

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

Twenty-Second Sunday after Pentecost: St. Tikhon of North America

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.

April 7, October 9, November 5: St. Tikhon

Today, we celebrate the feast appointed by the Moscow Patriarchate to commemorate St. Tikhon's consecration as the first Patriarch of Russia in 200 years in 1917. You will find an account of his election below. Before that, St. Tikhon was bishop of the North American Missionary Archdiocese of the Russian Church from 1898 to 1907. He did much to encourage the missionary activity of the Church among the non-Orthodox peoples of North America. His repose is celebrated April 7 and his canonization October 9.

From St. Tikhon of Moscow & North America

"The more I study the history of the Orthodox Church in this country, the more I am convinced that our work here is God's work; that God himself is helping us . . . we have to guard sacredly the Orthodox faith, to stand firm in it, disregarding the fact that we live in a non-Orthodox country; not giving heed to opinions one hears, such as: 'This is not the Old Country, here. This is a free land.' Therefore, supposedly, we may not have to observe everything that the Church requires. As if the Word of God is suitable only for the Old Country and not for the whole world. As if the Church of Christ is not catholic! As if the Orthodox Faith is not the one that 'sustains the universe!'" - *from St. Tikhon's 1907 Speech to the All-American Council in Mayfield, Pennsylvania*

Anecdotes from St. Tikhon's Life

After the decision to restore the Patriarchate, the most important act of the Sobor was the election of the man to fill that office. In the midst of the three days battle which resulted in the taking of Moscow by the Bolsheviks, the Sobor in orderly sittings carried out the routine it had defined for the election of a Patriarch. This was a minutely detailed procedure based upon the method first employed in 1634 for the election of Joasaf I and followed in the choice of all subsequent Patriarchs. A secret ballot of all members was taken and the names of those receiving votes tabulated according to the number received. The choice of the Patriarch must be made from the highest three in the list. In this case they were Tikhon, Metropolitan of Moscow, Antonius, Archbishop of Kharkov, and Arsenius, Archbishop of Novgorod. On November 5th, after a solemn service in the Church of the Savior, the three names, carefully sealed in wax rolls of equal size and weight, were placed in an urn and the eldest of the recluse-monks present drew out one name. It proved to be that of Tikhon, whose election was forthwith proclaimed. On November 21st (1917) occurred the solemn consecration in the Cathedral of the Assumption, and a new epoch in Russian church history had begun.

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The policy of Red Terror had gone into effect. In the face of this, the Patriarch issued his classic Epistle to the "Soviet of People's Commissars": - "Whoso taketh a sword shall perish by the sword", it begins. "The blood of our brothers shed in rivers at your order, cries to Heaven and compels us to speak the bitter words of truth. You have given the people a stone instead of bread, a serpent instead of a fish. You have exchanged Christian love for hatred: in the place of peace you have kindled the flames of class enmity". A few lines later we read "Is this freedom, when no one may openly speak his mind without danger of being accused as a counterrevolutionary? Where is the freedom of word and press? Where is freedom of church preaching?" The epistle concludes with the formal excommunication of all those connected with the terroristic movements in the government. He is a stern man and a bold one, who can publish such sentences in the face of powerful enemies against whom he has not the slightest physical defence. The Head of the Russian Church has been absolutely fearless in condemning wrong and insisting upon justice and right.

One of the differences from old times which immediately strikes a visitor in present-day Russia are the posters at the church door. Here is one announcing congregational singing-practice; another lists the services for the week, and you are surprised to note that there is a service with a sermon every day. Another gives notice of a special collection for a choir-director and a fourth, perhaps, appeals to all members to remain after this morning's service and help put in place the mats which are used in winter to cover the cold pavement. In the congregation the men are surprisingly predominant, many of them wearing Red Army insignia. You notice that while people are constantly entering the church, as in the old days, there are practically none leaving it, a phase of church service which was always very disconcerting to a western visitor in a Russian church before the Revolution. Now people come and stay for the entire service, especially the sermon, an institution which in the last few months (autumn 1921) has become, except for government deliverance, the most liberal and fearless public utterance to be heard. In general, the preachers confine themselves and their remarks pretty well within the limits set by the Patriarch in his quoted statement regarding the political activity of priests, but within these limits there has been the most vigorous, speaking of the "bitter truth". The preaching priesthood has attained a new respect in the eyes of Orthodox people, through the power of the spoken word.

