

# The Confessor's Tongue for October 8, A. D. 2017

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost: Venerable Mothers Pelagia & Thais

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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## October 8: Venerable Pelagia

St. Pelagia the Penitent was converted to Christianity by St. Nonnus, Bishop of Edessa. Before her acceptance of Christianity through Baptism, Pelagia was head of a dance troupe in Antioch, living a life of frivolity and prostitution.

One day while Pelagia was elegantly dressed, she made her way past a church where St. Nonnus was preaching. Believers turned their faces away from her, but the Bishop glanced after Pelagia. Struck by her beauty, St. Nonnus prayed in his cell at length to the Lord for the sinner. He told his fellow bishops that the prostitute put them all to shame, explaining that she took great care to adorn her body in order to appear beautiful in the eyes of men. "We... take no thought for the adornment of our wretched souls," he said.

On the following day, while St. Nonnus was teaching in the church about the dread Last Judgment and its consequences, Pelagia appeared again. His teaching made a tremendous impression upon her. With the fear of God and weeping tears of repentance, she asked St. Nonnus to baptize her. Seeing her sincere and full repentance, Bishop Nonnus did so. After her conversion, the devil began to appear to Pelagia, urging her to return to her former life. But she prayed, made the Sign of the Cross, and the devil vanished.

Three days after her baptism, Pelagia gathered up her valuables and took them to Bishop Nonnus. The bishop ordered that they be distributed among the poor saying, "Let this be wisely dispersed, so that these riches gained by sin may become a wealth of righteousness." After this, St. Pelagia journeyed to Jerusalem to the Mount of Olives. She lived there in a cell, disguised as the monk Pelagius, living in ascetic seclusion, and attaining great spiritual gifts. When she died, she was buried in her cell.

## October 8: Venerable Thais

Born in Egypt, brought up by her mother, a misbehaving woman, Thais from her youth lived a dissolute life, and, possessing external beauty tempted many men and youths. Living in Egypt in the Heraclionopolis Monastery, the Holy Elder Paphnutius, who converted many sinners to the way of virtue, heard about Thais, removed his poor clothes and put on worldly clothes and with a supply of money entered into the house of ill repute of the beautiful one, asking to meet with her in such secret place that not only people but also God would not see them. Thais in whose soul ideas about God have not yet decayed, with a smile answered that it is impossible because God is everywhere and sees all. Then the venerable one vividly presented her all the weight of her sins and what terrible answer she must give God

for those seduced by her and the people who died because of her. The words of the holy monk deeply touched the soul of the sinner, and her heart was lit with the light of heaven. Having collected all her treasures accumulated by an impious life, she ordered them piled up in the city square and she herself solemnly set them afire, having shown that all openly would know the foulness of her former life, and that its treasures as fruit of a dissolute life were not worthy to distribute to the poor. After this the venerable one entered a women's monastery where she was confined to a little cell with a small window and she ordered them to give her only pieces of bread and some water. Thais spent three years completely alone in strict ascetical fasts and prayer and in deep fervent contrition for her sins. After the passing of this time, Paphnutius felt in his heart pity for the confined sinner and went to the Venerable Anthony the Great to find out whether God forgave the sins of Thais. St. Anthony, having gathered his disciples around him, spent the whole night with them in prayer. And here one of his disciples, Paul the Simple (see Mar. 7), had a wonderful vision opening the petition for the sins of Thais to the Lord. After that Paphnutius, appeared in the monastery where Thais was shut in, opened the door of her cell. Thais curtly told him that she wished to remain shut in, but Paphnutius insisted that she leave, having told her that God forgave her sins. She obeyed and said in his presence: "God is witness from that moment I came into the cell, all my sins were before my eyes, and I poured out tears looking at them". "It is mainly for this", Paphnutius said, "that the merciful God pardoned you, and not for the severity of your seclusion". Within 15 days after her exit from the cell the Venerable Thais died. It was in Fourth Century, not later than the year 340. She should be distinguished from the St. Thais commemorated on May 10.

## The Commandments of Christ

"If ye love Me, keep My commandments." (John 14:15)

*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 among themselves. For instance, they were not to reap the corners of their fields or pick up 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 is 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, when all debts were cancelled, 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) but now He establishes the principle of giving them. Notice, He does not say: "Give to your fellow Jew who asks". 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, it seems that 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.

Naturally, the command is mitigated by our ability to give. If we do not have it, we cannot give it. Jesus also does not say that we have to give exactly whatever someone asks for, e.g., someone says he has a need for a particular sum. We are certainly free to give goods to meet a need rather than cash. If we give cash, we are not told we necessarily have to give the whole sum requested, but we are to give something if we have 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 analagous to us reaching into our wallets and blindly pulling out a bill—and giving it, regardless of the denomination. St. John the Merciful, Archbishop of Alexandria, would give a set amount to anyone who asked. Both are possible 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 the full 100%. In contrast, Ss. Joachim and Anna gave a third of their income to the temple, third to the poor in alms, and lived on the remaining third. The typical American now gives about 2.9% of his income in charitable giving, (a bit more than 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 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 us in this matter by the command: "Give to him who asks you,

and don't turn away from those who wish to borrow from you."

### Homily on the Call of All Christians to Become Saints

St. Nikolai of Zicha

*To the saint which are at Ephesus...*(Ephesians 1:1)

*Note: In Greek, Slavonic, and Russian, the word 'saints' is the same word that is translated as 'holy': bagios, or svyatoi. Hence, the English word 'saint' means 'holy one'—a person who is holy. Fr. JBAF*

The Apostle calls the Christians in Ephesus 'saints'. He does not call one or two of them saints, nor one group of them, but all of them. Is this not a wondrous miracle of God for people, not in the wilderness but in a city—and an idolatrous and corrupt city—to become saints? That married men who sire children, who trade and work, become saints! Indeed, such were the first Christians. Their dedication, fidelity, and zeal in the Faith as well as their holiness and purity of life, completely justified their being called 'saints.' If in latter times saints have become the exception, in those earlier times the unholy were the exception. Saints were the rule. Therefore, we must not wonder that the Apostle calls all baptized souls in Ephesus 'saints' and that he has an even loftier name for all Christians, i.e., 'sons,' the sons of God (Galatians 4:6). Christ the Lord Himself gave us the right to call ourselves such when he taught us to address God as *Our Father* (Matt 6:9).

O my brethren! Do we not say to God every day: "Holy God?" Do we not call the angels holy? Do we not call the Mother of God holy? And the prophets, apostles, martyrs, and the righteous? Do we not call heaven holy and the Kingdom of Heaven holy? Who then is able to enter into the holy Kingdom but the saints [holy ones]. Therefore, if we have hope for salvation, we also have hope for holiness.

O Holy God, who dwellest in the holy place and resteth among the saints and callest the holy to Thyself and showest mercy to them, help us also that we may become holy—in words, in thoughts, in deeds—to Thy glory and our salvation. To Thee be glory and praise forever. Amen.

### Fr. Epiphanius, *Life & Teaching* (+1989)

With miracles, the Lord does not give a certificate of correctness of people's faith. He does them out of His love for His creatures.

On account of all those who have difficulty with the matter of the Lord's miracles, Father Epiphanius stressed: When someone accepts the Resurrection of Christ—in other words, that Christ is God—then he can easily explain all the miracles.

### Upcoming Events 2017

31 October Parish All Saints Party  
12 November: Parish Thanksgiving Meal  
15 November: Nativity Fast Begins

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!