

# The Confessor's Tongue for January 14, A. D. 2018

Leavetaking of Theophany; St. Nina Equal-to-the-Apostles, Enlightener of Georgia  
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.

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## January 14: St. Nina Enlightener of Georgia

Saint Nina, Equal-to-the-Apostles, Enlightener of Georgia, was born in about 280 A.D. in Colastri, Cappadocia, an area with quite a few Georgian settlements. Her father Zabulon was a relative of St. George, the Great-martyr (d. 303). He belonged to a noble and pious family and enjoyed the favor of Emperor Maximian (284-305). While at the imperial military service, Zabulon, being a Christian, helped to release the captive Gauls, who had embraced Christianity. St. Nina's mother, Susanna, was a sister of the Patriarch of Jerusalem.

When twelve years old, St. Nina, the only daughter of her parents, came to Jerusalem with them. By their mutual consent, Zabulon, having obtained the Patriarch's blessing, retired to Jordan hermitages to serve God. Susanna was established as deaconess in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. The upbringing of St. Nina was entrusted to a pious old woman Nianfora. St. Nina demonstrated obedience and diligence, and in the course of two years, with the help of God's grace, she firmly assimilated the rules of faith and read the Holy Scripture with eagerness.

One day, as she was reading the Gospel story of the Crucifixion of Christ the Savior and weeping over it, her thoughts rested on the fate of the Lord's Robe (John 19: 23-24). Answering to St. Nina's question about the present location of the Robe, Eldress Nianfora explained that, according to tradition, the incorrupt Robe of the Lord had been taken by a Mtskheta rabbi, Eleazar, to Iberia (Georgia), which is called the particular province of the Mother of God.

St. Nina learnt that Georgia had not been enlightened with Christian faith as yet. She prayed day and night to the Most Holy Mother of God, asking Our Lady to let her see Georgia converted to the Lord and help her find the Lord's Robe.

The Queen of Heaven heard the prayers of the righteous girl. Once, when St. Nina was sleeping after long prayers, the Most Pure Virgin appeared to her in her dream and presented a cross woven from a grapevine saying, "Take this cross, it will be a shield and a protection for you against all visible and invisible foes. Go to Iberia, preach the Gospel of Lord Jesus Christ there, and you will be blessed with His grace. I will be your Protectress."

When St. Nina woke up, she saw the cross in her hands (now it is kept in a special shrine in Zion Cathedral of Tbilisi) and felt a spiritual joy. The Patriarch of Jerusalem blessed the young girl for the apostolic ministry.

On her way to Georgia, St. Nina miraculously escaped death when the Armenian king Tiridat martyred her companions, princess Ripsimia, her mentoress Gaiania, and thirty-five girls (commemorated on December 30), who fled to

Armenia from Rome to avoid the persecution by Emperor Diocletian (284 - 305). Strengthened by the visitations of the Lord's angel, who appeared first with a censor, and then with a scroll in his hand, St. Nina continued her journey and reached Georgia in about 319. Upon her arrival in Mtskheta, the ancient capital of Georgia, St. Nina found shelter in the Jewish quarter. Knowing Hebrew well, she was able to converse with the people and learn the ways and habits of the land. Through St. Nina's prayers the childless wife of a royal gardener, Anastasia, was released from her childlessness and came to believe in Christ. Soon Nina became known all over the Mtskheta region, where she labored, since many miraculous signs accompanied her ministry. On the day of the Most Glorious Transfiguration of the Lord, during a pagan offering performed by the oracles in the presence of King Mirian and a great multitude, St. Nina's prayers threw the idols Armazi, Gatsi and Gaim down from a high mountain. This event was accompanied by a severe storm.

St. Nina healed the Georgian Queen Nana of a severe illness. As a result, the latter, after being baptized, abandoned idolatry and turned into a devout Christian (her memory is observed on October 1). Despite the miraculous healing of his wife, King Mirian (265-342), incited by pagans, decided to subject St. Nina to severe torture. At that moment the sun faded away, and Mtskheta was plunged into an impenetrable darkness. The King suddenly got blind, and his suite, struck with horror, began to pray to their pagan gods asking them to bring back the daylight, yet to no effect. Then the terrified people appealed to the God preached by St. Nina. Immediately the darkness dispersed and the sun shone again.

The King Mirian, healed by St. Nina from blindness, was baptized together with his suite. In 324 Christianity became an established religion in Georgia.

According to the chronicle, the exact place where the Lord's Robe was concealed was revealed to St. Nina as a result of her prayers; on that spot, the first Christian church in Georgia dedicated to the Twelve Apostles was erected. This wooden church, now replaced with a stone cathedral, was called *Sveti Tskhoveli*, which means "Life-giving Pillar."

