

# The Confessor's Tongue for June 7, A. D. 2015

First Sunday after Pentecost: All Saints

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.

## Introduction to *The Lives of the Saints*

St. Justin Popovich

*A rousing reflection on what a saint is and our calling to be holy, most suitable for this Sunday of All Saints*

Until the coming of the Lord Christ into our terrestrial world, we men really knew only about death and death knew about us. Everything human was penetrated, captured, and conquered by death. Death was closer to us than we ourselves and more real than we ourselves, and more powerful, incomparably more powerful than every man individually and all men together. Earth was a dreadful prison of death, and we people were the helpless slaves of death. Only with the God-man Christ "life was manifested"; "eternal life" appeared to us hopeless mortals, the wretched slaves of death. And that "eternal life" we men have "seen with our eyes and handled with our hands," and we Christians "make manifest eternal life" to all. For living in union with the Lord Christ, we live eternal life even here on earth. We know from personal experience that Jesus Christ is the true God and eternal life. And for this did He come into the world: to show us the true God and eternal life in Him. Genuine and true love for man consists of this, only of this: that God sent His Only-Begotten Son into the world that we might live through Him (1 John 4: 9) and through Him live eternal life. Therefore, he who has the Son of God has life; he who has not the Son of God has not life (1 John 5: 12)—he is completely in death. Life in the one true God and Lord Jesus Christ is really our only true life because it is wholly eternal and completely stronger than death. Can a life which is infected by death and which ends in death really be called life? just as honey is not honey when it is mixed with a poison which gradually turns all the honey into poison, so a life which ends in death is not life.

There is no end to the love of the Lord Christ for man: because for us men to acquire the life eternal which is in Him, and to live by Him, nothing is required of us—no learning, nor glory, nor wealth, nor anything else that one of us does not have, but rather only that which each of us can have. And that is? Faith in the Lord Christ. For this reason did He, the Only Friend of Man, reveal to the human race this wondrous good tidings: God so loved the world that He gave His Only-Begotten Son so that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. He that believes in the Son has eternal life (John 3: 16-36). As the one true God giving people what no angel or man can give them, the Lord Christ alone in the human race had the boldness and right to declare: verily, verily I say unto you: he that believes in me has eternal life (John 6: 47), and he has already passed from death unto life (John 5: 24).

Faith in the Lord Christ unites man with the eternal Lord Who, according to the measure of man's faith, pours out in his soul eternal life so that he then feels and realizes himself to be eternal. And this he feels to a greater degree inasmuch as he lives according to that faith which gradually sanctifies his soul, heart, conscience, his entire being, by the grace-filled Divine energies. In proportion to the faith of a man the sanctification of his nature increases. And the holier the man is, the stronger and more vivid is his feeling of personal immortality and the consciousness

of his own and everybody else's immortality.

Actually, a man's real life begins with his faith in the Lord Christ, which commits all his soul, all his heart, all his strength to the Lord Christ, Who gradually sanctifies, transfigures, deifies them. And through that sanctification, transfiguration, and deification the grace-filled Divine energies, which give him the all-powerful feeling and consciousness of personal immortality and personal eternity, are poured out upon him. In reality, our life is life inasmuch as it is in Christ. And as much as it is in Christ is shown by its holiness: the holier a life, the more immortal and more eternal it is.

Opposed to this process is death. What is death? Death is ripened sin; and ripened sin is separation from God, in Whom alone is life and the source of life. This truth is evangelical and Divine: holiness is life, sinfulness is death; piety is life, atheism is death; faith is life, unbelief is death; God is life, the devil is death. Death is separation from God, and life is returning to God and living in God. Faith is indeed the revival of the soul from lethargy, the resurrection of the soul from the dead: "he was dead, and is alive: (Luke 15: 24). Man experienced this resurrection of the soul from death for the first time with the God-man Christ and constantly experiences it in His holy Church, since all of Him is found in Her. And He gives Himself to all believers through the holy mysteries and the holy virtues. Where He is, there is no longer death: there one has already passed from death to life. With the Resurrection of Christ we celebrate the deadening of death, the beginning of a new, eternal life.

