

The Confessor's Tongue for August 19, A. D. 2018

Twelfth Sunday After Pentecost: Martyr Andrew the Commander

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.

On Coldness in Prayer

St. Theophan the Recluse

May the grace of God be with you! You write, "My prayer is somehow going poorly." That prayer is going poorly is not the fault of the prayer, but of the one who is praying. Try to pray as you should, and the prayer will go well. If someone writes carelessly, people reprimand and threaten him, and he begins writing meticulously. Reprimand yourself, if you will, and threaten yourself with Divine judgment, and you will begin praying properly. We conscientiously correct human affairs, because people would see and reproach us. We conduct the affairs of God haphazardly, however, because the Lord is silent and does not reproach us immediately, presenting His children, as many as are benefitted by Him, the opportunity to serve Him. Oh, how bitter it will be when we will have to plead guilty in this to the Lord Himself!

Where has your prayer gone? It was going well, you know, and you were already feeling its beneficial action in your heart. I will tell you where it has gone. You prayed once or twice diligently and with warmth, and received such quick help from St. Sergius as a consequence of your prayer, that you therefore thought your prayer was already established, and there was thus nothing more to worry about concerning it, that it would go along well on its own. By permitting this kind of thinking, you began reciting the prayers carelessly and hurriedly, and ceased guarding the thoughts. Because of this, your attention became dispersed, your thoughts were scattered in different directions, and there was no prayer in the prayer. This happened a couple of times, and then prayer totally vanished. Acquire prayer from the beginning again, and ask for it from the Lord Himself.

"If you are not successful in prayer, do not expect success in anything else. It is the root of everything."

You will learn from this that you must never consider any spiritual activity to be established, especially prayer; always go about it as if you were going to carry it out for the first time. First zeal is given to something that is done for the first time. If when undertaking prayer, you go about it as if you have never prayed properly yet, and only now do you want to do so for the first time, you will always carry out your prayer with first zeal. And it will go well.

I suppose you began carrying out your prayer rule hurriedly—and haphazardly—just so you would finish it. Make it a rule for yourself from now on that you will never pray haphazardly. Nothing offends the Lord more than this. It is better to recite a few of the set prayers with the fear of God and reverence than to recite all of them haphazardly. It is better even to fall down on your knees and recite one of the prayers or

even use your own words than to do the other thing. You began praying that other way, and there are no results. Scold yourself thoroughly for such carelessness. Know that no one who prays attentively and diligently ever departs from prayer without having received its action. Oh, what good we deprive ourselves of when we permit ourselves to pray carelessly!

How does haste come about in prayer? It is not clear. We spend hours on other tasks, and it never seems long; but hardly have we begun our prayer than it seems we have been praying for who knows how long. We hurry ourselves along in order to finish sooner. There is no benefit from the prayer.

What should be done then? Some people do the following, so as not to be subject to this self-deception: They set aside a quarter of an hour for prayer, or half an hour, whatever is more convenient for them, and thus adjust their prayer time so that when the clock strikes, whether on the half hour or hour, they will know when it is time to end. While they are at prayer, they do not worry about reading a certain number of prayers, but only that they rise up to the Lord in a worthy manner for the entire set time. Others do this: Once they have established a prayer time for themselves, they find out how many times they can go around the prayer rope during that period, moving the beads in an unhurried manner. Then when they are at prayer, they move the beads unhurriedly for the set number of times, and during that period they pray to the Lord in their mind, speaking to Him in their own words or reciting set prayers, or bowing with reverence to His boundless majesty without either of those. There are others who get so accustomed to praying that the times they spend at prayer are moments of delight for them. It rarely happens that they stand at prayer for the set time only; instead, they double and triple it. Select whichever method pleases you most. Maintain it without fail. We cannot get along without a precise prayer rule for you. Those who are zealous about prayer do not need any rules.

I have already written you about memorizing the prayers and reciting them by heart when you are at prayer, without opening your prayer book. This is nothing to boast about! When you are at prayer, recite the prayer or psalm from memory, and embrace each word, not just with thought, but with feeling. If during this your own prayerful cries arise from some word of the psalm or prayer, do not cut them off, but let them come. You see, you will not worry about reciting a certain number of prayers, but only being at prayer for the allotted time, which will make itself known either by beads on the prayer rope or by the clock.

