

The Confessor's Tongue for October 22, A. D. 2017

Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost: St. Abercius Equal-to-the-Apostles

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.

October 22: St. Abercius

He was bishop of Hierapolis in Phrygia of Asia Minor, during the reign of Marcus Aurelius, a persecutor of Christians. During a pagan festival, Abercius was instructed by an Angel to throw down the idols of Apollo and other pagan gods. When his work was discovered, the people of the city were outraged; but instead of hiding, the bishop went to the marketplace and openly confessed the Christian faith. The people grew angrier still, but when Abercius healed three possessed men they were amazed and listened to him more closely. He preached the Faith with such power that the entire city and surrounding countryside became Christian.

These miracles reached the ears of the Emperor, whose daughter was suffering from demonic possession. The Emperor summoned Abercius to Rome, where he was enabled to cast out the spirit and perform several other miracles. The Empress offered him a large reward of gold for healing her daughter, but he would not accept it. On his way home, he was instructed in a vision to travel to Syria. He travelled first to Antioch and surrounding cities, then as far as Mesopotamia, proclaiming Christ and teaching the faith everywhere he went. No other bishop of his time travelled so widely in the service of the Gospel; for this reason he is called Equal to the Apostles.

After several years he returned to Phrygia, where he lived the remainder of his life in peace, shepherding his flock.

Commemorations at Proskomide

It is good to see so many of you submitting commemorations at the Divine Liturgy.

To make this most efficient and joyful for the priest, take note of this friendly reminder:

1. Please write neatly and not too small!
2. Use the baptismal name of each Orthodox Christian you wish to have commemorated. Please don't write Jack, Jane, or "the Smith family."
3. Monks and nuns should be recorded on the sheet as "Monk James" or "Nun Mary" or "Priestmonk Patrick".
4. Priests, Deacons, and Bishops should be recorded as "Priest John", "Deacon Thomas", "Bishop Peter", "Metropolitan Tikhon", etc.
5. Please do not use "Fr. X" or "Matushka Y". Priest's wives do not need a title, just their baptismal name. "Father" is ambiguous as it could equally refer to a priest or a simple monk or a hieromonk.
6. Non-Orthodox are to be indicated by an "n.o." in front of the name or placed in the non-Orthodox section. They are commemorated differently.

Thank you for your cooperation in this. It will help the priest to commemorate your list with greater joy.

The Commandments of Christ

"If ye love Me, keep My commandments." (John 14:15)
Moreover, when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head and wash thy face; that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.

Matthew 6:16-18

This command may be paraphrased thus: do not fast like the hypocrites who fast so that others notice their fasting, but when you fast, keep up your usual appearance so as not to signal your fasting to them and so that your heavenly Father may reward you eternally rather than men temporally by their praise.

Like the previous commandment concerning prayer, this command about our external appearance serves to purify our fasting so that it is spiritually profitable and not a mere show designed to impress others and feed our egos. Indeed, these commands (and the next regarding almsgiving) reveal man's pronounced tendency to do the right thing for the wrong reason or the wrong audience. Our prayer, fasting, and almsgiving are to be directed towards God as their object, not the attention of others.

Though on the surface, our Orthodox practice of all fasting on the same days and seasons seems to go against Christ's command (it is far from secret among ourselves that we all are fasting!), in fact, it helps remove the wrong motivation of doing it to impress others. We are all fasting, so the fact we are doing so impresses no one. Of course, we can seek to call attention to ourselves as to the strictness of our practice or dramatic spiritual experiences it may bring us, but fasting together helps diminish any wrong motives. If we are tempted to take pride in our ascetical accomplishments and spiritual experiences during our seasons of fasting, we may humble ourselves by assuming there is someone near us who quietly surpasses us in God's eyes without us knowing it, or we may read the life of a saint and his asceticism to bring our high thoughts back to earth.

There is a story about a man who lived in asceticism near a village. He became renowned for his fasting and abstinence and his ability to go for days without food, sometimes eating only once in the week. Then he came to live in the Egyptian desert among many experienced ascetics. Much to his surprise, he found it very difficult to fast for even one day past noon! He inquired of one of the old men as to why this was so. The old man told him that in his previous location, while fasting bodily, he had been nourished by the praises of others who admired his feats. But here in the desert, where strict fasting was commonplace, he had no such 'food' to sustain him. In other words, his fasting had been motivated by a

desire for the praise and admiration of others. In seeking glory from men, although laboring long in fasting, he had not received spiritual benefit, for he had violated Christ's commandment to 'not appear unto men to fast'. A man motivated by another man's praise, even small scraps of praise, can accomplish great feats even to the giving up of all his possessions and martyrdom, but take away from him the praise of man and his deeds will wither.

