

The Confessor's Tongue for February 11, A. D. 2018

Sunday of the Last Judgement; Hieromartyr Blaise

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.

Sunday of the Last Judgement

On this Sunday one week before the Great Fast begins, the Holy Church calls us to contemplate the Second Coming of Christ, the Resurrection of the Dead, and the standing of all before the judgement seat of Christ. The words and images are sobering, even frightening, as we realize that we must stand there in the penetrating glory of Christ to be revealed for what we have chosen to become in the course of our lives. We shall be able to hide nothing, forget nothing, excuse nothing. Everything will be revealed, everything made manifest. The Judgement is set before us to motivate us in the fast diligently to cultivate repentance, to deal with our sins now, in this life, which is given to us for repentance, so that all our sins may be removed from us "as far as the East is from the West" and will not remain to appear on that day. But if we are negligent regarding our sins in this life, we shall answer for them there. With such a fearful certainty before us, how can we be careless now? Let us read and contemplate a few hymns for this Sunday that they may motivate us to a deeper repentance.

When Thou shalt come, O righteous Judge, to execute just judgement, / seated on Thy throne of glory, / a river of fire will draw all men amazed before Thy judgement-seat; / the powers of heaven will stand beside Thee, / and in fear mankind will be judged according to the deeds that each hath done. / Then spare us, Christ, in thy compassion, with faith we entreat Thee, // and count us worthy of Thy blessings with those that are saved. *Vespers, LIHC, tone 6*

Here (above) we affirm what we confess in the Creed, that Christ will come again in glory to judge the race of man. Then there is this:

When Thou comest, O God, upon the earth with glory, / the whole world will tremble. / The river of fire will bring men before Thy judgement seat, / the books will be opened and the secrets disclosed. / Then deliver me from the unquenchable fire, // and count me worthy to stand on Thy right hand, O most righteous Judge. *Kontakion, Tone 1*

O Lord, supreme in love, as I think upon Thy fearful judgement seat and the day of judgement, I tremble and am full of fear, for I am accused by my own conscience. When Thou sittest on Thy throne and bringest all to trial, none will be able then to deny his sins, for the truth will accuse him and terror will constrain him. The flames of Gehenna will roar and the sinners will gnash their teeth. Therefore, have mercy upon me before the end, and spare me, Judge most righteous. *Ikos*

The hymns speak of the "books being opened", but the Church understands those books to be the human conscience opened in the full light of Christ's glory, as the *ikos* for Matins expresses.

The "Glory" verse for the Aposticha at Vespers instructs us in how we should respond now to the inevitable and inescapable coming judgement:

A publication of St. Maximus Orthodox Church, 2026 West Oak, Denton, TX, 76201 (940) 293-3032

Alas black soul! How long wilt thou continue in evil? / How long wilt thou lie in idleness? / Why dost thou not think of the fearful hour of death? / Why dost thou not tremble at the dread judgement seat of the Savior? / What defence then wilt thou make or what wilt thou answer? / Thy works will be there to accuse thee; / thine actions will reproach thee and condemn thee. / O my soul, the time is near at hand; / make haste before it is too late, and cry aloud in faith: / I have sinned, O Lord, I have sinned against Thee: / but I know Thy love for man and Thy compassion. // O good Shepherd, in Thy great mercy, deprive me not of a place at Thy right hand. *Vespers Aposticha, Glory, tone 8.*

The thought of judgement terrifies us, as it should, and provides a beginning to spiritual life in the desire to avoid condemnation at the judgement. In the hymns, we face that terror head-on, as we must. But each hymn imparts hope to the sinner tempted to despair: "Therefore we beseech Thee, O compassionate and loving Lord: spare us who sing Thy praise, for Thou alone art rich in mercy"; "O Judge compassionate, in Thy mercy save me"; "O Lord of glory, take pity on us in Thy goodness, and count us worthy of a place with them that have loved Thee"; "O God who only art compassionate, turn me back and save me." May we act on that hope.

On Obedience to the Church

St. Nicholas of Zicha

Why must one obey the Church and not some man whose thinking is opposed to the Church, eminent or intellectually gifted though that man may be? Because the Church was founded by the Lord Jesus Christ and is guided by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit of God. Also because "the Church" signifies the community of the saints, an orchard of choice, fruit-bearing trees. If a man remains opposed to the community of the saints, that means that he is unholy. Why, therefore, listen to him? "The Church is an enclosure," says the wise Chrysostom. "If you are within, the wolf cannot enter, but if you stray outside, the wild beasts will seize you. Do not wander from the Church; there is nothing mightier than the Church. She is your hope and your salvation. She is higher than the heavens, firmer than rock, wider than the world; she never grows old, but is forever renewing her youth."

