

The Confessor's Tongue for March 5, A. D. 2017

First Sunday of the Fast: Sunday of Orthodoxy; Martyr Conon

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.

A Prayer for the First Sunday of Lent

We give thanks unto Thee, O Lord Jesus Christ, that Thou hast brought us this present time of fasting unto salvation, so as to heal the great wounds of our souls in a short span, seeking to lift from us the burden of our many sins; and we pray Thee, O All-Good One: drive far from us all Pharisaic hypocrisy in our fasting, and root out from us Judaic gloom; make us not arrogant in our abstinence; keep us from doing that which is forbidden, and from an idle tongue and mind. Fill us with the brightness and truth which Thou hast commanded; give us strength to fight off the passions, and make us mighty in the war against sin. By alienation from passions, prepare us to follow Thee, Who hast shewn us victory over the devil through fasting, so that we may become partakers of Thy death and Resurrection, and be nourished by Thine eternal sweetness, which Thou hast made ready for them that hunger and thirst for Thy righteousness. Strengthen Thy community by fasting and by faith in Thee, and grant strength against the onslaught of enemies. For Thou art the God of mercies, and to Thee belongeth glory, together with the Father and Thine All-Holy, and Good, and Life-creating Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

The Commandments of Christ

“If ye love Me, keep My commandments.”

Give to him that asketh thee: and from him that would borrow of thee, turn not thou away. Matthew 5:42

Almsgiving is one of the pillars of spiritual life. The Hebrews under the law of Moses had obligations to the poor amongst themselves. For instance, they were not to reap the corners of their fields or pick of the stalks of grain that fell to the ground during harvesting so that food would be left in every field for the poor to come and glean. So too, they were not to charge each other interest on loans (a fee for the use of someone else's money traditionally called 'usury'). All debts were wiped out every fiftieth year, and one was forbidden to refuse a loan when asked simply because the year of Jubilee was near.

Jesus again expands the command on giving alms as He instructs his Jewish audience in the Sermon on the Mount. Later He will tell them *how* to give alms (secretly without public notice to gain praise) but now He establishes the principle of giving. Notice he does not say: “Give to your fellow Jew who asks” (or to your fellow Christian only!). The command is not limited by race or any condition other than one: give to the one who asks.

Thus, if someone asks us for help, Jesus's command is activated: we are commanded to give. Notice, too, that there is no indication of determining how worthy the one asking is, the

truthfulness of his claims, or any other such thing. Some has asked us for help, we are to give.

The command is mitigated by our ability to give. If we do not have it, we cannot give. Jesus also does not say that we have to give whatever someone asks for, i.e., someone says he has a particular need for a particular sum. We are not told we have to give the whole sum, but we are to give.

An assumption that the person asking help needs the necessities of life appears to underlie the command. When someone is in need of food, drink, clothing, shelter, perhaps medicine or tools needed to make a living, and such like, we must give if we can, either to meet the need or give something towards meeting it. This does not warrant a person to ask whatever he wants or obligate the one receiving such a request to give it.

St. Philaret the Merciful (Dec 1) would reach into his bag and give whatever his hand drew out, whether the coin was gold, silver, or brass, trusting that God had guided his hand. This would be analogous to us reaching into our wallets and blindly pulling out a bill—and giving it, regardless of the denomination. St. John the Merciful would give a set amount to everyone who asked. Both are good models for us, depending on our faith and our discernment of God's will for us.

In the Orthodox wedding service, we pray that God will bless the new couple with an abundance of wheat, wine, and oil so that they will always have something to give to the poor and never have to turn anyone away empty-handed. Part of our keeping this commandment lies in living in such a way that we always have something we could give. In other words, this means bucking the flow of American consumerism and not living on 110% of our income as so many do or even only on 100%. St. Joachim and Anna gave a third to the temple, and third to the poor in alms, and lived on a third. The typical American in 2005 gave 2.56% of his income in charitable giving, (one fourth of a tithe, far less than was expected of the Jews under the Old Covenant). It is disobedience to Christ to live beyond our means, to be bound with consumer debt, and consistently to have nothing left over to give to those in need because we have spent it all on ourselves, whether we are consuming it on pleasures and desires or 'prudently' saving it for a rainy day.

Christians understand that all that they have is God's; they are stewards, not owners, who will give an account for their use of what God entrusted to them. How does God want us to use what He has entrusted to us? Christ reveals part of His will for in the command: “Give to him who asks you, and don't turn away from those who wish to borrow from you.”

