

The Confessor's Tongue for January 7, A. D. 2018

Sunday After Theophany; Synaxis of St. John the Baptist

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.

¹²*Last week's Confessor's Tongue had a wealth of relevant material. If you missed it last week, please get it and read it. It is posted online on the parish website if you can't find a paper copy.*

"Perverse Thoughts Separate Men from God"

From St. Paisios in "Elder Paisios of the Holy Mt."

Elder Paisios always urged us to think positively. Our positive thinking, however, should not be our ultimate aim; eventually our soul must be cleansed from our positive thoughts as well, and be left bare having as its sole vestment divine grace granted to us through Holy Baptism. "This is our aim," he used to say, "to totally submit our mind to the grace of God. The rest is taken care of by His grace.

In the beginning, we should willingly try to develop positive thoughts, which will gradually lead us to the perfect good, God, to whom belongs every glory, honor, and worship; on the contrary, to us belongs only the humility of our conceited attitude.

"We must always be careful and constantly question the nature of our thoughts. When someone is preoccupied and trusts his own way of thinking, he becomes vulnerable to the devil, who is capable of transforming us into sly persons, even when we are honest by nature.

The older fathers never trusted their own thoughts. Even for minor problems to which they had to give answers, they prayed to God, or fasted, as a way to "force" divine grace to reveal the answer according to God's will; and after they got the "information," they gave the answer.

In our days, when someone has a serious problem and asks for advice, we tend to interrupt him and provide an answer without letting him finish his question first. In this case, we do not only not seek the assistance of divine grace, but we also misuse our logic, which was granted to us by God. We are ruled by our own thoughts and unhesitatingly rely on them, very often having to face the disastrous results of our acts.

We must have positive thoughts, otherwise none of the spiritual fathers—not even the saints—can help us. When Jesus was on the Cross and all the terrible events were taking place, two thieves were also being crucified with Him. "And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour." "...And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom; and the earth shook, and the rocks were split; the tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, and coming out of the tombs, they went into the holy city and appeared to many." Each one of them had a different attitude towards Him, even though they were both placed next to the same God; a God who had never been blamed for, or accused by anyone for the slightest sin.

On the contrary, many people were benefited by Him: some had been cured of a specific disease, others had been resurrected, and all these miracles took place in public. Now, even nature was reacting against the injustice done to Him.

The thief placed on the left cross had created inside his mind a "factory," which produced only negative thoughts. "...One of the criminals who were hanged railed at Him, saying, 'Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us.'" Although he could see what was going on around him, he never questioned himself about it. The one on the right, who had a positive way of thinking, reacted as follows: "But the other rebuked him, saying, 'Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.' And he say, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom'."

Both thieves had the same almighty God placed between them who could help them. The negative thinking of the one on the left prevented God from helping him, whereas the one on the right—who had committed terrible crimes and was legitimately being punished—was able to "move" Jesus with his positive attitude. And He said to him: "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

We should keep in mind that God "cannot" help us, even if He really wants to, unless we acquire a positive way of thinking.

Concerning the spiritual progress of a disciple monk, it is more important for him to develop good thoughts than to be guided by a spiritual father who is considered a living saint...*To be continued...*

The Great Blessing of Water

Fr. Alexander Schmemmann

To bless water, making it "holy water," may have two entirely different meanings. It may mean, on the one hand, the transformation of something *profane*, and thus religiously void or neutral, into something *sacred*, in which case the main religious meaning of "holy Water" is precisely that it is no longer "mere" water, and is in fact opposed to it—as the sacred is to the profane. Here the act of blessing reveals nothing about water, and thus about matter or world, but on the contrary makes them irrelevant to the new function of water as "holy water." The sacred posits the profane as precisely profane, i.e., religiously meaningless.

On the other hand, the same act of blessing may mean the revelation of the true "nature" and "destiny" of water, and thus of the world—it may be the epiphany and the fulfillment of their "sacramentality." By being restored through the blessing to its proper function, the "holy water" is revealed as the true, full, adequate water, and matter becomes again means of

communion with and knowledge of God.