The anecdote I heard in Moscow about Father Hotovitsky, of the Church of the Savior is indicative of the sort of priests here mentioned. There is

probably no more remarkable preacher in Russia than Father Hotovitsky. His sermons are very modern both in their theology and in their practical application. He was drawn into a discussion with Lunacharsky, Commissar of Education, on the omnipresence of God. "You say that God is everywhere", Lunacharsky told him. "Now you will surely admit that one could imagine a small box somewhere without God's being in the box". "But why suppose an imaginary box", Hotovitsky retorted, when we have you, Mr. Commissar?"

Easter, 1921, in Moscow was another indication of the present position of the Church. The Patriarch was released from his "home arrest" to officiate at the midnight service in the Church of the Savior. But even that great temple, accomodating ten thousand people, was utterly inadequate to serve the crowd which came. The whole of the grand square about the church was flooded with worshippers and several extra services were conducted simultaneously, in the open air, to meet the exigencies of the occasion. One very significant item about this service was the insistence of the people that it should occur at midnight by sun time, instead of by the daylight-saving chronometry of the Soviet government. So while the street clocks of Communist regime marked three-thirty a. m., the Orthodox people of Moscow celebrated" midnight service at midnight as the sun indicates time.

"It happened to be Thanksgiving Day at home, and the Patriarch remembered, and smilingly referred to its being known as "Turkey Day" in an American family he used to visit in New York. This brought on a discussion of American and Russian holidays and this in turn led to an interesting conversation "bout the present religious situation in Russia. At every step in this recital the Patriarch's clear insight into men and events and his statesmanlike grasp of the affairs of the whole Church were clearly evident. I left him with a renewed conviction of his fitness for the high post he occupies." *Donald Lowrie, Interview with the Patriarch*

One day, the Patriarch had to take a personal part, as a witness, in the trial initiated by the Bolsheviks against a group of clergymen. The Patriarch was warned that the fate of the accused depended on his testimony. This was a trial involving a great many priests, and concluded early in May of 1922, at which "red justice" was showcased. Here is an eyewitness description of the Patriarch's interrogation and the conduct of the accused and the audience. "When the stately figure, robed in black, appeared at the doors of the hall, accompanied by two escorts, everyone involuntarily stood up. All heads bowed low in profound, respectful homage. His Holiness the Patriarch calmly and majestically made the sign of the Cross over the accused and, turning upon the judges a direct, stern and majestic gaze,

awaited his interrogation, leaning on his staff. 'You gave orders that your Appeal be read publicly, calling the people to refuse to submit to the authorities?' asked the presiding judge. The Patriarch answered calmly: 'The authorities are well aware that there was in my Appeal no call to refuse to submit to the authorities, only a call to preserve our holy things, and in the name of preserving them to request the authorities to permit us to pay the monetary equivalent of their value, so that, while aiding the starving brethren in such a way, we might still preserve our holy objects.' 'So, this Appeal will cost the lives of your dutiful servants,' said the presiding judge, indicating with a dramatic gesture the accused seated on a bench. "The elder cast a kind and loving glance at the ministers of the altar and said clearly and firmly: 'I have always said, both to the investigative authorities and to all the people, that in this I alone am guilty. These are merely my army of Christ, which is obediently carrying out the orders of the leader given it by God. But if a redemptive victim is required, innocent lambs of the flock of Christ must die.' Here the voice of the Patriarch rose and was audible in all corners of the immense hall; and he himself seemed to grow when, turning to the accused, he raised his hand and blessed them, loudly and distinctly saying: 'I bless the faithful servants of the Lord Jesus Christ to suffer and die for Him.' The accused fell to their knees. The interrogation of the Patriarch was over."

That evening's session did not continue. "At dawn on 25 April 1922, the sentence of the 'just and impartial' 'people's' court was handed down: eighteen men were to be executed by firing squad, the rest were to be imprisoned for terms of various lengths. The suggestion of the presiding judge that an appeal for leniency be made to the higher authorities was responded to by Archpriest Zaozersky in an ardent speech and was rejected by all those sentenced." Only a deep sigh was audible in the hall at the pronouncement of the sentence; not a groan, not weeping.

A great redemptive sacrifice was to be offered up for the sins of the Russian people, and the people dispersed in silence. Yet not to their homes, but to the square, where all night more and more awaited the fatal moment. It was already light, the sun had already risen, when the heavy doors of the court opened and those sentenced to death emerged on the square, surrounded by a forest of bayonets. They walked bare-headed, their arms crossed upon their breasts, their eyes upraised to heaven, where the good Redeemer of the world awaited them, where all is forgiven, all is forgotten, where there are no sufferings, no evil. And a loud and exultant hymn poured forth from them: "Christ is risen from the dead."