Rush through the recitation of prayers and nothing will happen. Recite one psalm or one prayer

for the whole time. Someone was saying that often he will recite a single prayer, the *Our Father*, for the entire allotted time. This is because he considers each word in the entire prayer. Another person said that when someone explained to him that one could pray in this way, he stood in reverential prayer for the entire Matins, reciting *Have mercy on me, O God*, and did not manage to complete the entire psalm.

Get accustomed to praying in this manner if you will, and God granting, you will soon cultivate prayer within yourself. Then you will no longer need any rules. Labor, for nothing will come from you otherwise. If you are not successful in prayer, do not expect success in anything else. It is the root of everything. May the Lord bless you.

From *The Spiritual Life and How To Be Attuned to It*

The All-Night Vigil: Litia, Aposticha, St. Simeon

At Vigils for a Great Feast or high-ranking saints, the Evening Litany is followed by the "Litia," also written "Lity." The word comes from the Greek and means "prayer" or "entreaty". (If the Litia is not celebrated as part of the Vigil, the clergy remain in the altar, and the service continues with the stichera of the Aposticha.)

The Litia begins with the choir singing special stichera (verses) in honor of the feast or saint. As they sing, the clergy and servers process out the North Door to the narthex of the temple (the Royal Doors remain shut). There is a special reason for the location of this part of the service. The nave of the temple represents the Church in the world, but the narthex represents those not yet united to the Church. A pre-revolutionary Russian liturgist writes, "In the Litia, the Church steps out of its blessed milieu and, with the goal of mission to the world, into the external world or into the narthex, the part of the church which abuts this world, the part which is open to all, including those not yet part of the Church or excluded from Her. From this stems the universal character of Litia prayers, embracing all people." In some times and places, the Litia is even celebrated outside the temple. Properly, all the faithful would process with the clergy to the narthex or outside, but due to the lack of space in most modern narthexes, this is rarely done—only the clergy leave the nave.

When the choir finishes the stichera for the Litia, the Deacon intones a special litany of five longer-than-usual petitions, beginning with the long prayer, "O God, Save Thy People." In this first petition, we ask that God would look upon His world with mercy and compassion, exalt the horn (a Scriptural symbol of power and strength) of Orthodox Christians, and send down upon them His rich mercies through the petitions of the Theotokos and a long list of saints. This reminds us that the Church consists of those of all times and places, not just those who happen to be alive now. Moreover, we call upon those who have successfully completed their earthly course to pray for us, the great cloud of witnesses of which Paul writes in the epistle to the Hebrews.

In the remaining four petitions, we pray for hierarchs, the whole Church and the local Church, the departed, and civil authorities. We pray to be preserved from "wrath, famine pestilence, earthquake, flood, fire, the sword, foreign invasion, and from civil war, and from sudden death..." and we pray that God will hear us sinners and have mercy on us.

"Lord, have mercy" is sung many times after each of these petitions (originally 40, 50, and 30 times for the first three petitions, now customarily reduced to 12 times). After the priest's exclamation, he then offers a prayer to Christ through the intercessions of the Theotokos and a long list of saints (sometimes omitted): "...make our prayer acceptable, grant us forgiveness of our trespasses, shelter us under the shelter of thy wings, drive away from us every enemy and adversary, give peace to our life, O Lord. Have mercy on us and on Thy world and save our souls, for Thou art good and lovest man."

After this prayer, the people and clergy process back into the nave while the choir sings the stichera of the Aposticha commemorating the feast or saint, alternating with psalm verses chanted by the reader. The clergy stand before a table on which five loaves (evoking the five loaves Christ used to feed the 5000), wheat, wine, and oil are placed. They remain there until after the "Our Father" has been read and the dismissal troparia have been sung, and then the priest blesses the loaves, wheat, wine, and oil. The ancient custom was then to distribute the wine and bread to strengthen the faithful to keep the long all-night Vigil yet ahead. Now, the bread dipped in the wine is distributed during Matins when the faithful come to venerate the Gospel or Festal icon and be anointed with the blessed oil.