True life on earth indeed begins from the Resurrection of the Savior, for it does not end in death. Without the Resurrection of Christ human life is nothing else but a gradual dying which finally inevitably ends in death. Real true life is that life which does not end in death. And such a life became possible on earth only with the Resurrection of the Lord Christ the God-man. Life is real life only in God, for it is a holy life and by virtue of this an immortal life. just as in sin is death, so in holiness is immortality. Only with faith in the risen Lord Christ does man experience the most crucial miracle of his existence: the passover from death to immortality, from transitoryness into eternity, from hell to heaven. Only then does man find himself, his true self, his eternal self: "for he was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found" (Luke 15: 24).

What are Christians? Christians are Christ-bearers, and by virtue of this bearers and possessors of eternal life, and this according to the measure of faith and according to the measure of holiness which is from faith. The Saints are the most perfect Christians, for they have been sanctified to the highest degree with the podvigs of holy faith in the risen and eternally-living Lord Christ and no death has power over them. Their life is entirely from the Lord Christ, and for this reason it is entirely Christ's life; and their thought is entirely Christ's thought; and their perception is Christ's perception. All that they have is first Christ's and then theirs. If the soul, it is first Christ's and then theirs: if life, it is first Christ's and then theirs. In them is nothing of themselves but rather wholly and in everything the Lord Christ.

Therefore, the Lives of the Saints are nothing else but the life of the Lord Christ, repeated in every saint to a

greater or lesser degree in this or that form. More precisely it is the life of the Lord Christ continued through the Saints, the life of the incarnate God the Logos, the God-man Jesus Christ who became man. This was so that as man He could give and transmit to us His divine life; so that as God by His life he could sanctify and make immortal and eternal our human life on earth. "For both he who sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one" (Heb. 2: 11).

The Lord Christ made this possible and realizable in the world of man from the time that He became man, partook of flesh and blood, and thus became a Brother of man, a Brother according to flesh and blood. Having become man but having remained God, the God-man led a holy, sinless, Divine-human life on earth, and by this life, death, and Resurrection, annihilated the devil and his dominion of death and by this act gave and constantly gives His grace-filled energies to those who believe in Him, so that they may annihilate the devil and every death and every temptation. That Divine-human life is found entirely in the Divine-human Body of Christ—the Church—and is constantly experienced in the Church as an earthly-heavenly whole, and by individuals according to the measure of their faith.

The lives of the saints are in fact the life of the Godman Christ, which is poured out into His followers and is experienced by them in His Church. For the smallest part of this life is always directly from Him because He is life, infinite and boundless and eternal life, which by His Divine power vanquished all deaths and resurrects from all deaths. According to the all-true and good tidings of the All-True One: "I am the resurrection and the life" (John 11: 25). The miraculous Lord who is completely "resurrection and life" is in His Church in His whole being as Divine-human reality, and consequently there is no end to the duration of this reality. His life is continued through all ages; every Christian is of the same body with Christ, and he is a Christian because he lives the Divine-human life of this Body of Christ as Its organic cell.

Who is a Christian? A Christian is a man who lives by Christ and in Christ. The commandment of the Holy Gospel of God is divine: "live worthily of God" (Col. 1: 10). God, Who became incarnate and Who as the Godman has in entirety remained in His Church, which lives eternally by Him. And one lives "worthily of God" when one lives according to the Gospel of Christ. Therefore, this Divine commandment of the Holy Gospel is also natural: "Live worthily of the Gospel of Christ" (Phillip. 1: 27).

