

# The Confessor's Tongue for February 22, A. D. 2015

Forgiveness Sunday, Cheesefare Sunday

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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## Forgiveness Vespers Homily 2011

*Archbishop Dmitri*

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Christ is in our midst! There's nothing more comforting to us than to know that Christ is with us. Once we have been received and become a part of His body which is the Church then Christ is always with us. I think sometimes in our Christian life we tend to forget that He is indeed with us.

Going back to the prayer that we pray constantly because the Lord said that when you pray, pray like this: and He recited the "Our Father." Right in the midst of the prayer there's this "forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors". Oh, sometimes others try to soften that by saying "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us", but that's secondary. The main and most important petition is "forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors".

What does it mean "debts"? Every person that we come in contact with is just like us. We have been made in God's image and we have the solemn obligation to achieve the likeness of God. We all have the image; the likeness is to be achieved. One of the main and most important things that we have to remember is that Jesus Christ came in the world to teach us exactly how to achieve that likeness. When the council of the Holy Trinity is recorded in the Old Testament: "Let us make us make man in our image", and then pretty shortly after that, "and in our likeness", the image is guaranteed. We have it. Like it or don't like it, fulfill it or not fulfill it, live up to it, or show the exact opposite, we still have the image of God in us. That's a *tremendous* obligation when you think about it. There's no other creature that has been endowed with God's image but the human being.

So when we say "forgive us" in the prayer "forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors", we're not just talking about some possible slip-up, a kind of accidental sin of some sort. No, "forgive us our debts" that is, that which we *owe*. And why do we owe each other? Because we've all been made in God's image and likeness. Let us not forget that on this occasion of the first Sunday of the Great Fast.

Forgiveness: forgiveness is of the essence of our faith. As we pray in the Lord's Prayer, "forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors". We always pray for forgiveness because forgiveness is of the essence because we have sinned against God, we have tried to replace Him in our daily life, with every conceivable substitute, something to take the place of God. But one of the things that this Great Fast period will bring to our minds and not just once, not just at this service, but constantly right until the very end, is that we have been made in God's likeness. We have been made in His image, and we are to achieve God's likeness. More than anything else, the goal of the

Great Fast is to strengthen that effort of each one of us, to achieve the likeness of God. And so that we have no doubt of what God's likeness consists of, God Himself came into the world, took upon himself our own nature, and lived and walked among us so that we might know exactly what it was to be in God's image.

Jesus Christ, the One who was always with the Father, took upon Himself our nature and lived and walked among us and our reaction to that is the crucifixion. The victory over man's reaction to God's intervention was the resurrection from the dead. And that's what we constantly love, praise, and glorify in our Orthodox church: the resurrection from the dead. If there's anything that characterizes our Church any more than any other is this constant emphasis on the resurrection. What is the word for resurrection in the language that some of us have as background language? Воскресение ['Sunday' in Russian] means the resurrection day. So, Resurrection because we all have committed ourselves to a life that prepares us for the resurrection from the dead.

If we are here for any other purpose than that; than to achieve the likeness of God so that we can be in the resurrection not just behold it from afar, but be in it, be a part of it, belong to it, be resurrected from the dead. One of the most important parts of our preparation is precisely what we said earlier in the prayer: "forgive us our debts" - Let us forget about trespasses for a moment - "forgive us our debts", that's what we owe every single person that we come in contact with. Everyone that is standing next to us is made in God's image too, so we owe him. "Forgive us our debts" because we haven't paid our debts. We often mistreat the person next to us. Sometimes we are so selfish that we can only see our own good. "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors", because there are those who owe us as well. And we forgive them.

So let's start the Great Fast as simply as possible: forgive! You forgive me, and I forgive you. Let's all take that very seriously, take that home with us as we go home tonight. Say, "I must learn what it is to forgive" because that is why God Himself came to us, shared in our life. Jesus Christ the eternal Son of God became one of us came to us to teach us that forgiveness is of the essence of our life as human beings made in God's image.

To Him be glory, honor, and worship, now and unto ages of ages. Forgive me my brethren, in every way that I may have sinned against you!

*Transcribed by Nadia Colias*

*I would add this gloss: the debt we owe is to love one another as Christ has loved us. To the degree we have not loved each other thus, to that degree we are indebted to one another and need to ask forgiveness of the debt we have not paid. Fr. J.*

### The Sayings of St. Anthony the Great 6

*Abba Pambo asked Abba Anthony, "What ought I to do?" and the old man said to him, "Do not trust in your own righteousness, do not worry about the past, but control your tongue and your stomach."*

Saying 6 in *The Sayings of Desert Fathers*

*Commentary:* The unspoken, assumed goal in the question is "What should I do to be saved? to make progress in the spiritual life? to enter into union with Christ who through the incarnation entered into union with me?"