Perverse Thoughts Separate Men From God

St. Paisios of Mt. Athos

The spirituality of a person is defined by the quality of his thoughts. One day, three men were sitting in a part chatting. Suddenly, a young man hastily ran by them. When they saw him, they all thought of something.

The first one thought: "He must have stolen something, so he is running to escape." The second

thought, "He must be late for his date with some girl—that is why he is running." And the their one said to himself: "Most probably, he is a chanter in a church and runs to be on time for the service."

Three men had three different thoughts for the same person. Only the last one, however, who had a positive thought, was benefitted, whereas the other two were spiritually harmed."

Father Paisios always insisted that when one of our brothers has a negative thought, we must try kindly and humbly to correct it. It is our duty to do so. Today, many people—unfortunately including some of our spiritual fathers—instead of trying to correct falsified thoughts, either consent to them or even distort the positive ones. I will give you an example so you can understand the way they function.

Suppose a young man says to his spiritual father: "A friend of mine did this and that to me."

And thus, he starts telling him his negative thoughts about his friend. His spiritual father, instead of trying to change his thoughts and make him love his friend again, views his problem from a social point of view, and wishing to be nice, says to him:

"Since you know what kind of person your friend is, do not pay attention to him. Just ignore him."

The young man may superficially feel better after listening to the words of his spiritual father, but his negative predisposition towards his friend is still inside him.

Now, when his friend goes to the same spiritual father to tell him the same things, the spiritual father faces the problem in the same way. He once again regards the problem from a social point of view and calms him down. He lets him, however, keep inside him the negative thoughts he has for his friend.

This way, the Elder said, I can even please the devil if I wish to. You will now see what happens next, since divine justice exists in our lives.

At some point, the two friends, who still have negative thoughts inside them, meet and begin accusing each other: "You dare this and that... I talked to my spiritual father and he also thinks the same way of you." Eventually, they discover that what their common spiritual father tried to do was just to be nice to them. As a result, they end up losing their trust and respect for him. The correct way of dealing with similar cases is the following, which I also apply.

A married man came to me to discuss the problems he was facing with his wife and how her behavior has affected his thoughts. I immediately started finding excuses for his wife's behavior. In the end, I told him that he should glorify God for the wife He gave him, and he is the one responsible for destroying their loving relationship. I made him question his behavior and love his wife again, by convincing him that he is in the wrong and that he should get rid of all his negative thoughts. I did exactly the same thing with his wife, when she came to see me. I also scolded her, so both of them got rid of their negative thoughts and ended up loving each other again. Moreover, she also understood why I

scolded them, as they realize that my only aim was to bring them back together.

Thoughts are like airplanes flying in the air. If you ignore them, there is no problem. If you pay attention to them, you create an airport inside you and permit them to land!

Once, a young man visited the Elder for advice. Being simple-hearted, however, he couldn't restrain from listening to negative thoughts. These thoughts were acting as an obstacle to every good work he was trying to accomplish. Father Paisios, due to his discretion, realize that his negative thoughts were the cause of his problem, and told him the following:

There was a man who used to say: "If I get married and have children, and my children are boys and there is a war, they will have to join the army and, finally, they will get killed. So, there is no reason for me to get married."

The, the Elder turns to him and says:

"Isn't that a silly thought?"

"Yes," the young man replied.

The Elder went on: "Be careful, because you are doing the same thing. Bear in mind that you will never achieve anything good, if you think and act this way."

A Prayer for the Construction of a Church to Pray at Home

O Lord Jesus Christ our God, Head and Cornerstone of thy Holy Church, have mercy on us, Thy people, who desire to build a temple unto Thy glory in memory of Thy saint Maximus the Confessor. Grant us the wisdom, land, and resources to build a temple whose very stones will cry out to all who see it in witness of Thine incarnation and death by which Thou hast reconciled us with Thy Father and made us His children by the grace of adoption. Remember all the members, friends, and benefactors of this parish who love the beauty of Thy house and support its construction and bless them with Thy good things. In flame our hearts with love for Thee that we may offer to Thee ourselves and all Thou hast given us to the glory of Thy holy Name. For Thou art the true Philanthropist—the Lover of Man—and to Thee do we send up glory, together with Thine eternal Father, and Thy most holy, good, and life-creating Spirit, now, and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

Please use this prayer regularly at home that we may all pray together about this matter.

Upcoming Events 2018

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.

19-24 February: Clean Week

1-7 April: Holy Week

8 April: Pascha

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!