity Fast begins in two weeks and lasts for forty days, ending with the Liturgy on Christmas Day. Now is a good time for us to prepare and plan for the fast: gather recipes, plan meals, prepare for almsgiving, adjust our schedules so that we may pray more effectively, read more of the Scriptures, and, in general, plan how we may keep the fast to our spiritual benefit and profit.

Perhaps we may wish to read through the New Testament during the Fast? Now is the time to plan. If we read two chapters from the Gospels each day (with nine days of reading three chapters) and four chapters from the rest of the NT (with nine days of reading five chapters) we may finish the whole NT in forty days.

Perhaps we have needed to take a look at our prayer rule, to adjust it, strengthen it. Now is the time to set our hearts on seeking God's face in prayer and determining how and when each day we shall do this. Monks will double their usual cell rule during a fast. Perhaps we can increase the daily number of

prostrations we do, add Psalms to our prayer rule, add more of the Jesus Prayer, or add an additional time to pray during the day. Perhaps we can come to the full Vigil or choose a weekday service to attend regularly.

Christmas has long been a time for giving, but much of that giving is focused on our families and friends. Perhaps we wish to give alms to those less fortunate than we or to those who are in need. Now is the time to plan that giving lest it be lost in the competition with Christmas shopping. We will put out a collection box during the fast for non-perishable food to develop our own food pantry here that we may help those among us in need and those God brings to us.

Perhaps we realize that we have been taking in too much of the world through movies, internet, video games, music, television, radio, novels, etc., and that our mind is too full of thoughts about many things to think clearly about God and hear His voice. Now is the time to plan how we may cut back on such entertainments so that we might not have minds full of noise and endless thoughts and find the room silence affords us to meet God.

Finally, the Nativity Fast is difficult for us because the world feasts before the Feast and fasts (diets) after it. The endless round of pre-Christmas Christmas parties (or in proper modernspeak 'Holiday parties') makes it difficult for us to keep the Fast before the Feast. Now is the time to plan as well as we can to keep the Fast and then to commend ourselves to God and His grace to help us keep it and help us up quickly if we fall.

Naturally, all Orthodox Christians, regardless of how often they commune, should prepare themselves for a thorough Confession and Holy Communion during the Fast. If you have any questions about how you should keep the Fast, please see your priest or spiritual father. *Fr. Justin Frederick*

### Christian Prayer: Private and Corporate

*Fr. Georges Florovsky*

'Even 'in the closet', a Christian must not pray only for himself: he is never alone on his knees before the Father, and the Father is not only his Father, but the Father of all and everyone. As Christians, we are taught to call on "our Father," our common Father who is also "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," who died for and has saved all men. Personal prayer itself must be catholic," i.e., comprehensive and universal. The praying heart must be large enough to embrace the needs and sorrows of all of suffering and redeemed humanity. On all levels, private and corporate, Christian worship must be common worship, worship within the Community. On all levels, private and corporate, personal engagement and commitment are indispensable. Prayer "in common" is still personal engagement. The very act of "joining" is a personal act.'

### Upcoming Events 2012-2013

31 October, Thursday, 6:00 All Saints Festival  
15 November Nativity Fast begins.

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!