Life according to the Gospel, holy life, Divine life, that is the natural and normal life for Christians. For Christians, according to their vocation, are holy: That good tiding and commandment resounds throughout the whole Gospel of the New Testament. To become completely holy, both in soul and in body, that is our vocation. This is not a miracle, but rather the norm, the rule of faith. The commandment of the Holy Gospel is clear and most clear: as the Holy One who has called you is Holy, so be ye holy in all manner of life (1 Peter 1: 15). And that means that according to Christ the Holy One, Who, having been incarnate and become man, showed forth in Himself a completely holy life, and as such commands men: "be ye holy, for I am Holy" (1 Peter 1: 16). He has the right to command this, for having become man He gives men as Himself, the Holy One, all the Divine energies which [are] necessary for a holy and pious life in this world. Having united themselves spiritually and by Grace to the Holy One—the Lord Christ—with the help of faith,

Christians themselves receive from Him the holy energies that they may lead a holy life.

Living by Christ, the saints can do the works of Christ, for by Him they become not only powerful but all-powerful: "I can do all things in Christ Jesus who strengthens me" (Phillip. 4: 13). And in them is clearly realized the truth of the All-True One, that those who believe in Him will do His works and will do greater things than these: "Verily, verily I say unto you: he that believeth in me, the works that I do he shall do also and greater works than these shall he do" (John 14: 12). And truly: the shadow of the Apostle Peter healed; by a word St. Mark the Ascetic moved and stopped a mountain... When God became man, then Divine life became human life, Divine power became human power, Divine truth became human truth, and Divine righteousness became human righteousness: everything which is God's became man's.

What are the "Acts of the Holy Apostles"? They are the acts of Christ which the Holy Apostles do by the power of Christ, or better still: they do them by Christ Who is in them and acts through them. And what are the lives of the Holy Apostles? They are the living of Christ's life which in the Church is transmitted to all faithful followers of Christ and is continued through them with the help of the holy mysteries and the holy virtues.

And what are the "Lives of the Saints"? They are nothing else but a certain kind of continuation of the "Acts of the Apostles." In them is found the same Gospel, the same life, the same truth, the same righteousness, the same love, the same faith, the same eternity, the same "power from on high," the same God and Lord. For "the Lord Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever" (Heb. 13: 8): the same for all people of all times, distributing the same gifts and the same Divine energies to all who believe in Him. This continuation of all life-creating Divine energies in the Church of Christ from ages to ages and from generation to generation indeed constitutes living Holy Tradition. This Holy Tradition is continued without interruption as the life of Grace in all Christians, in whom through the holy mysteries and the holy virtues, Jesus Christ lives by His Grace. He is wholly present in His Church, for She is His fullness: "the fullness of Him who filleth all in all" (Eph. 1: 23). And the God-man Christ is the all-perfect fullness of the Godhead: "for in Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (Col. 2: 4). And Christians must, with the help of the holy mysteries and the holy virtues, fill themselves with "all the fullness of God" (Eph. 3: 19).

The Lives of the Saints show forth those persons filled with Christ God, those Christ-bearing persons, those holy persons in whom is preserved and through whom is transmitted the holy tradition of that holy grace-filled life. It is preserved and transmitted by means of holy evangelical living. For the lives of the saints are holy evangelical truths which are translated into our human life by grace and podvigs (asceticism). There is no evangelical truth which cannot be transformed into human life. They were all brought by Christ God for one purpose: to become our life, our reality, our possession, our joy. And the saints, all, without exception, live these Divine truths as the center of their lives and the essence of their being. For this reason the "Lives" of the Saints are a proof and a testimony: that our origin is in heaven; that we are not from this world but from that one; that a man is a true man only in God; that on earth one lives by heaven; that "our conversation is in heaven" (Phillip. 3: 20); that our task is to make ourselves heavenly, feeding ourselves with

the "heavenly bread" which came down to earth. And He came down to feed us with eternal Divine truth, eternal Divine good, eternal Divine righteousness, eternal Divine love, eternal Divine life through Holy Communion, through living in the one true God and Lord Jesus Christ.

