

The Confessor's Tongue for May 24, A. D. 2015

Sunday of the Fathers of the First 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.

Sunday of the Holy Fathers

Devoting this Sunday to the memory of the Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council, the Holy Church sings: "Let us, the pious assembly of true believers, celebrate today in prayerful memory the God-bearing Fathers from every part of the world who assembled in the brilliant city of the Nicaea. For these pious wise ones put down the godless teachings of the terrible Arius, and expelled him from the unity of the Catholic Church, and clearly taught everyone to profess their faith in the consubstantial and coeternal Son of God, existing before the ages, expressing this clearly in the symbol of faith". The heresy of Arius was one of the most destructive heresies. It concerned the teaching about the divinity of the Son of God, i.e. that main doctrine of Christianity, on which all our faith and the whole Church of Christ is founded, which makes it the unique basis for all hope of our salvation. If the Arian heresy, rejecting the divinity of the Son of God, Jesus Christ, then exasperated the whole Church and carried away with itself a great many pastors and shepherds; if this heresy had overcome the true teaching of the Church and was made dominant; then for a long time Christianity itself would no longer exist and the whole world would be plunged into its former darkness of unbelief and superstitions.

The Holy Fathers at the First Ecumenical Council laid down the Orthodox teaching, having established it universally. And the Holy Church, after a comfortable time, glorifies these same Holy Fathers of Nicaea on the Sunday after the Ascension because the most glorious Ascension of the Lord serves as clear proof of the inseparable connection of the two natures in Jesus Christ, the divine and the human. In the service for the present day, the Holy Nicaean fathers are hymned, as "the hierarchs of Christ", "hierarchs, glorious pastors", "most blessed fathers of divine knowledge", "as luminous stars bright with the truth of Christ", "keepers of the known apostolic traditions", "O divine array, God-proclaiming knights of the Lord's company, most brilliant stars of the spiritual firmament, impregnable towers of the mystical Zion, fragrant flowers of Paradise, all-golden mouths of the Word, the praise of Nicaea, the adornment of the universe". Commemorating the efforts of the Holy Fathers of the Nicaea Council, the Holy Church glorifies them because they, "gathered all pastoral art and righteous ascetic passion, avenging the difficult rotten and pernicious wolves, with the sling of the spirit casting them out from church performance", "preaching peace, with the peace most of the world was united", and "all the gathered spiritual art and through the Divine Spirit immediately seeing the heavenly and honorable symbol of faith divinely written sketched out", i.e. as

St. Dmitri of Rostov says, "a true canon of the Christian faith". According to the manual of this hierarch, firmly containing this canon of the Orthodox faith in Christ, as the bright candlestick in the darkness of this world, we should go the way of the commandments of the Lord, in order for us to inherit a bright and blessed place. With all our life we should confess, that the Lord Jesus Christ is the true God and the perfect man, and He, our Savior, will call us true servants and His confessors (Mt. 10:2). With a loud voice we should most sweetly glorify the name of Christ, before whom every heavenly, earthly, infernal worldly knee bends, but the Lord will glorify us with heavenly glory for He says: "I will glorify those who glorify me". Continuously we should hymn Him as the true God, and He will bless us in this contemporary life with the fulfillment of His grace, and for the praise of our mouths He will satisfy our flesh and souls with the glory of eternal life in His kingdom of heaven where He in unapproachable glory reigns with the Unoriginate Father, the Coeternal and Life-creating Spirit to ages of ages without end. From S. V. Bulgakov, *Handbook for Church Servers*, 2 ed., 1274 pp. (Kharkov, 1900), pp. 0586-0589. Translated by Archbishop Eugene D. Tarris © all rights reserved.