Christ by His commandments makes it clear that we are not to pray, fast, or give alms to receive recognition from man but to seek God's approval in secret. Doing the right thing for the wrong motivation will not profit us spiritually. Was it not for the praise of others that Ananias and Sapphira conspired to lie about their gift to the Church? Can we not see now dangerous it is to do the right thing to be seen by others rather than for Christ's sake? Can we perceive the imperishable profit in doing things secretly for Christ's sake and the vain passing gain of doing things for the praise of man?

From Various Fathers on the Many Mansions

John 14:2

+*St Cyril of Alexandria*: "And it seems likely that in speaking of the many mansions He wishes also to indicate the different grades of honor, implying that each one who desires to live a life of virtue will receive as it were his own peculiar place, and the glory that is suitable to his own individual acts."

+*St Irenaeus, Against Heresies, V.36 (ANF 1, pp566ff)*: "...there is this distinction between the habitation of those who produce an hundred-fold, and that of those who produce sixty-fold, and that of those who produce thirty-fold: for the first will be taken up into the heavens, the second will dwell in paradise, the last will inhabit the city; and that was on this account the Lord declared, "In My Father's house are many mansions." For all things belong to God, who supplies all with a suitable dwelling-place; even as His Word says, that a share is allotted to all by the Father, according as each person is or shall be worthy. And this is the couch on which the guests shall recline, having been invited to the wedding."

St. John Chrysostom, Exhortation to Theodore: He Himself saith, "He shall reward every man according to his works." And not only in hell, but also in the kingdom one will find many differences; for He saith "in my Father's house are many mansions;" and, "there is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon." And what wonder, if in dealing with such great matters he has spoken with such precision, seeing that He declares there is a difference in that world even between one star and another? Knowing then all these things let us never desist from doing good deeds, nor grow weary, nor, if we should be unable to reach the rank of the sun or of the moon, let us not despise that of the stars. For if only we

display thus much virtue at least, we shall be able to have a place in Heaven. And though we may not have become gold, or precious stone, yet if we only occupy the rank of silver we shall abide in the foundation; only let us not fall back again into that material which the fire readily devours, nor, when we are unable to accomplish great things, desist also from small ones, for this is the part of extreme folly, which I trust we may not experience.

For just as material wealth increases if the lovers of it do not despise even the smallest gains, so is it also with the spiritual. For it is a strange thing that the judge should not overlook the reward of even a cup of cold water, but that we, if our achievements are not altogether great, should neglect the performance of little things. For he who does not despise the lesser things, will exercise much zeal concerning the greatest; but he who overlooks the former will also abstain from the latter; and to prevent this taking place Christ has defined great rewards even for these small things. For what is easier than to visit the sick? Yet even this He requites with a great recompense. Lay hold then on eternal life, delight in the Lord, and supplicate Him; take up again the easy yoke, bow thyself beneath the light burden, put a finish to thy life worthy of the beginning; do not suffer so great a stream of wealth to slip past thee. For if thou shouldst continue provoking God by thy deeds, thou wilt destroy thyself; but if before much damage has been done, and all thy husbandry has been overwhelmed with a flood, thou wilt be able to recover again what has been spoiled and to add to it not a little further produce.

Having considered all these things, shake off the dust, get up from the ground, and thou wilt be formidable to the adversary; for he himself indeed has overthrown thee, as if thou wouldst never rise again; but if he sees thee again lifting up thy hands against him, he will receive such an unexpected blow that he will be less forward in trying to upset thee again, and thou thyself wilt be more secure against receiving any wound of that kind in future. For if the calamities of others are sufficient to instruct us, much more those which we have ourselves undergone. And this is what I expect speedily to see in the case of thy own dear self, and that by the grace of God thou art again become more radiant than before, and displaying such great virtue, as even to be a protector of others in the world above. Only do not despair, do not fall back; for I will not cease repeating this in every form of speech, and wherever I see you, as well as by the lips of others; and if you listen to this you will no longer need other remedies."

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!