In other words, our vocation is to fill ourselves with the Lord Christ, with His Divine life-creating energies, to live in Christ and to make ourselves christ. If you set about this you are already in heaven although you walk on earth; you are already wholly in God even though your being has remained within the limits of human nature. The man who makes himself a christ surpasses himself, as man, by God, by the God-man, in Whom is given the perfect image of the true, real whole man in the image of God; and in Him are also given the all-vanquishing Divine energies, by the help of which man raises himself above every sin, above every death, above every hell; and this he does by the Church and in the Church, which all the powers of hell cannot overcome, because in Her is the whole wondrous God-man the Lord Christ, with all His Divine energies, His truths, His realities, His perfections, His lives, His eternities.

The Lives of the Saints are holy testimonies of the miraculous power of our Lord Jesus Christ. In reality they are the testimonies of the Acts of the Apostles, only continued throughout the ages. The saints are nothing other than holy witnesses, like the Holy Apostles who were the first witnesses—of what?, of the God-man Jesus Christ: of Him crucified, resurrected, ascended into heaven and eternally alive; about His all-saving Gospel which is unceasingly written with evangelical holy deeds from generation to generation, for the Lord Christ, who is always the same, constantly works miracles by His Divine power through His holy witnesses. The Holy Apostles are the first holy witnesses of the Lord Christ and His Divine-human economy of the salvation of the world, and their lives are living and immortal testimonies of the Gospel of the Savior as the new life, the life of grace, holy, Divine, Divine-human and therefore always miraculous, miraculous and true as the Savior's life itself is miraculous and true.

And who are the Christians? Christians are those through whom the holy Divine-human life of Christ is continued from generation to generation until the end of the world and of time, and they all make up one body, the Body of Christ—the Church: they are sharers of the Body of Christ and members of one another. The stream of immortal divine life began to flow and still flows unceasingly from the Lord Christ, and through him Christians flow into eternal life. Christians are the Gospel of Christ continued throughout all the ages of the race of men. In the Lives of the Saints, everything is ordinary as in the Holy Gospel, but everything is extraordinary as in the Holy Gospel—both one and the other, uniquely true and real. And everything is true and real by the same Divine-human reality; and the same holy power—Divine and human—bears witness to it: Divine in an all-perfect way, and human—also in an all-perfect way.

What are the Lives of the Saints? Behold, we are in heaven, for earth becomes heaven through the Saints of God. Behold, we are among angels in the flesh, among Christ-bearers. And whoever they are, the Lord is completely in them, and with them, and among them; and there is the whole Eternal Divine Truth, and the whole Eternal Divine Righteousness, and the whole Eternal Divine Love, and the whole Eternal Divine Life.

What are the Lives of the Saints? Behold, we are in Paradise, in which everything which is Divine, holy,

immortal, eternal, righteous, true, and evangelical grows and increases. For by the Cross in every one of the saints the tree of eternal, Divine, immortal life blossomed and brought forth much fruit. And the Cross leads to heaven; it leads even us after the thief, who for our encouragement entered Paradise first after the All-Holy Divine Cross-bearer—the Lord Christ—and entered with a cross of repentance.

What are the Lives of the Saints? Behold, we are in eternity: no longer is there time, for in the Saints of God Eternal Divine Truth, Eternal Divine Righteousness, Eternal Divine Love, Eternal Divine Life reign and rule. And in them there is no longer any death, for their entire being is filled with the resurrecting Divine energies of the Risen Lord Christ, the Only Vanquisher of death, of all deaths in all worlds. There is no death in them—in holy people: their whole being is filled with the Only Immortal One—the All-Immortal One: the Lord and God Jesus Christ. Among them—we are on earth among the only true immortals: they have conquered all deaths, all sins, all passions, all demons, all hells. When we are with them, no death can harm us, for they are the lightning-rods of death. There is no thunderbolt with which death can strike us when we are with them, among them, in them.

