

# The Confessor's Tongue for December 18, A. D. 2016

26<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost, Sunday Before Nativity

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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## God Has Entered the Bosom of Human Life

*Nativity Homily 1970*

*St. Justin of Chelije*

Christ is Born! Truly, God has been born as Man, on earth! Why? "That we might live through Him" (I John 4: 9). For without the Incarnate God, the God-Man Lord Jesus Christ, human life is overall, a completely suicidal absurdity; death is truly the most obvious and awful absurdity on earth. To comprehend death is to comprehend life — all of the height and depth, the boundless eternity, of life. This is something accomplished only by the All-man-loving Lord, Who in His immeasurable love becomes man, while ever remaining God Incarnate, God-Man in the world of man. Human life acquires its eternal meaning, its purpose, as Divine-life, life in God. Outside of God, life is absurd and utter nonsense, filled to overflowing with offense and bitterness.

Only in God, O man, does your life find its sole rational, logical meaning. And your intelligence, my brother, your human thought, finds its Divine and eternal meaning only in God, only as Divine-intelligence. It is only in the God-Man Lord Jesus Christ that Human thought becomes Divine intelligence.

Likewise, only in God do your senses, O man, find their Divine, eternal purpose. Lacking that, your senses are but your most merciless torturer, constantly crucifying you on an eternal cross, with no resurrection to follow.

And your conscience? Where do we people find this savage stranger? It is only through Divine-conscience that it unites itself with its divine, eternal, purpose. Without it, human conscience is also a savage and terrible absurdity.

And your death and mine, everyone's death overall: in all of Creation, is it not the cruelest torture within human existence? Yes, that is truly so. Yet even it achieves its eternal meaning and purpose only through the death and Resurrection of the God-Man, our Lord Jesus Christ, for through Him, through Him alone, is the victory over death accomplished, and does death in the human world have meaning.

Likewise, it is only as the good and grace-filled God-Man, in the worshipping and all-quickening Body of Christ the Incarnate God — the Church — that all mankind, all humanity in its infinite variety, discovers its Divine, eternal, Godly and human higher meaning.

With His Incarnation, becoming Man, God entered most patently entered into the womb, the bosom of human life, entered into the blood, the heart, and the center of all existence. Through His Incarnation, by becoming Man, God, Whom man had voluntarily crowded out of the human world, out of the human soul, comes back into the world, into the

body, into the soul. He becomes fully Man, and being Him, labors for man, makes his abode in the world, in the midst of His Creation; He saves Creation, exercises His Providence over Creation, sanctifies and saves Creation, transfigures and deifies Creation. God's Incarnation is the greatest, most staggering, and most providential event to have occurred either on earth or in Heaven, for in [the Incarnation] the miracle of miracles is accomplished. If, to date, the greatest miracle had been the creation of the world out of nothing, God's Incarnation as Man surely surpasses it as a miracle. If in the creation of the world, God's words were transformed into matter, in the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ, God Himself took on a body and became matter, became flesh. Thus God's Incarnation became providential for each individual, for each creature throughout all Creation.

As for you: live in Him, live in God-Man, and you will be healed of all deaths, sins, passions, and of every work of the devil. Let your life become Divine-life. In that, O man, as soon as you become a member of the Church, a member of the Divine-human Body of Christ, rests all of the Mystery of Heaven on earth: And how does one live in the Church of Christ? Live by the Holy Mysteries and the Holy Virtues. This is why the Feast of the Nativity is preceded by a Fast. Fasting is the first among the virtues, and is always accompanied by prayer. Those two fundamental virtues lead man to God-Man, and through Divine Wisdom teach him how to live by Him and in Him.

And what is to be done with the body given you by God? — Purify it, free it from all uncleanness, from all passion, from all evil, from every demon. What does that mean? It means to purify it of every sin, for the devil hides in any sin, in every sin the devil works without regard to your free will. In great sins, it is prince of demons, in little sins, a little demon. You and I and everyone else, have been given all of the resources with which to defeat all of those demons, all of the passions, all of the sins, all of the deaths in us and in the world around us. First and foremost among those resources are prayer and fasting. From the truthful lips of the Lord Jesus Christ, who always speaks the real Truth, [we hear] the life-giving truth: "This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting." (Matthew 17: 21),- "this kind" of all manner of sins, all manner of passions, all manner of demons.