By that time, with the help of the Byzantine Emperor Constantine (306-337), who sent a bishop, two priests, and three deacons to Georgia at the request of King Mirian, Christianity had established a permanent foothold in the country. However, mountainous areas of Georgia still remained enveloped in the darkness of paganism. St. Nina, accompanied by presbyter Jacob and a deacon, set out for the upper reaches of the Aragvi and the Iori rivers, where she began to preach the Gospel to pagan

mountaineers. Many of them were baptized. From there St Nina proceeded to Kakheti (Eastern Georgia) and settled in a little mountainside hut in the village of Bodbe. She lived as an ascetic there, praying unceasingly and converting the neighboring inhabitants to Christ. Among them was the Kakhetian Queen Sodzha (Sofia), who was baptized together with her courtiers and a great number of people.

Having completed her apostolic ministry, St Nina learnt, through Divine revelation, that her earthly life would end soon. In her letter to King Mirian, she asked him to send out Bishop John to make necessary preparations for her departure. Not only John but also the king himself with all the clergy went to Bodbe. There, at her deathbed, they witnessed many healings. When giving precepts to those who came to worship her, St Nina, at the request of her disciples, told about her life and background. That story, written down by Salomia of Udzharma, laid the foundation for St Nina's hagiography.

### St. Maximus the Confessor

*Next Sunday, we celebrate the feast honoring our patron saint, Maximus the Confessor. In preparation for the feast, we offer this account of his life and work for you to read this week.*

The Church honours the memory of the Venerable Maximus with two feasts during the year: January 21 and August 13. Because the latter feast corresponds with the leavetaking of Transfiguration, the celebration of the summer feast of St. Maximus is commonly transferred to August 12, though we here at St. Maximus celebrate it with the Leavetaking on the thirteenth.

St. Maximus was an official in the court of the Emperor Heraclius of the East Roman Empire. About the year 614, after having served the emperor for three years, Maximus, longing for a life of solitude, of *besychia*, left his position and became a monk. He lived the rest of his life as a simple monk, never being ordained.

St. Maximus' keen mind was illuminated through his ascetic struggles, and he wrote extensively about the spiritual life based in the writings of those who had gone before and his own experience of those truths. But in 634, through his association with St. Sophronius, Patriarch of Jerusalem, St. Maximus was enrolled in the struggle against the Monothelite heresy, which taught that Jesus Christ had had only one will—a divine one. But for Christ to lack a human will was to render Him less than fully human. The consequences of this were not merely academic, for as St. Gregory the Theologian had taught, "What is not assumed is not healed." If Christ had not assumed a human will, then man's will was not healed by Christ—and it was man's will above all, perhaps, that needed to be healed. Man could not be saved if Christ lacked a human will.

For the rest of his life, and sometimes nearly alone, St. Maximus eloquently defended Christ's full humanity and divinity in the face of political pressure, heretics, and wavering churchmen. He was tried by imperial authorities, condemned, and exiled three times: in 655, 656, and finally, in 662. The last time, his right hand and his tongue, the instruments of his teaching, were cut off. He died in exile shortly afterwards on August 13, 662.

St. Maximus bears the titles "venerable" and "Confessor". "Venerable" (*prepodobnii*) is the title given to monastic saints. "Confessor" (*ispovednik*) is the glorious title given to a saint who has been persecuted and has suffered for the Faith without compromising it.

One of the Church's most profound theologians, St. Maximus possessed equally profound insight into the spiritual life which he acquired through his practice of it. True Christian life always consists both of believing and confessing the right doctrine as well as doing the right things or living the right way. In his writings, the intimate relation between theology and spirituality is manifest. Christian spirituality (how one approaches and interacts with God) depends on Christian theology (what is said about God). If the Church's confession of who God is, and especially, who Jesus Christ is, becomes corrupt or distorted, it cannot but have a corrupting influence on spiritual life.

St. Maximus teaches that there are three faculties of the soul: the rational faculty (mind or nous), the concupiscent (desiring) and the irascible (temper). There is a proper use for each, and there are misuses of each, which are sinful. For example, desire is to be directed towards God rather than created things. Anger is used rightly as a protective response towards the enemy, his demons, and the lies they tell to lead men into sin away from God. Regular misuse of the faculties results in a sinful habit. To overcome a fixed habit of pleasure related to the concupiscent element, one needs the continual exercise of fasting, vigils, and prayer. To overcome a habit of temper, kindness, benevolence, love, and mercy are needed.

Sin in action is preceded by sin in thought. "For unless anyone sins first in thought, he will never sin in deed." As a result the war with sinful thoughts is far harder to win than the war with sinful actions. To prevail over thoughts, Maximus counsels, "Take care of your passions and you will easily drive thoughts from your mind. Thus for fornication—fast, keep vigil, work hard, keep to yourself. For anger and hurt—disdain reputation, dishonor, and material things. For grudges—pray for the one who has hurt you, and you will be rid of them."