Saints are people who live on earth by holy, eternal Divine truths. That is why the Lives of the Saints are actually applied dogmatics, for in them all the holy eternal dogmatic truths are experienced in all their life-creating and creative energies. In The Lives of the Saints it is most evidently shown that dogmas are not only ontological truths in themselves and for themselves, but that each one of them is a wellspring of eternal life and a source of holy spirituality.

According to the All-True Gospel of the unique and irreplaceable Savior and Lord: "My words are spirit and life" (John 6: 63), for each one pours out from itself saving, sanctifying, a life-creating, transfiguring power. Without the holy truth of the Holy Trinity we have none of that power from the Holy Trinity on which we draw by faith and which vivifies sanctifies, deifies, and saves us. Without the holy truth about the God-man, there is no salvation for man, for from it, when it is lived by man, wells forth the saving power which saves from sin, death, the devil.

And this holy truth about the God-man—do not the lives of countless saints most evidently and experimentally bear witness to it? For the saints are saints by the very fact that they constantly live the entire Lord Jesus as the soul of their soul, as the conscience of their conscience, as the mind of their mind, as the being of their being, as the life of their life. And each one of them together with the Holy Apostle loudly proclaims the truth: "Yet not I live, but Christ liveth in me" (Gal. 2: 20). Delve into the Lives of the Saints: from all of them wells forth the grace-filled, life-creating, and saving power of the Most Holy Theotokos, Who leads them from podvig to podvig, from virtue to virtue, from victory over sin to victory over death, from victory over death to victory over the devil, and leads them up into spiritual joy, beyond which there is no sadness nor sighing nor sorrow, [19] but rather everything is only "joy and peace in the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 14: 17), joy and peace from the victory obtained over all sins, over all passions, over all deaths, over all evil spirits.

And all this, without a doubt, is the practical and living testimony to the holy dogma concerning the Most Holy Theotokos, truly "more honorable than the Cherubim and beyond compare more glorious than the Seraphim," the holy dogma which the saints by faith carry in their hearts

and by which they live with zealous love. Again if you want one, two, or thousands of irrefutable testimonies of the life-bearing and life-creating nature of the All-Venerable Cross of the Lord, and with it an experimental confirmation of the all-truthfulness of the holy dogma of the saving nature of the death of the Savior on the Cross, then start out with faith through the Lives of the Saints. And you will have to feel and see that to each saint individually, and to all the saints together, the power of the Cross is the all-vanquishing weapon with which they conquer all visible and invisible enemies of their salvation. Furthermore, you will behold the Cross in all their being: in their soul, in their heart, in their conscience, in their mind, in their will, and in their body, and in each one of them you will find an inexhaustible wellspring of the saving, all-sanctifying power which unfailingly leads them from perfection to perfection, and from joy to joy, until finally it leads them into the eternal Heavenly Kingdom where there is the unceasing triumph of those who keep festival and the infinite delight of those who behold the ineffable beauty of the face of the Lord.

But not only these aforementioned dogmas are witnessed by the Lives of the Saints, but all the other holy dogmas: of the Church, of grace, of the holy mysteries, of the holy virtues, of man, of sin, of the holy relics, of the holy icons, of life beyond the grave, and of everything else which makes up the Divine-human economy of salvation. Yes, the Lives of the Saints are experimental dogmatics. Yes, the Lives of the Saints are experienced dogmatics, experienced by the holy life of the holy people of God.

In addition, the Lives of the Saints contain in themselves Orthodox ethics in their entirety, Orthodox morality, in the full radiance of its Divine-human sublimity and its immortal life-creating nature. In them is shown and proven in a most convincing manner that the holy mysteries are the source of the holy virtues; that the holy virtues are the fruit of the holy mysteries—they are born of Them, they develop by Their help, they are nourished by Them, they live by Them, they are perfected by Them, they become immortal by Them, they live eternally by Them. All the Divine moral laws have their source in the holy mysteries and are realized in the holy virtues. For this reason the Lives of the Saints are indeed experiential ethics, applied ethics. Actually, the Lives of the Saints prove irrefutably that Ethics is nothing other than Applied Dogmatics. The entire Life of the Saints consists of the holy mysteries and the holy virtues, and the holy mysteries and the holy virtues are gifts of the Holy Spirit Who accomplishes all in all (1 Cor. 12: 4, 6, 11).