Following the Litia and Aposticha is St. Symeon's Prayer, "Now dost Thou dismiss Thy servant, O Master, according to Thy word, in peace..." which expresses the last theme of Vespers: that of the end. At daily Vespers, the prayer is read by the reader, but at Great Vespers it is sung. The words of this prayer come from the lips of St. Symeon the God-Bearer (Luke 2:22-35). St. Symeon had spent his entire life in constant expectation of the coming of the Messiah, for he had been told in a vision that he would not die before he had seen the Promised One of Israel. When Mary and Joseph brought the Child Jesus to be presented to God in the Temple, he was there and received the Christ-child into his arms, and spoke the words we now sing at Vespers:

Now dost Thou dismiss Thy servant, O Master, according to Thy word in peace. For mine eyes have seen Thy salvation, which Thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to enlighten the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel.

St. Symeon had been waiting all his life, and then, at last, the Christ-child was given to him: he held the Life of the world in his arms. He stood for the whole world in its expectation and longing, and the words he used to express his thanksgiving have become our own. He could recognize the Lord because he had expected Him; he took Him into his arms because it

is natural to take someone you love into your arms; and then his life of waiting was fulfilled. He had beheld the One for whom he had longed. He had completed his purpose in life and was ready to die.

But death to St. Symeon was no catastrophe. It was only a natural expression of the fulfillment of his waiting. He was not closing his eyes to the Light he had at last seen; his death was only the beginning of the more inward vision of the Light. In the same way, Vespers is the recognition that the evening of this world has come, which announces that day that has no evening. In this world, every day faces night; the world itself is facing night. It cannot last forever. Yet the Church is affirming that an evening is not only an end, but also a beginning, just as any evening is also the beginning of another day. In Christ and through Christ, it may become the beginning of a new life, of the day that has no evening. For our eyes have seen salvation and light which will never fail. And because of this, the time of this world is now pregnant with new life. We come into the presence of Christ to offer Him our time, we extend our arms to receive Him, and He fills this time with Himself. He heals it and makes it—again and again—the time of salvation.

Following St. Symeon's Prayer, the reader chants the Trisagion Prayers through the "Our Father." At the exclamation, the lights are turned up and the Royal Doors are opened. The hymn "O Theotokos, Virgin, Rejoice..." is sung three times. (At Great Vespers served alone, this hymn is not taken, but rather the appropriate dismissal troparia and theotokion.) If a Litia was served, the Deacon now censes the loaves, wheat, wine, and oil and the Priest reads the prayer of blessing. He then gives the dismissal and returns to the altar. The Royal Doors are closed, the Church is darkened, and the bell rings to announce the beginning of Matins.

Practical Spiritual Counsel on Judging, etc. *St. Sergius of Kasimov*

If you have a sinful habit of judging and condemning your neighbor, then here you are, the Great Fast has arrived, lay down a good beginning and pitch out this habit. But if out of weakness you forget, if you condemn someone, then give yourself the rule to make three prostrations that day with the prayer: "O Lord, save and have mercy on ___ (say the name of the person you judged), and by his prayers have mercy on me, a sinner." Do this always, whenever you judge someone. If you fulfill this, the Lord will see your fervor and will deliver you for good from this sinful habit. And if you don't judge anyone, then God, too, will never judge you, and so you will receive salvation.

Act exactly the same way with everything else. Has an unchaste thought visited your heart? Make three prostrations with the words, "O Lord, forgive me the prodigal," and consider yourself a prodigal. For you know the Lord considers even an unchaste glance to be an unclean action. Have you deceived someone? Go and apologize to him, admit your falsehood, and

ask forgiveness. Have you taken something belonging to someone else? Go and return it to him; but if this is impossible, then give double its value to a person in need. Have you offended someone? God and make peace with him. Meanwhile, the spirit of pride will whisper, "How is this possible? It's disgraceful! what will people think of me?" Answer it: "You can't fool God; He knows and sees everything. I wasn't ashamed to sin; I won't be embarrassed to repent also. Help me, O Lord!"