Memorial Saturdays

The custom of offering prayers and sacrifices for the departed comes to us from the Old Testament. Holy Scripture praises the custom as holy and wholesome of pious, as is written in 2 Maccabees 12:45: "It is, therefore, a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead that they may be loosed from sins." IN the Orthodox Church, the commemoration of the dead is considered as one of the main works of mercy. Apostle Paul prayed for his devoted friend Onesiphorus that the Lord "grant him mercy" as he stands before God's judgment seat (2 Timothy 1:18).

The Apostolic Constitutions [fourth century] prescribed that during the celebration up the Divine Liturgy, the Deacon should remind the faithful to pray for the deceased, saying: "Let us pray for our brethren that are fallen asleep in Christ, that God, the Lover of mankind, who has received their souls, may forgive them every voluntary and involuntary sin, and may be merciful and gracious to them, placing them in the land of righteousness . . . where there is not pain, sorrow, or lamentation."

All the early Liturgies of the Church, including the most ancient one, the Liturgy of St. James, contain a prayer for the departed. In the Liturgies of St. Basil the Great and St. John Chrysostom, prayers for the deceased are also included. St. John Chrysostom interprets this as follows: "Not in vain did the Apostles order that remembrance should be made of the dead in the awesome Mysteries. They knew that great gain resulted to them (the deceased)

and great benefit. For when the whole assembly (of the people) stands with uplifted hands and that awesome Sacrifices lies displayed, how shall we not prevail with God by our entreaty for them? And this we do for those who have departed in faith! Let us assist them according to our power. Let us think of some advantage for them, small though it be, but let us assist them. How and in what way? By praying for them, by asking others to pray for them, and by constantly giving alms to the poor in their behalf!" [Homily on Philippians 3,4]

One of the most venerable traditions in the Church, equally observed in the West as in the East, is the commemoration of the departed in the liturgical prayers. It is the constant teaching of the Church since Apostolic times that our prayers, offerings, and good deeds can help the departed.

It is of great consolation for us, the surviving friends and relatives of our faithful departed, to be able to help them and thus remain united to them by a bond of everlasting love. St. Ambrose of Milan, preaching at the commemoration of Emperor Theodosius on the fortieth day after his death (in 395), consoled his survivors with the words: "I love the man and I will not abandon him until, by my tears and prayers, I shall lead him into the Holy Mountain of God (Psalm 2:6), where there is life eternal!"

Blessed are they whom Thou hast chosen and hast taken unto Thyself, O Lord! *Synaxarion*

A Criticism of the Lack of Concern for Doctrine Among Russian Orthodox Believers

Fr. George Florovsky

The late Metropolitan Eulogius was discussing the recent religious revival among Russians, both at home and in exile, during the early years of Russian emigration. The fact was obvious: there was an awakening. The reasons were obvious, also: the shock of tragic events, insecurity and uncertainty, suffering and fear. But exactly what was it that attracted Russians to the Church? The dogmas, the Orthodox doctrine? Yes, said the Metropolitan, so it was in the past, and especially in Byzantium among the Greeks, but not in Russia. There was a time when even lay people were deeply interested in questions of faith. But Russians, the Metropolitan contended, with the exception of the few educated theologians, have not yet reached the point at which they would be concerned with the problems of abstract theological thought, and in fact they are not interested in them at all. It may be, the Metropolitan conceded, that the Church has failed to develop an interest in theology among believers. But, in his opinion, the true reason for this lack of interest among the Russians was that they neither cherish, nor understand the theoretical aspect of the realization or embodiment of the Church's ideals in the lives of men. Above all, they cherish the ritual aspect of religion, the beauty of services, ikons, melodies, and the like. The Metropolitan proceeded to explain the emotional and educational value of the rites. He added, however,

that all this ritual may be little understood, and that people do not really know what truth is witnessed or symbolized in the rites. Yet, he contended, rites themselves are so touching and moving, exalting and inspiring, regardless of their meaning.

