

The Confessor's Tongue for December 3, A. D. 2017

Twenty-sixth Sunday after Pentecost: Prophet Zephaniah

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.

The Commandments of Christ

"If ye love Me, keep My commandments."

This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of Me. Luke 22:19

When people hear the word "commandment", what frequently comes to mind is a prohibition of something they might like to do or an order to do something they would rather not do. Hence Christ's command to "do this in remembrance of me" does not readily appear in thoughts or discussions of commandments.

What Christians are "to do" in this case is to take Christ's body and His blood "in remembrance of Him. From the beginning, the Church gathered on the Lord's day to fulfill this command. Now, not only on Sunday may Christians partake, but any day of the week on which the Divine Liturgy is served.

Christ speaks to the necessity of this in John's Gospel: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him" (John 6:53-56). Christ's words are potent, demanding careful consideration. Many Christians very poorly if at all observe this commandment, thinking faith is a matter of the heart to be expressed in prayer and Bible-reading at home and not in the divine-human institution of the Church. Many others observe the command in part, but do not believe that what they receive is actually Christ's body and blood, despite what He said, even as they presume to substitute wafers and grape juice for bread and wine.

Supposing that believers accept Christ words, that the bread and wine become His body and blood and impart life and Christ's presence to them, we may consider the command "this do in remembrance of Me." The theme of remembering is an important one in the history of God working with man for his salvation. Moses instituted the Passover so that Israel might remember how God delivered them from slavery in Egypt and so that generations to come might know His mighty works in behalf of His people. On the threshold of entering the Promised Land, God spoke through Moses to warn the people not to forget Him once they possessed the land and its riches—vineyards they had not planted and houses they had not built—lest they became rich and proud and forgot God and what He had done for them and then break the covenant and bring the curse on themselves. Forgetfulness of benefits bestowed and services rendered is a vice that leads to sin, and God wanted to spare His people the consequences of sin, urging them to remember who they had been, who

they had become, who God was and what He had done for them.

The history of the Hebrews in this regard foreshadows life in the Church. We by baptism have been delivered from spiritual slavery and given life and freedom in Christ. Through His resurrection, we all have eternal being—death is no longer final—and God desires to give eternal well-being to those who will be reconciled to Him through Christ. He has adopted us creatures as His children. He has given us His Holy Spirit as an earnest of an inheritance to come. There is nothing more important for us to do than to remember this regularly and to return to God fitting thanks and praise. To forget this is to dishonor Him by ingratitude and failing to appraise accurately the value of what He has given us. In fact, we gather regularly to ponder what He has done so that in time we may come to an accurate appraisal of the value of His gift, render him due honor and worship, and hunger and thirst to be filled with more of Him than we now contain. A Christian neglects this command to his great peril. He cannot remain indifferent to such marvellous things.

The command to "do this in remembrance" is life. To neglect it is not to have life. To obey it without remembering and without discerning Christ's body and blood invites judgment, for then we misuse things that are most holy. May God grant us grace to keep this command faithfully unto life and eternal good.

St. John of Kronstadt on Candles in Church

Do not grudge burning a wax taper before the image of the Lord during prayer; remember that you burn it before the Light inaccessible, before Him who enlightens you with His light. Your candle is as though a burnt offering to the Lord. Let it be a gift to God from your whole heart. Let it remind you that you yourself should also be a burning and shining light. *He was*, says our Lord of John the Forerunner, *a burning and a shining light*.

I offer light to the Lord in order that He may bestow the light of grace, spiritual light, upon me, that He may lead me from the darkness of sin into the light of the knowledge of God and of virtue; I offer fire that the fire of the grace of the Holy Spirit may be kindled in my heart, and that I may quench the fire of the vices of that miserable heart. I bring a light that I myself may become a light, burning and shining to all that are in the church.

It is well to place candles before the icons. But it is still better if you bring as a sacrifice to God the fire of your love for him and your neighbor. It is well that the one should accompany the other. But if you place candles before the icons and have no love for God and your neighbor in your heart, if you are grasping, if you

do not live in peace with others—then, your offering to God is useless.