Fr. Justin Frederick

First Sunday of Lent: Sunday of Orthodoxy

This day the Holy Church commemorates the victory of Orthodoxy over heresies and is why this day is also called the "Sunday of Orthodoxy". The Synaxarion explains that the day celebrates "the restoration of the holy and venerable icons", which happened in first half of the 9th century (in 842) "by the Emperor Michael (the Byzantine Emperor), the holy and blessed Empress Theodora (see page 80) and the Holy Methodius, Patriarch of Constantinople".

This commemoration was established to celebrate the final victory of the Holy Church over the iconoclastic heresy. But in this way the Holy Church finally explained and defined in the canons of the Seventh Ecumenical Council the Orthodox Christian teaching that is now a celebrated event and is not called the celebration of iconolatry but the Triumph of Orthodoxy. It does not mean that after the 10th Century heresies would or could not appear any more; but it means that all following heresies, even though they were numerous and various, find their accusation and refutation in the definitions of the Seven Ecumenical Councils.

The victory of Orthodoxy in the Greek Church itself was first celebrated on the first Sunday of Great Lent, and thus the basis of the present Triumph of Orthodoxy is historical. Together with these things the Holy Church through the celebration of the present day means to grant great comfort to those who attend. This intention agrees with the rules of faith and piety and the ascetic effort of the fast. It sees in this action the proof of their living communion according to their faith and life, and finds in this the foundation for prayerful petition to God for them. After the end of the liturgy on this day it is necessary to serve the special Rite of Orthodoxy, composed by St. Methodius.

Again the restoration of honoring and venerating the holy and venerable icons was annually prescribed "from that time these holy confessors appointed the annual commemoration of this solemnity, so that we might never again fall into a similar ignominy".

S. V. Bulgakov, Handbook for Church Servers, 2nd ed., 1274 pp. (Kharkov, 1900) pp. 511-515. Translated by Archpriest Eugene D. Tarris © March 21, 2005. All rights reserved.

From the Greek Procession for the Sunday of Orthodoxy

Priest: As the prophets beheld, as the apostles have taught, as the Church has received, as the teachers have declared, as the world has agreed, as grace has shown forth, as truth has been revealed, as falsehood has been dispelled, as wisdom has become manifest, as Christ has awarded; thus we declare; thus we affirm; thus we proclaim Christ our true God, and honor His saints in words, writings, thoughts, sacrifices, churches, and holy icons — on the one hand, worshipping and reverencing Christ as God and Lord, and on the other, honoring the saints as true servants of the same Lord of all, and offering them proper veneration. THIS IS THE FAITH OF THE

APOSTLES. THIS IS THE FAITH OF THE FATHERS. THIS IS THE FAITH OF THE ORTHODOX. THIS IS THE FAITH ON WHICH THE WORLD IS ESTABLISHED.

Therefore, with fraternal and filial love we praise the heralds of the faith, those who with glory and honor have struggled for the faith, and we say: to the champions of Orthodoxy, faithful emperors, most-holy patriarchs, hierarchs, teachers, martyrs, and confessors: MAY YOUR MEMORY BE ETERNAL.

People: May their memory be eternal. [3]

Priest: Let us beseech God that we may be instructed and strengthened by the trials and struggles of these saints, which they endured even unto death, and by their teachings, entreating that we may to the end imitate their godly life. May we be deemed worthy of obtaining our requests through the mercy and grace of the Great and First Hierarch, Christ our God, through the intercessions of our glorious Lady, the Theotokos and ever-virgin Mary, the divine angels and all the Saints

Commentary on the All-Night Vigil 9 Vouchsafe, Evening Litany

After the Augmented Litany, the Deacon steps aside from before the Royal Doors while the priest intones the exclamation. Then the reader chants the prayer, "Vouchsafe, O Lord, to keep us this evening without sin...", a short prayer derived from the longer Great Doxology. It is always read by the reader except during Bright Week, when it is sung.

We ask God to keep us "this night" without sin, asking Him for aid in the perpetual battle against thoughts that would lead us into wrongdoing. Another part of prayer reads as follows: "Blessed art Thou, O Lord, teach my Thy statutes. Blessed art Thou, O Master, make me to understand thy statutes. Blessed art Thou, O Holy One, enlighten me by Thy statutes." Hereby the Church asks God for progress along the path of Christ's commandments, which is the path to purification, illumination, and glorification. We ask God to teach us His statutes. He promised through the Prophet Ezekiel that in the latter days he would replace the heart of stone in His people with the heart of flesh and write His laws not on tablets of stone but in their hearts. To do His commandments, we must know them. We must also understand them once we know them, and so we ask His aid in us gaining understanding of what His commands mean and how they apply to life, not only on the surface but at the deeper, subtler levels. Third, the Church seeks the result of the practice of the commandments which is illumination coming after the commandments have cleansed us. The prayer thus lays out the spiritual path and the centrality of Christ's commandments to it.