It is really embarrassing that there is so little concern for "dogmatic systems," as well as for the Doctrine of the Church, in various circles and quarters of the Orthodox society of our day, and that "devotion" is so often forcefully divorced from "faith." There is too much concern with "the vessels" and too little concern with the Treasure, which alone makes the vessel precious. Symbols and rites are vehicles of the truth, and if they fail to convey the truth, they simply cease to function. *Fr. George Florovsky*

Whether this is a fair description of the Russian approach to Christianity is open to doubt. But the attitude described by the late Metropolitan is typical of certain elements in the Russian Church. It is persistently asserted by various writers that Russians learn Christianity not from the Gospel but from the Lives of Saints. It is also asserted that for the Orthodox in general, Christianity is not "Doctrine" but "Life." The Orthodox are concerned not with "dogmatic systems" but with "living." They comprehend the truth not through the mediation of intellectual understanding, but through the mediation of "the heart" and in an aesthetical manner. One should look for Orthodox teaching not in systems but in images, rites and ikons. It is even asserted that in the Orthodox East there is "no theory of Christianity," but that instead there are saints, ikons, poetry and so on.

No Orthodox, and no Catholic, would deny the basic importance of sacred rites and the life of sanctity. What is embarrassing in the statements which we have just quoted is their exclusiveness, their emphasis on *not—but*. One should ask why "doctrinal systems" and "intellectual understanding" are so carefully restricted, so contemptuously devaluated and almost altogether eliminated. The balance seems to be broken. In any case, this over-emphasis on the "artistic" aspect of the ritual is not in agreement with the actual tradition of Orthodox art itself. And if one can be instructed by Orthodox hymnography and ikons, it is precisely because a very definite "theory of Christianity" is embodied and expressed there. "Theory" means above all "contemplation;" it is an insight and a vision, a poetic insight and an intellectual vision. According to Orthodox spiritual tradition, the *Nous* is the ruling power of the inner life, "*to hegemonikon*." Traditional Eastern Orthodox hymnography, inherited by Russians from the Greeks, is not just lyrics; it is marked not by emotion, but by sobriety. It is high poetry, indeed, but it is "metaphysical poetry," or rather "theological poetry," and does not hesitate to sometimes use elaborate theological terminology. Indeed, some of the greatest hymns of the Eastern Church are simply paraphrases

of dogmatic definitions: *a Son, who was born before ages of the Father without mother, and who hath in no way undergone either a change, or intermingling, or division, but hath preserved in their entirety the peculiarities of each nature* (Dogmatic Theotokion, in the 3rd tone.) This is precisely the definition of the Council of Chalcedon, and it requires theological understanding. It was aptly said that Orthodox Icons are "dogmatic monuments" (V. V. Bolotov.) They witness the same truth which is defined in doctrine, and according to the Seventh Ecumenical Council, they must be controlled by sound doctrine. In brief, there is no room for this disjunction: *not-but*. Of course, dogmas must be lived and not assessed by abstract thinking alone, but for that very reason it is misleading to urge *not* doctrine *but* life. This habit of division and disjunction only distorts the "life" itself. One cannot separate "spirituality" and "theology" in St. John of Damascus, or in St. Gregory of Nazianzus. One misses the very center of the spirituality of Father John of Kronstadt when it is deliberately "abstracted" from his theological vision. Holiness in the Orthodox tradition is always interpreted "theologically," and not in the categories of aesthetic emotion or exaltation, but in the categories of spiritual sobriety, in faithfulness to truth.

It is really embarrassing that there is so little concern for "dogmatic systems," as well as for the Doctrine of the Church, in various circles and quarters of the Orthodox society of our day, and that "devotion" is so often forcefully divorced from "faith." There is too much concern with "the vessels" and too little concern with the Treasure, which alone makes the vessel precious. Symbols and rites are vehicles of the truth, and if they fail to convey the truth, they simply cease to function. Unfortunately, it is often suggested that "interest in doctrines" is something rather archaic and is a Greek attitude rather than a Russian one (again, *not—but*). There is but one Orthodox Tradition of faith, and it transcends all national barriers. The feast of Orthodoxy, which we still faithfully celebrate on the first Sunday in Lent, is precisely a theological feast. The Legacy of Fathers is the core of our Orthodox tradition, and it is a theological legacy. The Doctrine of Fathers is the spring of Orthodoxy in life. One is fully justified in contending that our modern confusion in life comes directly from the contemporary neglect of "sound teaching," from the lack of "sound learning" in matters of faith.

