

The Confessor's Tongue for October 15, A. D. 2017

Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost: Fathers of the Seventh 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.

What the Fathers of the Seventh Council Have Done for our Salvation and Sanctification

Archimandrite John Krestiankin (+2006)

Most glorified art Thou, O Christ our God, Who hast established our Fathers as luminous stars upon the earth, and through them didst guide us all to the true Faith" (troparion for the Fathers of the Seventh Ecumenical Council).

Holy Father, keep through Thine own Name those whom Thou hast given Me, that they may be one, as We are... Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on Me through their word; That they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in Us (John 17:11, 20-21). We need to bring this prayer of the Savior to mind more and more often, in order not to stray from the path within the darkness of the godless world; in order not to be deceived by the bright, shrill light of ungodly doctrines; in order to be with God always; and in order to remember that this unity is possibly only in God's Church.

Fear not, little flock! – only believe, the Lord is with you all days (Luke 12:32). Fear not, little flock! – I shall leave you God's Church, the pillar and ground of truth. Live in it; live through it; only it is immovable, neither changing nor deceiving, for the Lord Himself is in it. He guards the holy truth in the catholicity of the Church's decisions.

For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us (Acts 15:28): conciliar decisions were proclaimed using these words on every occasion and at all times. The seven pillars – the Seven Ecumenical Councils – firmly and unwaveringly support the vault of the Church, while the canons protect God's truth in the world.

My dear ones, it is the Fathers of the Seventh Ecumenical Council to whom we are obliged to give thanks that our churches, our cells, and our homes are sanctified with holy icons; that living flames glimmer before them in lampadas; that we fall down in prostration before the holy relics; and that the smoke of holy incense lifts our hearts to the heavenly abodes, parting us from earth. The grace of revelation from these holy objects has filled many, many hearts with love for God and animated many spirits that were already quite dead.

But all this might not have been, if there had not been a time in the eighth century when the Holy Fathers of the Church – holy hierarchs and monks – stood up in defense of these holy objects. Their struggle, to the shedding of blood, extinguished many bonfires made up of icons, which had been blazing over the course of fifty years.

The Seventh Ecumenical Council affirmed that iconography is a special form of revelation of Divine reality; and that through the Divine services and icons, Divine revelation becomes accessible to the

faithful, to our domain. Through the icon, just as through Holy Scripture, we not only learn about God, but we come to know God; through the holy icons of the God-pleasers we touch transfigured man, a partaker of the Divine life; through the icon we receive the all-sanctifying grace of the Holy Spirit.

The icon, according to the Fathers, is also prayer. A consecrated icon is itself holy. When we pray before it, the holy words of our prayers and the visible holy image of the icon before us simultaneously transfigure us, directing even us sinners and earthly people to holiness.

But now in our highly complex and difficult times, when a new paganism has again blinded the world, does not a new iconoclasm loudly declare itself? They no longer destroy icons, but rather they gather them, they hunt for them. But some see only the beauty of antiquity and the exotic in them, while others are captivated by the professional perfection of the images, and still others sacrilegiously stretch out their hands to them, in order to turn them into silver or gold.

Is this not blasphemy?

And they hold icons in their hands and keep them on the walls of their houses, but do not know that the Holy Spirit is looking for living and inspired temples worthy of the inhabitation of holiness in the owners of icons; and not finding such, He will withdraw. And then this woeful sentence will be pronounced over them: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable (Romans 3:11-12). And God's wrath will abide on them.

My dear ones, is this not frightful? That which should sanctify man makes him even more sinful, joining to the other sins the grievous sin of offending the Holy Spirit. Then the Holy Spirit withdraws, and man becomes blind and unable to see God's miracles.

My friends! If you have a sacred object like an icon at home, do not forget about it. Let us turn our gaze to it daily, let us speak with it in the words of prayer or of a troparion, or let us simply stand silently, clinging to it with our soul. Then we will draw daily sanctification, life for the soul, and strength from the icon.

I will not list examples of God's gifts that we have received through the holy icons and through the holy Mysteries of the Church. They are innumerable. Every day the Holy Church glorifies the icons of the Mother of God and celebrates the memory of the holy God-pleasers. Their icons are placed before us on analogions for veneration. The living religious experience of each one of us, the experience of our gradual transfiguration through them, makes us faithful children of the Holy, Universal, Orthodox Church.