Trusting in one's own righteousness is a pitfall of those who have made some progress, and it is deadly to spiritual life. A man comes to trust in his moral goodness ("I'm not like those sinners"), in his generosity ("I tithe every month"), his faithful prayer ("I read all the morning and evening prayers every day"), his fasting ("I don't break the fast like some"), etc. It leads to comparing himself with others, considering himself better than others, to pride, vainglory, and judging of others. We must keep our eyes on Christ and the saints so we don't think that we have achieved some great righteousness in comparison with others around us. 'A haughty spirit goes before a fall', and judging others deprives us of God's grace. If there is any good in us, it is by Christ's grace and the power of the Holy Spirit in us, not of ourselves. Understanding that we have received the virtues and gifts that we have, we shall not glory in them as though we had not received them, that is, as though they were the product of our own efforts.

Sometimes the past continues to cast a shadow over our present life, either in our lamenting and despairing over our failures or in living in our past success. The past is gone. The future is not yet. We have only the present moment in which to live. There we live day-by-day trusting in God for everything. St. Paul says that he forgets what is behind and reaches for what is ahead to win the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Assuming we have thoroughly repented of our past sins and confessed them, we should not dwell on them or let the enemy bring us into despair over them. Instead, we keep our eyes on Christ who delivers us from the past and gives us a beginning of good.

Two things difficult to control must be brought into submission to Christ: our tongues and our stomachs. The Apostle James says that if a man can control his tongue, he is perfect, able to control the whole body as well. Our tongues are to be used to glory God and give thanks to Him, and to speak truth to edify and build up one another, as well as to enable us to carry out the necessary daily business of living. We tend to turn the use of the tongue into a sport for pleasure, to build ourselves up, to tear others down, for criticizing, cursing, blaming, judging. How much evil is brought into being in our world through the careless use of our tongues! How much harm we do to others merely to gratify our own egos or to advance our selfish interests! We lead others into sin

when we criticize, judge, and gossip about others. The Spirit is grieved and quenched in us and God's grace is lost through the misuse of the tongue.

"All man's labor is for his mouth, and yet the appetite is not filled," says Solomon (Ecclesiastes 6:7). Our need to eat drives us to work. But we can let our need for food become all-consuming and make satisfying the needs of our belly and body the goal of our life, whether consciously or, what is more likely, unconsciously. St. Paul writes about those who "are enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things" (Philippians 3:18-19). We make a god of our belly by living to eat and to satisfy the desire of the body for pleasure and comfort beyond what it truly needs. Man properly ordered is governed by his mind illumined by the light of Christ; the illumined mind guides both the will and emotions of the soul and the body. In disordered man, the desires of the body dictate to the will and mind, and man is governed by his god, the belly.

Though it is common for Christians monks to be accused of being obsessed with sexual matters, in fact, their greater concern was food: how to eat what is necessary to take care of the body so it can be a good servant, but not so much that the body usurps its place as servant of the soul and comes to subject the soul to its pleasures. Indeed, as we make progress in our life in Christ, we become increasingly aware that sexual intemperance has its root in intemperance of the tongue and belly. St. John Cassian in his *Conferences* goes so far as to assert that because Jesus conquered Satan's temptation to misuse food, He was not subsequently tempted sexually.

Controlling the tongue and belly will take us far on the path of salvation; allowing them free reign will keep us from making progress and will lead us to destruction.

*Fr. Justin Frederick*

### Liturgy of St. Basil

On the five Sundays of the Great Fast, instead of the usual Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, the Church celebrates the more ancient (and longer) Liturgy of St. Basil the Great. Identical in outline and structure, the Liturgy differs only in the length and detail of the prayers of the anaphora, which recount salvation history in great detail, and the prayers for the church and the world, which are far more comprehensive. Pay close attention, and you will appreciate the rich treasure that is the Liturgy of St. Basil.

### Upcoming Events 2015

- 22 February: Forgiveness Sunday. Forgiveness Vespers, 6:00 p.m., with Beth Marie's Ice Cream to follow. Plan to attend.
- 23-28 February: Clean Week, first week of the Great Fast, Great Canon of St. Andrew.
- 12 April: Holy Pascha, Feast of Feasts, Picnic

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!