Orthodoxy stands by its faithfulness to the Seven Ecumenical Councils. It is so often forgotten that the Councils were engaged precisely in the formulation of Christian Doctrine, in the elaboration of "dogmatic systems." Is it a step forward that now we are not moved or impressed by the dogmatic teachings of those great men who gave their entire lives to the establishment of the Right Faith, of Orthodoxy? We praise the Three Hierarchs, who were above all the ecumenical *teachers*, the teachers of the right faith, but we are strangely indifferent to their perennial

contribution to the life of the Church: namely—their teaching, their theology, their interpretation of the Christian truth "in the words of reason." And do we not need, as a matter of first priority, for our intellect to be illuminated by the "Light of Reason" in the present days of intellectual confusion? Without a sober guidance, without the stable element of sound doctrine, our feelings would but err and our hearts would be blinded.

One should accept the present revival of religion, the awakening of the heart, as a gift of Grace, as a token of Divine Mercy, but also as a stern summons and invitation to study and understanding, to the Knowledge of Truth which embraces our Eternal Life. There is an unfortunate prejudice, one which does not stem from Orthodox sources, that "doctrines" are abstract and "theology" is intellectualism. Our Lord and Redeemer is the Logos, and He illumines all men; and the Holy Spirit, the Giver of Life, is the Spirit of Truth. "Emotions" are human moods, but the truth is Divine.

Let us adorn the vessels, but not forget that vessels are of clay. Yet in them an Eternal Treasure is hidden: the Word of Life.

The Ascension of Our Lord Jesus Christ

The Great Feast of the Ascension has a post-feast of nine days, concluding on the Friday before Pentecost.

During the nine days of the Ascension, we say or sing the troparion and kontakion of the Feast at meals and during our usual morning and evening prayers. The troparion also replaces the prayer "O Heavenly King" wherever it is usually taken. We do not use "O Heavenly King" until Pentecost.

Ascension, Troparion, tone 4

Thou hast ascended in glory, O Christ our God, / granting joy to Thy disciples by the promise of the Holy Spirit. / Through the blessing they were assured / that Thou art the Son of God, / the Redeemer of the world.

Ascension, Kontakion, tone 6

When Thou didst fulfill the dispensation for our sake / and unite earth to heaven; / Thou didst ascend in glory, O Christ our God, / not being parted from those who love Thee, / but remaining with them and crying: / I am with you and no one will be against you!

Prayers for Travellers

When travelling, whether a long distance or short, we do well to pray the following Troparion & Kontakion.

O Christ the Way, the Truth and the Life, as Thou didst send Raphael the Archangel as a guide for Tobias, so now send Thine Angel to accompany Thy servant, and may he protect from every evil thing. Bless this journey, that Thy name may be glorified, O Lover of Man, through the Theotokos.

O Savior, as Thou didst walk to Emmaus with Luke and Cleopas, now accompany Thy servant in his travels, deliver him from the assaults of the evil one, for in Thy will all things are possible, O Lover of Man.

The Sayings of St. Anthony the Great 18

Some brothers were coming from Scetis to see Abba Anthony. When they were getting into a boat to go there, they found an old man who also wanted to go there. The brothers did not know him. They sat in the boat, occupied in turns with the words of the Fathers, Scripture, and their manual work. As for the old man, he remained silent. When they arrived on shore, they found that the old man was going to the cell of Abba Anthony too. When they reached the place, Anthony said to them, 'You found this old man a good companion for the journey?' Then he said to the old man, 'You have brought many good brethren with you, father.' The old man said, 'No doubt they are good, but they do not have a door to their house, and anyone who wishes can enter the stable and loose the ass.' He meant that the brethren said whatever came into their mouths.