Ecstatically, the people responded to them, crying: "Truly He is risen!" They kissed their hands, the hems of their garments. The guards fended off the crowd with their rifle-butts, yet they swelled in

number, pressing against the soldiers. Mounted detachments appeared and pushed the people back with their horses; they beat them back with their rifle-butts, with whips—all to no avail. The ecstatic singing poured forth, the ecstatic people hurled themselves at the martyrs. A truck carrying soldiers of the Red Army forced its way into the crowd. They seized the convicted and literally threw them into it. The truck rumbled and sped off. Yet the joyous "Christ is risen!" was long heard, was long audible in the clear air of the sunny spring morning." From Ivan M. Andreev's book, *A Brief Overview of the History of the Church of Russia from the Revolution to Our Days* (Jordanville, 1952).

A Sermon on the Sunday of Orthodoxy 1903 of St. Tikhon, Given in San Francisco

This Sunday, brethren, begins the week of Orthodoxy, or the week of the Triumph of Orthodoxy, because it is today that the Holy Orthodox Church solemnly recalls its victory over the Iconoclast heresy and other heresies and gratefully remembers all who fought for the Orthodox faith in word, writing, teaching, suffering, or godly living.

Keeping the day of Orthodoxy, Orthodox people ought to remember that it is their sacred duty to stand firm in their Orthodox Faith and to keep it carefully. For us it is a precious treasure: we were born and raised in it; all the important events of our life are related to it, and it is ever ready to give us its help and blessing in all our needs and good undertakings, however unimportant they may seem. It supplies us with strength, good cheer and consolation, it heals, purifies and saves us.

The Orthodox Faith is also dear to us because it is the Faith of our Fathers. For its sake the Apostles bore pain and laboured; martyrs and preachers suffered for it; champions, who were like unto the saints, shed their tears and their blood; pastors and teachers fought for it; and our ancestors stood for it, whose legacy it was that to us it should be dearer than the pupil of our eyes.

And as to us, their descendants – do we preserve the Orthodox Faith, do we keep to its Gospels? Of yore, the prophet Elijah, this great worker for the glory of God, complained that the sons of Israel had abandoned the Testament of the Lord, leaning away from it towards the gods of the heathen. Yet the Lord revealed to His prophet, that amongst the Israelites there were still seven thousand people who had not knelt before Baal (3 Kings 19). Likewise, no doubt, in our days also there are some true followers of Christ. "The Lord knoweth them that are His" (2 Timothy 2:19). We do occasionally meet sons of the Church, who are obedient to Her decrees, who honour their spiritual pastors, love the Church of God and the beauty of its exterior, who are eager to attend to its Divine Services and to lead a good life, who recognize their human failings and sincerely repent of their sins.

But are there many such among us? Are there not more people, "in whom the weeds of vanity and passion allow but little fruit to the influence of the

Gospel, because of the increase of their sins, who renounce the gift of the Lord and repudiate the grace of God" (a quotation from the Service of Orthodoxy). I have given birth to sons and have glorified them, yet they deny Me, said the Lord in the olden days concerning Israel. And today also there are many who were born, raised and glorified by the Lord in the Orthodox Faith, yet who deny their Faith, paying no attention to the teachings of the Church, they do not keep its injunctions, do not listen to their spiritual pastors and remain cold towards the divine services and the Church of God.

How speedily some of us lose the Orthodox faith in this country of many creeds and tribes! They begin their apostasy with things which in their eyes have but little importance. They judge it is "old fashioned" and "not accepted amongst educated people" to observe all such customs such as praying before and after meals, or even morning and night, to wear a cross, to keep icons in their houses and to keep church holidays and fast days. They even do not stop at this, but go further: they seldom go to church and sometimes not at all, as a man has to have some rest on a Sunday ... in a pub); they do not go to confession, they dispense with church marriage and delay baptizing their children. And in this way their ties with the Orthodox Faith are broken! They remember the Church on their deathbeds, and some don't even do that!

To excuse their apostasy they naively say: "this is not the old times, this is today, and consequently it is impossible to observe all the demands of the Church." As if the word of Christ is of use for the old times only and not for always. As if the Orthodox Faith is not the foundation of the world. "Ah, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evil doers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the Lord, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel into anger" (Isaiah 1:4).

If you do not keep the Orthodox Faith and the commandments of God, the least you can do is not humiliate your hearts by inventing false excuses for your sins! If you do not honour our customs, the least you can do is not to laugh at things that you do not know or understand. If you do not accept the motherly care of the Holy Orthodox Church, the least you can do is to confess you act wrongly, that you are sinning against the Church and behave like children! If you do, the Orthodox Church can forgive you, like a loving mother, your coldness and slights, and will receive you back into her embrace, as if you were erring children.