Lying before you and me, before all of us, brothers and sisters, is the Nativity: God is born as a person "so that we might receive life through Him" and so that through God we might perfect both soul and body. That is something easiest to achieve through prayer and fasting, which cleanse and purify both body and soul, so that the sweetest Divine Infant, our Lord Jesus, might joyously come to dwell in them, and that by God our human essence, in all its infinite

variety might be fulfilled and perfected. For that was why your body and your soul, O man, were created, so that they might be fulfilled through God and [you] might live in God in God's kingdom above. Our God-given teachers in this matter are humble prayer and fasting with humility. They are sacred and fundamental virtues [found in the] Gospels. May they soar with us, may they anticipate and proclaim to us and to all people throughout Creation the all-salvific and all-joyous Good News: Christ is born! *The Nativity of Christ, 1970*

### The Commandments of Christ

"If ye love Me, keep My commandments."

*Ye have heard that it hath been said, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy.' But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you, that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven. . . Matthew 5:43-44*

The Christian through Jesus Christ is given the inestimable privilege of calling the eternal God, his Creator, "Father", and the power to become a child of God not in name alone but in character. And what is God's character? Christ tells us of His Father "He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust" (Matt 5:45). The Apostle Paul adds "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). In other words, God indiscriminately loves man made in His image, each one alike, and Christ commands us to do likewise. The Christian may not limit himself to loving his friends and relatives but must extend his love to his enemies if he is to take on the character of his heavenly Father.

"Who is my enemy?" one might ask. Our enemies are not only those who have set themselves against us, who hate us, who try to harm us, but also those with whom we are angry, who have offended us, who have not treated us as we would like, who make life difficult for us, whom we are disinclined to like, those whom we would never choose as friends. In short, it is anyone whom we wish 'would just go away.' And we are to love them! This love is not in essence a warm feeling we somehow concoct towards them like a person who receives a hideous gift forces himself to find words of thanks to offer the giver. Rather, as Christ says, it consists in choosing to do good to one who does us wrong: instead of returning curse for curse, we return a blessing; instead of returning hatred with the same, we do good to the one who hates us; instead of seeking the damnation of those who abuse and persecute us, we pray for them. Love of enemy consists in such discrete actions in response to enmity.

Evil is not effectively overcome by evil. As St. Paul commands the Romans, "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good" (12:21). We are to overcome any evil they may do to us by doing good to

them in return. Though returning violence for violence and hate for hate may produce an armed truce, true victory comes when the enemy's enmity is disarmed and through our doing good he is won over as a friend. This is the victory Christ came to achieve in each person at enmity with God. Moreover, to use evil means, to curse, to hate, to take revenge, to do harm in response to enmity is to be defeated by evil. It enslaves us to hatred, to bitterness, to anger—in short, to sin—and it does harm to our souls. Thus Christ gives the command not only to accomplish reconciliation and friendship with an enemy but also to keep our hearts free from enslaving passion.

By showing love to our enemies in this way, we become children of our heavenly Father, for He is love and shows love to all, whether they receive it gratefully or scornfully reject it. As a further incentive to embark upon this path, consider the teaching of a desert father who insisted that if you want your prayers answered speedily, pray fervently for your enemies before you pray for yourself, and your request will be quickly met.

St. Silouan of Athos (+1938) considered love for enemies to be the criterion of whether or not a man has true faith and true communion with God and a sign of the real action of grace in his life (*St. Silouan the Athonite, p. 114*). He would often say, "The Holy Spirit is love, and He gives the soul strength to love her enemies. And he who does not love his enemies does not know God." This work of loving enemies is beyond our natural strength. But if we are willing to obey the command and ask Christ for strength to do it, He will give it.

May God grant us much grace to love our enemies and so become like our Father in heaven. *Fr. Justin Frederick*

### An Explanation of Matthew 9:16-17

St. Theophan the Recluse (+1894)

*No man puts a piece of new cloth unto an old garment...nor do men put new wine into old wineskins.*

What does the Savior wish to teach us by this comparison? By this comparison, the Lord taught that strenuous labors, without the spirit of true life, bring no benefit to our moral character, but rather, confusion and corruption. A repentant sinner is given grace, which forms in him a determination to please the Lord, without sparing his own life. All labors are useful to a person with determination. However, should a person who lacks it, attempt on occasion, for example, to impose a fast on himself, he will strain and strain harder, but then he gives up his efforts. And after this, his life becomes even worse.

#### Upcoming Events 2016

20 December 7:00 p.m. Holy Unction  
25 December Nativity of our Lord  
31 December Feast Day at Holy Nativity Monastery  
31 December New Year's Eve Vigil 8:00 p.m.

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!