And what else are the Lives of the Saints but the only Orthodox pedagogical science. For in them in a countless number of evangelical ways, which are completely worked out by the experience of many centuries, it is shown how the perfect human personality, the completely ideal man, is built up and fashioned, and how with the help of the holy mysteries and the holy virtues in the Church of Christ he grows into "a perfect man, according to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." And this is indeed the educational ideal of the Gospel, the only educational ideal worthy of a being made in the image of God, as man is, and which is established by the Gospel of the Lord Christ, established and realized first by the God-man Christ, and afterwards realized in the Holy Apostles and the other Saints of God. At the same time, without the God-man Christ, and outside the God-man Christ, with any other educational ideal, man forever remains an incomplete being, a wretched being, a miserable being, who deserves

all the tears of all eyes in God's worlds.

If you wish, the Lives of the Saints are a sort of Orthodox Encyclopedia. In them can be found everything which is necessary for the soul which hungers and thirsts for eternal righteousness and eternal truth in this life, and which hungers and thirsts for Divine immortality and eternal life. If faith is what you need, there you will find it in abundance: and you will feed your soul with food which will never make it hungry. If you need love, truth, righteousness, hope, meekness, humility, repentance, prayer, or whatever virtue or *podvig*, in them, the Lives of the Saints, you will find a countless number of holy teachers for every *podvig* and will obtain grace-filled help for every virtue.

If you are suffering for your faith in Christ, the Lives of the Saints will console you and encourage you and make you bold and give you wings, and your torments will be changed into joy. If you are in any sort of temptation, the Lives of the Saints will help you overcome it both now and forever. If you are in danger from the invisible enemies of salvation, the Lives of the Saints will arm you with the "whole armor of God," and you will crush them all now and forever and throughout your whole life. If you are in the midst of visible enemies and persecutors of the Church of Christ, the Lives of the Saints will give you the courage and strength of a confessor, and you will fearlessly confess the one true God and Lord in all worlds—Jesus Christ—and you will boldly stand up for the holy truth of His Gospel unto death, unto every death, and you will feel stronger than all deaths, and much more so than all visible enemies of Christ, and being tortured for Christ you will shout for joy, feeling with all your being that your life is in heaven, hidden with Christ in God, wholly above all deaths.

In the Lives of the Saints are shown numerous but always certain ways of salvation, enlightenment, sanctification, transfiguration, "christification," deification; all the ways are shown by which man conquers sin, every sin; conquers passion, every passion; conquers death, every death; conquers the devil, every devil. There is a remedy there for every sin: from every passion—healing, from every death-resurrection, from every devil—deliverance; from all evils—salvation. There is no passion, no sin for which the Lives of the Saints do not show how the passion or sin in question is conquered, mortified, and uprooted.

In them it is clearly and obviously demonstrated: There is no spiritual death from which one cannot be resurrected by the Divine power of the risen and ascended Lord Christ; there is no torment, there is no misfortune, there is no misery, there is no suffering which the Lord will not change either gradually or all at once into quiet, compunctionate joy because of faith in Him. And again there are countless soul-stirring examples of how a sinner becomes a righteous man in the Lives of the Saints: how a thief, a fornicator, a drunkard, a sensualist, a murderer, an adulterer becomes a holy man—there are many, many examples of this in the Lives of the Saints; how a selfish, egoistical, unbelieving, atheistic, proud, avaricious, lustful, evil, wicked, depraved, angry, spiteful, quarrelsome, malicious, envious, malevolent, boastful, vainglorious, unmerciful, gluttonous man becomes a man of God—there many, many examples of this in the Lives of the Saints. . . .

#### Upcoming Events 2015

8-28 June Apostles' Fast

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!