Holding to the Orthodox Faith, as to something holy, loving it with all their hearts and prizing it above all, Orthodox people ought, moreover, to endeavour to spread it amongst people of other creeds. Christ the Saviour has said that "neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candle stick, and it giveth light unto all that are in the house" (Matthew 5:15). The light of Orthodoxy was not lit to shine only on a small number of men. The Orthodox

Church is universal; it remembers the words of its Founder: "Go ye into the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Luke 16:15), "Go ye therefore and teach all nations" (Matt. 28:19). We ought to share our spiritual wealth, our truth, light and joy with others who are deprived of these blessings, but often are seeking them and thirsting for them.

Once "a vision appeared to Paul in the night, there stood a man from Macedonia and prayed him, saying, come over into Macedonia, and help us" (Acts 16:9), after which the apostle started for this country to preach Christ. We also hear a similar inviting voice. We live surrounded by people of alien creeds; in the sea of other religions, our Church is a small island of salvation, towards which swim some of the people, plunged in the sea of life.

Are we to remain deaf and insensible to them? God save us from such a lack of sympathy. Otherwise woe unto us, "for we have taken away the key of knowledge, we entered not in ourselves, and them that were entering in we hindered" (Luke 11:52). But who is to work for the spread of the Orthodox Faith, for the increase of the children of the Orthodox Church? Pastors and missionaries, you answer. You are right; but are they alone? St Paul wisely compares the Church of Christ to a body, and the life of a body is shared by all the members. So it ought to be in the life of the Church also. "The whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love" (Ephesians 4:16).

At the beginning, not only pastors alone suffered for the faith of Christ, but lay people also, men, women and even children. Heresies were fought against by lay people as well. Likewise, the spread of Christ's faith ought to be near and precious to the heart of every Christian.

In this work every member of the Church ought to take a lively and heartfelt interest. This interest may show itself in personal preaching of the Gospel of Christ. And to our great joy, we know of such examples amongst our lay brethren. Needless to say, it is not everybody among us who has the opportunity or the faculty to preach the Gospel personally. And in view of this I shall indicate to you, brethren, what every man can do for the spread of Orthodoxy and what he ought to do.

The Apostolic Epistles often disclose the fact that, when the Apostles went to distant places to preach, the faithful often helped them with their prayers and their offerings. Saint Paul sought this help of the Christians especially. Consequently, we can express the interests we take in the cause of the Gospel in praying to the Lord that He should take this holy cause under His protection, that He should give its servants the strength to do their work worthily, that He should help them to conquer difficulties and dangers, which are part of the work,

that He should not allow them to grow depressed or weaken in their zeal; that He should open the hearts of the unbelieving for the hearing and acceptance of the Gospel of Christ, that He should impart to them the word of truth, that He should unite them to the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church; that He should confirm, increase and pacify His Church, keeping it forever invincible.

We pray for all this, mostly with lips, but seldom with the heart. Don't we often hear such remarks as these: "What is the use of these special prayers for the newly initiated (the catechumens)? They do not exist in our time; let them pray for such where there are any; as to us, such prayers only needlessly prolong the service which is not short by any means, as it is." Woe to our lack of wisdom! Woe to our carelessness and idleness!

Offering earnest prayers for the successful preaching of Christ, we can also show our interest by helping it materially. It was so in the primitive Church, and the Apostles lovingly accepted material help to the cause of the preaching, seeing in it an expression of Christian love and zeal. In our days, these offerings are especially needed, because for the lack of them the work often comes to a dead stop. For the lack of them preachers cannot be sent out or supported, churches cannot be built or schools founded, the needy amongst the newly converted cannot be helped. All this needs money and members of other religions always find a way of supplying it. Perhaps, you will say, these people are richer than ourselves. This is true enough, but great means are accumulated by small, and if everybody amongst us gave what he could towards this purpose, we also could raise considerable means.

Accordingly, do not be ashamed of the smallness of your offering. If you have much, offer all you can, but do offer, do not lose the chance of helping the cause of the conversion of your neighbours to Christ, because by so doing, in the words of St James, you "shall save your own soul from death and shall hide a multitude of sins" (James 5:20).

Orthodox people, in celebrating the day of Orthodoxy, you must devote yourselves to the Orthodox Faith not in word or tongue only, but in deed and in truth.

Upcoming Events 2017

- 11 November: Men's Breakfast
- 11 November: Bramlett Baptism 10:00 a.m.
- 12 November: Parish Thanksgiving Meal 4:00 p.m.
- 15 November: Nativity Fast Begins

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!