Saying 18 in *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*

Commentary: In the armed forces there is a saying (originally coined by the US War Office for use on the home front in World War Two) "Loose lips sink ships." In time of war, careless talk about the military, its deployment, and its plans can lead to disaster when that information comes to the ears of the enemy. Even to this day, soldiers deployed on active duty are not permitted to reveal even to their families exactly where they serve. Information is given out only on a 'need to know' basis for security.

Christians may be likened to ships on the stormy sea of life seeking their calm haven in Christ. There the enemy batters them with waves of temptation. Lack of care and discernment in using the tongue invites waves of temptation and weakens the ship's ability to ride out the storm safely. Spiritual shipwreck may ensue rather than safe arrival at the destination. King Solomon in his Proverbs (10:19) writes, "In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin: but he that refraineth his lips is wise." Many Christians have had the experience of being filled with grace through Confession and Holy Communion only to have it depart after allowing words of judgment or complaint to escape their lips. A perfect man has bridled his tongue (James 3), and even a fool, when he keeps quiet, may be counted wise, but not bridling the tongue opens the stable door to let loose the ass within, by which one suffers loss.

Certainly sinful words harm the soul and grieve the Holy Spirit within, but even good words to excess can lead to harm. For example, talking with others indiscriminately about spiritual blessings and gifts can lead to their loss and the assault of temptations. Telling others of a victory over a particular sin may open the door to being tempted by that sin again if

the telling was accompanied by pride or vainglory. Even in speaking about God, the Scriptures, and other spiritual things, one can speak to excess, and one's good words become bad thereby. In the multitude of words [even good ones!] sin is unavoidable.

Solomon says in Ecclesiastes (3:7), "There is a time to keep silence and a time to speak." Notice that silence comes before speech. By avoiding sinful and excessive words, by refraining one's lips, one learns wisdom to speak to the profit of others and oneself. The monastic rule for speech, according to St. Nikon of Optina, says, "Do not begin a conversation yourself, not being asked something." A strict application of this word may be too much for the faithful in the world, but a selective use of it would help deliver one from many idle words.

What is more, talk tends to displace prayer and the remembrance of God. "Be still and know that I am God," says the Lord, but we fill our lives with noise and chatter. Especially when it comes to problems in the Church or the world, the temptation to address them through extensive conversations with others rather than bringing them before God in prayer is almost irresistible. Consider how our lives would be different if just half the time we now typically spend talking to others (including blogging, texting, etc.) we spent consciously praying to God instead, and the amount of time we now typically spend in prayer was all we had for chatter!

If the battle with the tongue seems hopeless, one may take the counsel of St. Hilarion of Optina with great profit: "During conversation with others, it is no hindrance to be cautious in speech, and, at the same time, one can retain the Jesus Prayer in the mind." Hereby one will find aid against speaking unto the sinking of the ship or the loosing of the ass.

Fr. Justin Frederick

Praying Service on the Prayer Rope

A custom exists in the Church of praying services on a prayer rope when one cannot attend services in the church. This custom can be of use to us. If the church is too far for us to travel to more than once a week and we don't have the books needed to read the service at home, we can pray with the Church at Vigil in preparation for the Sunday Liturgy or for a Feast on the prayer rope with attentive awareness that we stand in the presence of God. "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me."

Here is a schedule commonly used:

1 kathisma of the Psalter	300 knots
1 stasis of the Psalter	100 knots
Midnight Service (Nocturnes)	600 knots
Matins	1500 knots
Hours (per Hour)	250 knots
Vespers	600 knots
Small Compline	400 knots
Great Compline	700 knots

Upcoming Events 2015

25 May Memorial Day Picnic
31 May Holy Pentecost

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!