Now anyone who is acquainted with the content and text of the great prayer of blessing of water—at Baptism and Theophany—knows without any doubt that they belong to the second of the two meanings mentioned above, that their term of reference is not the dichotomy of the sacred and the profane, but the “sacramental” potentiality of creation in its totality, as well as in each of its elements. *For the Life of the World, “Worship in a Secular Age”*

The Blessing of Homes

Homes are customarily blessed after the Great Blessing of Waters at Theophany, though they can be blessed at any time. This is a brief service in the home of prayer and sanctifying the house through the sprinkling of holy water. A longer order of blessing is often used for the first blessing and cleansing of a new home (or home new to the family). In Russia, it is common that laymen themselves sprinkle their homes each year with the blessed waters of Theophany. The service of the blessing of water indicates this in the petition “For those who draw from this water and take it for the sanctification of their dwellings, let us pray to the Lord.” The priest blesses the house initially when the family first moves in and the family itself may renew that blessing by sprinkling the house each year at Theophany with the newly-blessed waters.

Yet there is a custom of having the priest come yearly to bless one’s home. This has the benefit of giving us time alone with our priest in our home if we desire conversation with him or have questions to ask. If you desire that your priest come to bless your house this year, please email him and he will set up a visit with you.

Whenever a priest comes to bless a house, we should have the house cleaned and ready and dress ourselves as we would for a church service. When the priest arrives, we turn off any television, radio, stereo, video, games, etc., that may be on. Pets that may interfere are placed out of the way. A small table may be set up before the Icon Corner, upon which a wide-mouthed but small bowl full of newly blessed water is placed. A lit candle, censer (if you have one), and icon are placed on the table. These things should be arranged before the priest arrives.

Family members and any guests gather and stand before the small table. The first names of those residing in the home are printed on a piece of paper and placed on the table. Proper baptismal names should be used.

One family member may carry the lit candle, going before the priest and leading him through the house, turning on lights, opening doors, etc. The other family members may accompany the priest or may stay at the table (children, though, usually want to see their rooms blessed).

After the service you may take advantage of having the priest in your home for the house blessing

to ask questions, to voice any concerns you may have, or simply conduct some spiritual conversation. Some parishioners desire a more extended visit or to have a meal with the priest. This should be arranged beforehand.

After the service, some of the faithful will make an offering to the church or give a gift to the priest. There is no obligation to do this, but if done, it is done following the service.

On the Use of Holy Water

Christ through His Baptism has sanctified the nature of water. For this reason, on the Eve of the Feast, after the blessing of the water, we take some home and keep it throughout the year, making regular use of it. The day of sanctifying the waters becomes a clear sign of God’s grace, for the nature of these waters is not spoiled for a long time, but it endures for a whole year or two, or three, or many years. Today the waters that are drawn remain fresh and new and after an extended time is as on the day in which it was drawn.

By pious custom, the blessed waters of Theophany are taken home after the Great Blessing of Waters for the spiritual refreshment of soul and body and the sanctification of our dwellings. The water is drunk every day from the Feast (Jan 6) through its leavetaking (Jan 14). At other times, when we cannot come to church, or when we feel ill, are embarking upon a journey, are especially tempted, etc., we should resort to these blessed waters, partaking of them with prayer and deep faith. Some partake of it daily upon rising (except when planning to receive Holy Communion).

St. Seraphim, after hearing the confessions of pilgrims, always gave them to drink from a cup of holy water. The elder heiroschemamonk Serpaphim used to say that there was no stronger medicine than holy water and holy oil.

Holy Water is kept in the church throughout the year for the faithful to take home as needed.

Old Holy Water may be disposed of by pouring it out on plants. It should not be poured down the drain.

Prayer Before Partaking of Prosphora and Holy Water

O Lord my God, may Thy holy gift and Thy holy water be for the remission of my sins, for the enlightenment of my mind, for the strengthening of my soul and body, for the health of my soul and body, for the conquering of my passions and infirmities, according to Thy mercy that hath no limit, through the prayers of Thy most pure Mother and all Thy saints. Amen.

Upcoming Events 2018

21 January: Feast of St. Maximus
2 February: Meeting of the Lord in the Temple
18 February: Forgiveness Sunday, Forgiveness Vespers at 6:00 p.m. with ice cream at Beth Marie’s following. Plan now to keep the evening clear.

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!