This is the true embodiment in the world of the works of the Holy Fathers of the Seventh Ecumenical Council. That is why, of all the victories over a multitude of various heresies, only the victory over iconoclasm and the restoration of icon-veneration was proclaimed to be the Triumph of Orthodoxy. The faith of the Fathers of the Seven Ecumenical Councils is the eternal and immutable foundation of Orthodoxy.

But now the terrible waves of the worldwide flood that once destroyed the human race are again covering the world with lies and falsehood, ready to engulf the universe, to destroy faith in Christ, and to distort His teaching. Our only salvation, our ark, is the Holy Church, guided on its way by its heavenly luminaries: the writings of the holy God-pleasers.

Let us not neglect this ark! Let us not deviate by our self-opinion and pride from humbly obeying the truth of the Church! Let us not board any other ship that has been damaged by false teachings! Let us not fall away through coldness and duplicity of soul from the guidance of Holy Scripture! And let us be saved!

Glory to the Immortal and Unseen God the Father! Glory to the Immortal God the Son, Who has revealed Himself in the flesh!

Glory to the Immortal God the Holy Spirit, Who has spoken through the Prophets, Apostles, and Holy Fathers!

Most Holy Trinity, Glory be to Thee! For each and every thing, glory be to Thee! Amen.

Delivered October 14, 27, 1991 Fr. John was an elder and confessor of the Russian Church, a priest-monk who lived at the Pskov Caves Monastery under Communism and helped keep the Christian Faith alive in the Soviet Union.

The Commandments of Christ

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

Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly. Matthew 6:1-4

Christ's words in these four verses boil down to two simple commands, a negative one and a positive one. Do not give charitable gifts to be seen and recognized by others. Do give them as secretly as possible so that your giving is not generally known to others.

Why should Christians give secretly? The answer is simple. Christ would have His disciples give in faith for His sake, not for the sake of vainglory and praise from men. Much human activity, much of it good in itself, is driven by vainglory—the desire to be noticed by others and praised by them. While vainglory can

help keep a man from committing serious sins, it is a weak foundation on which to build a virtuous life. It reduces the field of charity only to what others will notice and praise. If there is no praise from men in it, the man motivated by vainglory will not do it. Yet the praise of men who only see a small portion of another's life is vain and is often little more than flattery. Only the praise of God is true. By keeping the command, the Christian learns to seek praise and reward from God alone. He frees himself from vainglory and sets himself to serve Christ out of love.

How often these simple, explicit commands of our Savior and Lord are transgressed in our parishes! To motivate people to give for earthly recognition, donors are listed in bulletins and nameplates are attached to the furnishings and decorations of the temple. Thus we teach people to give in order to receive glory from men and deprive them of a public reward from our Heavenly Father. Moreover, we disobey the explicit commandment of Christ our Lord! It does not matter how 'successful' such tactics may appear to be, it is simply wrong. And such tactics are not ultimately successful: they stunt the spiritual lives of those who are taught to give for the wrong reasons and they replace an investment with a guaranteed eternal return for an uncertain, ephemeral return in personal pride and glory from men.

We give tithes, offerings, and alms out of obedience to our Savior and our love for Him. We can never repay Him for what He has done for us, but we bring our gifts to Him in His House and give alms in His name out of deep gratitude. He knows our gifts and will reward us if we have not had reward from man; hence no one else need know.

For virtue is philanthropic, just as in men of an opposite character, sin is misanthropic. *St. Athanasius*

From St. Athanasius on Many Mansions

Festal Letter 10 from A.D. 338

Not with virgins alone is such a field adorned; nor with monks alone, but also with honourable matrimony and the chastity of each one. For in sowing, He did not compel the will beyond the power. Nor is mercy confined to the perfect, but it is sent down also among those who occupy the middle and the third ranks, so that He might rescue all men generally to salvation. To this intent He hath prepared many mansions with the Father, so that although the dwelling-place is various in proportion to the advance in moral attainment, yet all of us are within the wall, and all of us enter within the same fence, the adversary being cast out, and all his host expelled thence.

Upcoming Events 2017

31 October Parish All Saints Party, 6:00 p.m.
12 November: Parish Thanksgiving Meal 4:00 p.m.
15 November: Nativity Fast Begins

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!