After the prayer "Vouchsafe", the Deacon, back in his place before the royal doors, intones the Evening Litany, also known as the Litany of Supplication. Normally each service of the Church

ends with a prayer or litany of supplication. At Vespers, this is the Evening Litany, and at Matins, it is called the Morning Litany. This litany is known at once from its first petition, "Let us complete our evening/morning prayer unto the Lord." It is also distinguished by the response of the people, "Grant this, O Lord," making a more daring request of the Lord than the more penitential and usual response, "Lord, have mercy." The Evening Litany, with its response "Grant this, O Lord," makes request for some things we have not yet asked during the Vigil.

It begins with the last petition of the Great and Little Litanies: "Help us, save us, have mercy on us, and keep us, O God, by Thy grace," and the usual response, "Lord, have mercy." Thus it starts where the other litanies leave off.

The petitions are all personal, pertaining to each believer. Here are no prayers for hierarchs or government officials, but for the spiritual welfare of us, the faithful. We pray in the first person plural "we," as Christ taught us to pray, for we are connected by Baptism in one Body to one another and we cannot find salvation for ourselves if we care not for the salvation of others. We pray for our own essential spiritual needs which are the needs of all Orthodox Christians.

We pray that the specific time of day we are entering will be sinless: "That the whole evening may be perfect, holy, peaceful, and sinless..." Our struggle with sin is ongoing, and how rare are the hours when we do not fall short of God's glory in some way! But we never cease to seek that victory over sin. Notice that we ask for sinlessness only for the immediate future, for the next few hours. If one can go one hour without sin, one can go two; if two, one can go four, and so on. If we look to far into the future, the thought of how hard it is to guard constantly against sin will overwhelm us. We rather ask strength only for this day in which we are living. When tomorrow has become today, only then shall we concern ourselves with tomorrow's struggle.

We ask of the Lord "an angel of peace, a faithful guide and guardian of our souls and bodies." This petition reminds us that we are not alone in our spiritual struggles, but the angels of God also render us assistance, particularly our guardian angel, who always works for our salvation and deliverance and sees all we do. We need to cooperate with the angels rather than resist them by evil deeds and words.

We ask "pardon and forgiveness of our sins and offenses." Until now in the litanies, we have not asked this so specifically, so concretely for ourselves. The Augmented Litany requests "pardon and forgiveness of the sins of the servants of God, [insert names], the brethren of this holy temple," but we have not asked it for ourselves until now. As we are not saved alone, we ask it for "us", the Church gathered locally.

The next petition reads, "All things good and useful for our souls, and peace for the world, let us ask of the Lord." God alone knows what is best for us. Here, we ask that He will give us only what will

benefit our souls, and not simply every request we might make. When we pray for specific things, we sometimes request something that will be harmful to us unbeknownst to us. The petition thus teaches us to seek only that which will be of spiritual benefit, in accordance with God's will for us. We also request peace for the world in the petition. This could be taken to mean the cessation of war and the prevailing of peaceful times in which to work out our salvation, but to take it only so seems out of place with the other petitions. Rather, the prophet Isaiah says, "The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose water casts up mire and dirt. There is no peace," saith my God, 'to the wicked'" (Isaiah 57:20-21). As we pray for our spiritual good, we do not forget the world, those yet outside the Church, and we pray for their peace, which comes only from Christ.

The Evening Litany concludes with a petition for "a Christian ending to our life, painless, unashamed, peaceful, and a good defence before the fearful judgment seat of Christ..." As Christians, we cannot only begin well in our spiritual lives, but must finish well, and this petition seeks that we may endure faithfully to the end with nothing to be ashamed of in the hour of death and nothing to fear before Christ's judgment. Baptism does us little good if we fall away before the end. Moreover, we are reminded that death will come to each of us and will usher us in to judgment. Each of us will give an account of his life before Christ—a sobering thought. Thus we pray that in the end we shall not stand condemned before Christ as unprofitable servants.

At the end of each litany, we remember the Theotokos and all the saints and "commend ourselves, and each other, and all our life unto Christ our God." Some Christian groups will have periodic calls to "rededication," in which the people are called to renew their faith and commitment to Christ. In Orthodox worship, that opportunity is given at the end of each litany. We offer ourselves body and soul to Christ as living sacrifices, entrusting ourselves to His care and protection.

The exclamation for the Evening Litany differs slightly from that of the Augmented Litany before it: "For Thou art a good God who lovest man..." God is not only merciful but is also good. As He is good, He works only good on our behalf, though because our definition of "good" is usually skewed, we sometimes struggle to see the good in the difficult situations that come to us. Our good God only gives good gifts (James 1:17 ; Matt 7:7-11), and because He is good, we may dare to commend ourselves to His care and ask of Him "what is good and useful for our souls."