"A passion is a movement of the soul contrary to nature either toward irrational love or senseless hate of something or on account of something material." Furthermore, "the beginning of all passions is love of self, and the end is pride. Self-love is irrational love of the body, and if one eliminates this, he eliminates along with it all the passions stemming from it."

About money, St. Maximus says there are three sinful reasons for loving it: "pleasure-seeking, vainglory, and lack of faith. And more serious than the other two is lack of faith." There is also a virtuous reason for acquiring money: the financial administrator acquires money "so that he might never run short in relieving each one's need."

St. Maximus' teaching offers us many more spiritual riches than we can recount here. Many of his writings are found in volume two of the *Philokalia*. His work entitled *400 Chapters on Love* should be known and followed by all Christians. He wrote many other works, including *200 Chapters on Theology*, and commentaries on the Lord's Prayer and the Divine Liturgy.

St. Maximus shines as an example both of faithfulness to the Truth and as one who practiced the life he taught to others. His teachings instruct us not only in the mysteries of the highest theology, but also in how to live the Christian life, conquer our passions, attain the love of God and our fellow man, and be deified. Let us honour his memory by receiving his instruction and striving to follow his example in our own time.

The ikos from the canon of Matins for the saint well sums up his life:

Showing thyself to be an emulator of the sufferings of the Savior, and having Him in thy soul, O most blessed one who art most rich, thou didst appoint ascents in thy heart. And He hath given thee grace from heaven; for thou didst manfully oppose the tyrants, O wise one; and preaching the unoriginate, divine, and consubstantial Trinity, and denouncing the heretics who fought against God, thou didst endure boundless trials, O venerable and most praised one: the severing of thy theologizing tongue together with thy hand. Yet didst thou not cease to speak with boldness, confirming the faithful with thy divine teachings, manifestly preaching the transcendent and unoriginate Trinity unto all the people.

### **"Perverse Thoughts Separate Men from God"**

*From St. Paisios in "Elder Paisios of the Holy Mt."  
continued from last week*

Looking at this subject from a different point of view, Elder Paisios stressed and greatly emphasized the specific characteristic of love, that is, that "love is not irritable or resentful." He used to say that "we should never, even under the worst circumstances, allow a negative thought to penetrate our soul. The person, who, under all circumstances, is inclined to have positive thoughts, will always be a winner; his life will be a constant festivity, since it is constantly based on his positive thinking. Our acts depend on and are determined by the "machine" we have inside us, and not by the "material" we digest, or the environment we live in. I will give you an example, so you can better understand what I am trying to say:

If one has a machine that produces bullets and feeds it with the highest quality material—let's say gold—the machine will still convert gold into bullets, golden but destructive bullets; if he feeds it with

silver, then it will produce silver bullets; if he feeds it with iron, it will produce iron bullets, or if he feeds it with clay, it will produce clay bullets. In other words, no matter what material he feeds his machine, it still produces bullets, because it was made to manufacture these destructive products. If someone converts the machine into one that produces holy chalices instead of bullets, then whatever material he feeds it, it will always produce holy chalices. If he puts in the machine iron or clay, it will manufacture clay or iron chalices respectively.

I will now tell you a story regarding a very old father from Kapsala. The old father's "machine" was the kind that produced only positive thoughts. He only saw the good things in life, and he was blind to every evil. Once, a group of people visited him and brought him a small radio as a present. The old father took it in his hands and examined it with lots of admiration. He asked where it was manufactured, and the visitors told him in Japan. As he was looking at it, suddenly he was filled with joy and started kissing the radio saying: "Glory to God!"

The visitors asked him why he was glorifying God, and he explained to them, "You see, I am very pleased that the Japanese Christians put the sign of the Holy Cross on the products they manufacture."

The old father had noticed the positive and negative poles (+, -) of the batteries and thought it was the sign of the Cross. His mind produced a simplistic and positive thought for the radio the visitors brought him. Considering he was an ascetic, he could have developed negative thoughts and get angry at them for bringing him such an unsuitable present.

Someone asked the same father why he was making the sign of the Cross when he saw an airplane. And he simply answered: "Don't you see, my child, that its shape looks like the sign of our Holy Cross?" The old father ignored the negative thoughts associated with the sight of an airplane, such as wars and bombing. His mind was attracted by the similarity of its shape to the sign of the Holy Cross; the sight and noise of the airplane made him think of the crucifixion of Christ.