I am an infirm, carnal, sinful man. I am not always able to bring to my Lord a heart burning with faith and love—but at least I bring, as a carnal, material man, a material gift as a gift to heaven, a lighted candle. May the Lord look down from heaven upon this little gift of my zeal, and may he give me more in return. He alone is rich, and enriches all, whilst I am poor and needy. He dwells amid light inaccessible, whilst I am in darkness. I am of little faith; may He grant me the gift of faith. I am poor in love; may He enrich my heart with this priceless heavenly treasure. I am powerless to do good; may He give me that power. From *Spiritual Counsels: Select Passages from My Life in Christ*, SVS Press

From the Arena, Chapter 1 St. Ignatius Brianchaninov

[From his very entry into the Church, a Christian] should occupy himself with all possible care and attention with the reading of the Holy Gospel. He should make such a study of the Gospel that it may always be present in his memory, and at every moral step he takes, for every act, for every thought, he may always have ready in his memory the teaching of the Gospel. Such is the injunction of the Savior Himself. This injunction is linked with a promise and a threat. In sending His disciples to preach Christianity, the Lord said to them: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19-20).

The promise consists in the fact that the person who fulfills the commandments of the Gospel will not only be saved but will also enter into the most intimate union with God and become a divinely built temple of God. The Lord said: “He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me; and he who love Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will reveal Myself to him” (John 14:21).

From these words of the Lord, it is evident that the commandments of the Gospel must be so studied that they become the possession, the property of the mind; only then is the exact, constant fulfillment of them possible such as the Lord requires. The Lord reveals Himself to the doer of the commandments spiritually, and He is seen with the spiritual eye, with the mind. The person sees the Lord in himself, in his thoughts and feelings transfigured by the Holy Spirit. On no account must the Lord be expected to appear to the eyes of sense. This is clear from the words of the Gospel that follow those we have just quoted: “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode in him” (John 14:23).

The threat to a person remiss in the fulfillment of the commandments of the Gospel is contained in the predication for him of unfruitfulness, estrangement from God, perdition. The Lord said: “Without Me,

you can do nothing. if anyone does not remain in Me, he is lopped off like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire and burned. Remain in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will remain in My love” (John 15:5-6, 9-10). “Not everyone who calls Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only those who do the will of My Father in heaven. On that day [the day of judgment] many will say to Me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Thy name, and expel demons in Thy name, and do many miracles in Thy name?’ And then I will confess to them, ‘I have never known you. Depart from Me, you whose work is sin’” (Matthew 7:21-23).

The giver, teacher, and model of humility, our Lord Jesus Christ, called His all-holy, almighty, divine commandments ‘the least’ on account of the very simple form in which they are expressed and which makes them easy to understand and easy to carry out for every type of person, even the most uneducated. But at the same time the Lord added that a deliberate and constant breaker of even on commandment ‘will be called least in the Kingdom of Heaven,’ or, according to the explanation of the holy Fathers, will be deprived of the heavenly Kingdom and will be cast into the fire of gehenna.

The Lord’s commandments are “Spirit and life.” They save the doer of them. They restore a dead soul to life. They make a carnal and worldly person spiritual. On the other hand, a person who neglects the commandments ruins himself and remains in a carnal and worldly state, in a fallen condition, and develops the fall in himself. “The carnal man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him” (I Corinthians 2:14). And therefore it is indispensable for salvation to be changed from a carnal man into a spiritual, from the old man into the new. “Flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God.” And therefore it is essential for salvation to be freed not only from the influence of the flesh or coarse passions, but also from the influence of the blood by means of which the passions act on the soul. “Those who go far from Thee [not by position of body but by disposition of soul which dodges from doing the will of God] will perish. Thou destroyest all who go awhoring from Thee” by following their own will and their own understanding by refusing the commandments of the Gospel or the will of God. The latter necessarily accompanies the former. “But it is good for me,” as a true [Christian], “to cling to God, to put my trust in the Lord” (Psalm 72:27-28).

Upcoming Events 2017

- 6 December: St. Nicholas; Vigil Dec 5 at 6:00 p.m.;
Liturgy 9:00 a.m. Dec 6.
- 7 December Men’s Meeting at church, 6:00 p.m.
- 9 December: Xenia Williams Baptism, 10:00 a.m.
- 13 December: St. Herman of Alaska Liturgy 9:00 a.m.;
Vigil Dec 12 6:00 p.m.
- 19 December: Holy Unction

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!