After the exclamation of the Evening Litany, the Priest faces the people and blesses them, "Peace be to all," and then turns back to the east and says "Let us bow our heads unto the Lord." As the choir sings "to Thee, O Lord," the priest mystically prays for those who have bowed their heads: "...Unto Thee, the fearful Judge who lovest man, have Thy servants

bowed their heads and subjected their necks, awaiting not help from man, but expecting Thy mercy and looking for Thy salvation. Keep them at all times, both during this present evening and during the approaching night, from every enemy, from every adverse operation of the Devil, and from vain thoughts and from evil imaginations." Rather than being stiffnecked resisters of God as ancient Israel, the faithful are called to bow their heads and subject their necks unto Christ, submitting to Him as King rather than being ruled by their own self-will, and on the basis of that submission to the rightful ruler, they can expect His mercy and protection.

Herein is part of the blessing of being in attendance at any service: the priest prays mystically for those present, interceding for the faithful present (and those absent for a worthy reason). Though these prayers are usually not read aloud, the faithful should know that at every service, the priest offers quiet prayer on their behalf. *Fr. Justin Frederick*

The Christian Understanding of Sin

Sin is primarily a metaphysical phenomenon whose roots lie in the mystic depths of man's spiritual nature. The essence of sin consists not in the infringement of ethical standards, but in a falling away from the eternal Divine life for which man was created and to which, by his very nature, he is called.

Sin is committed, first of all, in the secret depths of the human spirit, but its consequences involve the individual as a whole. A sin will reflect on a man's psychological and physical condition, on his outward appearance, on his personal destiny. Sin will, inevitably, pass beyond the boundaries of the sinner's individual life to burden all humanity and thus affect the fate of the whole world. The sin of our forefather Adam was not the only sin of cosmic significance. Every sin, manifest or secret, committed by each one of us, affects the rest of the universe.

The earthly-minded man when he commits sin is not conscious of its effect on himself as is the spiritual man. The carnal man does not remark any change in himself after committing a sin because he is always in a state of spiritual death and has never known the eternal life of the spirit. The spiritual man, on the contrary, does see a change in himself every time his will inclines to sin—he senses a lessening of grace.

From St. Theophan the Recluse (+1894)

For what reason were the martyrs tormented? Because, having believed in the Lord and been united with Him, they did not want to worship false gods. The false gods were the spirits of passions and evil deeds. He who refuses to give in to passions and sinful desires does the same as he who refuses to bow down and worship idols. He who refused to worship idols was given over to external sufferings, while he who refuses to satisfy the passions actually wounds himself and forces his heart to suffer until the passions quiet

down in him. Victory over passions is a self-inflicted spiritual martyrdom, which is performed invisibly in the heart but is nevertheless very painful....But if there is a lot of pain, there are a lot of rewards.... The more the sorrows, the more intense the consolations.

From St. Gregory Palamas

There are three degrees of eating: self-control, sufficiency, and satiety. Self-control is to be hungry after having eaten. Sufficiency is to be neither hungry nor to be weighed down. Satiety is to be slightly weighed down. To eat again after reaching the point of satiety is to open the door of gluttony, through which unchastity comes in. Attentive to these distinctions, choose what is best for you according to your powers, not overstepping the limits. For according to St. Paul, only the perfect can be both hungry and full, and at the same time be strong in all things (Philippians 4:12).

For the Evening of the First Sunday

Let us now set out with joy upon the second week of the Fast; and like Elijah the Tishbite let us fashion for ourselves from day to day, O brethren, a fiery chariot from the four great virtues; let us exalt our minds through freedom from the passions; let us arm our flesh with purity and our hands with acts of compassion; let us make our feet beautiful with the preaching of the Gospel; and let us put the enemy to flight and gain the victory.

When he had been cleansed by fasting, great Moses saw the God for whom he longed. Eagerly follow his example, O my humble soul; make haste to cleanse thyself from evil in the day of abstinence, and so thou shalt behold the Lord who granteth thee forgiveness, for He is all-powerful and loveth mankind.

Come, let us cleanse ourselves by almsgiving and acts of mercy to the poor, not sounding a trumpet or making a show of our charity. Let not our left hand know what our right hand is doing; let not vainglory scatter the fruit of our almsgiving; but in secret let us call on Him that knoweth all secrets: Father, forgive us trespasses, for Thou lovest mankind.

Triodion, from Vespers of the First Sunday of the Fast

Upcoming Events 2017

25 March Annunciation
9 April Palm Sunday
10 April—15 April March Holy Week
16 April: Pascha

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!