Once, a journalist, who had a negative way of thinking about everything, visited Elder Paisios. He began asking the Elder about various things and making him feel in distress. At one point, he asked him:

"Why are you staying here in the peace and quietness of Mount Athos being carefree, and you are not going out in the world to help people who have so many serious problems?"

The Elder, slightly raising his tone of voice, told him:

"Your mind machine is a broken one and produces only negative thoughts. You misunderstand everything you see or hear. Now, you see me living here and ask me why I am not going out in the world. If I go to live in the world, you will then say that it is unsuitable for a monk and that I should go back to the quietude of my cell. For this reason, I will only tell

you one thing: Repair your broken mind-machine and bear in mind the old saying which says, 'Traffic lights are made for noisy streets, whereas lighthouses for deserted rocky mountains.'"

One afternoon, I went to visit the Elder. At the fence of his cell stood a man about thirty years old, waiting for him to open the door.

When I arrived, Father Paisios opened his window and asked who it was. I replied,

"It is I, Father, and one layman" I said (and I told him his name).

"Tell the layman to leave," he replied.

Then, the layman said beggingly: "Father, I really wish to see you."

The Elder answered reproachfully: "Go, because you upset me as you only trust your own way of thinking and do not listen to what I tell you. Why are you coming here wasting your time?"

And he told him to go away. Then, he came and opened the door for me to come in.

"He is a real burden," Fr. Paisios told me. "He does not listen to my words. He comes, asks questions, and leaves; after a short time, he comes back and asks me the same things over and over again. This happens because he always listens to his own thoughts; therefore, he forgets what I tell him, or does not understand a word."

### **From *The Diary of a Russian Priest***

We must have recourse to certain words, gestures, signs (sign of cross, bows, etc.), in order to awaken and maintain a religious disposition in ourselves. Bodily and psychic processes are closely linked and mutually influence one another. There is nothing humiliating in the fact that the spiritual life is influenced, not by any and every kind of sign, but by pious and symbolical attitudes and gestures. Our entire body, its form and outline, are not accidental—'I am the image of Thine ineffable glory' (funeral service)—and sacred and symbolical expressions and gestures create lofty spiritual dispositions in the soul.

A good course for those of us who are unable to perceive our own sins is to observe what sins our friends and relations notice in us and reproach us for. This will nearly always serve as a correct indication of our real defects.

'Insensibility,' petrification, deadness of soul—these are the result of long-established sins which have not been confessed in time. The soul is greatly eased if we immediately confess the sin we have just committed, while we still feel its pang. Confession, if postponed, leads to insensibility.

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Let this, I say, be our way of overpowering them [unbelievers], and of conducting our warfare against them; and let us astound them by our way of life rather than by words. For this is the main battle, this is the unanswerable argument: the argument from conduct.

*St. John Chrysostom*

Whensoever then we commit some little fault or even negligence, let us not overlook that little; since this, being disregarded, quickly becomes great.

*St. John Chrysostom*

### **Head of the Church & the Body of Christ**

St. Nicholas of Zicha (+1956)

*"And gave Him to be the head of the Church which is His body" (Ephesians 1:22-23)*

Headless humanity is given a Head in the Lord Jesus, risen from the dead. The Body, [formerly] severed from the Head, begins to knit together with that Head, bit by bit and part by part. Not all men are the Body, but only those who believe in Christ the Lord; all are called, but only those who respond are received under the Head. Those who respond compose the Body that is called the Church, of which the Lord is the Head. But, as the risen and glorified man, Jesus is exalted within the Holy Trinity above each and all on earth and in heaven, so also will His Church, His Body, be raised up to its Head, above each and all. The whole Church will stand at the right hand of the Holy Trinity, for, where the Head is, there is the Body. To such an exaltation, greatness and glory will the gathered repentant sinners attain, who had sometime been enemies of God, wandering astray like the Prodigal Son and headless as a dead body, but now adopted through Christ and for Christ, and clad in the beauty of divine life and light.

It is a great thing, my brethren, for the Son of God to be incarnate on earth, and for Him to suffer on the Cross and die for our sakes. His sojourn on earth brought a vast change in the destiny of man and in the meaning of all created things. He changed all things and made them new. Therefore, my brethren, let us not live and conduct ourselves as the old man, but as the new; let us not live in sin but in righteousness; let us not conduct ourselves according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. Let us merit that exaltation, greatness, and glory to which we are called by our Head.

O Lord Jesus, the holy Head of Thy holy Church, make us worthy to be members for ever of Thy most pure Body. To Thee be glory and praise for ever. Amen.

### **Upcoming Events 2018**

14 January: Mission Council  
21 January: Feast of St. Maximus  
2 February: Meeting of the Lord in the Temple  
2 February: St. Vladimir's Seminary fundraiser  
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!**