And—may God have mercy—if you fall into any major sin, then bring to God special repentance, confess your sin to your spiritual father as soon as possible, ask him for the kindness of giving you a penance, and carry it out willingly, with great joy, knowing that in this lies your salvation: you have both repented and also wish to bring forth fruit worthy of repentance. Without fail, begin to act in this way and pray constantly: "O Lord our God! Even thou I have done nothing good in Thy sight, grant me henceforth to make a good beginning."

From Elder Zacharias *Man the Target of God*

It follows then that obedience is a gift of the Holy Spirit. The first step towards it occurs when man comes to understand that all the faculties of his soul are broken and diseased, that he is ailing and in need of healing. The realization that only God-become-man is able to raise him from the pit in which all humanity is sunk is not something man can perceive without the presence of the Holy Spirit. This initial degree of humility of admitting his true state, and hatred of sin, procures a small opening in his heart. Thus God, who always waits for man to bring Him the small part of his will so that He can join to it the greater part of His grace, readily comes to further illumine the one who shows the desire to change and resoluteness to sacrifice. Elder Sophrony emphasizes, "To see one's sin is a spiritual act of extraordinarily great price for all who seek the Face of the Living God. Indeed, this act is the working in us of God Himself, who is Light."

Thy Word Is a Lamp *Fr. Justin Frederick*

Darkness is not conducive to safe travel. Even navigating a familiar house at night can be perilous without light. A toy not put away, a chair not pushed in under the table, or a little disorientation suffices for a stubbed toe, a bumped nose, or an unexpected fall to the floor. To combat the dangers of navigating a home by night, man has created night lights, flash lights, and easily accessible light switches so that late night trips to the bathroom do not end in mild disaster.

How much more does our spiritual life require light—light that allows us to see where it is safe to step and what steps to avoid, where lies the precipice and where runs the path. The Psalmist in that great panegyric to the law of God revealed to Moses on Mount Sinai declares, "Thy word is a lamp to my feet

and a light to my path." Man, perhaps, does not think of law as giving light, but the Psalmist begs to differ. Much as a flashlight keeps us from stumbling in the dark, so God's law, His Word, provides light to help him navigate the dark paths of this life to keep him from falling.

How can a young man keep his way pure, especially in a world full of temptation? "By taking heed according to Thy Word" (Psm 118:9) is the answer. God's Word gives wisdom, understanding, and guidance to keep man from sin and to guide him safely on the path of life. "Thy Word have I hid in my heart that I might no sin against Thee" (Psm 118:11). By reading, memorizing, and meditating upon God's Word, we hide it in our hearts so that it is always with us when we need it.

There is scarcely anything more shameful than when a man who can read neglects the reading of God's Word. Such a one might as well be illiterate! He would be better off, in fact, for the illiterate knows he cannot read and often longs for that freedom, while the one who can read but neglects God's word to consume endless volumes of human wisdom deludes himself into thinking he is learned.

Brethren, we are all literate, at least in the sense of being able to read. Let us use that ability to become literate in God's Word, to read it, to reflect upon, to memorize it, to do it. It will repay us handsomely for the time we put in by giving us knowledge, wisdom, and light to keep us from tripping over unseen moral snags, falling into unperceived error in our thoughts, and delivering our souls from spiritual disaster.

Balaam's Donkey or Thoughts of a Sinner

Photius Kontoglou

The poor manger where Christ is born is the humble heart into which He enters and "makes a dwelling." He is never born in vain places.

No book is so simple and so clear as is the Gospel. And despite this, no book can be twisted so easily as the Gospel, because the human heart is wicked.

The more we feel in our hearts gratitude that we exist and for the whole world, and we want to give thanks, the closer we come to the faith of Christ. We want to cry, to forgive the wicked, and to give thanks also for those things which previously had seemed bad to us.

My soul is comforted when I look at the holy icons of Byzantine iconography. I think I am reading the Gospel. This art is a healing for the eyes.

"The Kingdom of God suffers violence, and the violent take it by force" (Mt 11:12). The Kingdom of God is gained with struggle, with affliction, and with harsh forcefulness on our bodies, and especially on our spirit, that is, on our egotism and our knowledge.

The fewer words a Christian says, the more he learns; and the less he examines, the more he is illumined.

When someone has been healed of the rage to grab and rip people apart, treating his neighbor

unjustly, people call that person lazy and indifferent, because all the activity of humanity is none other than this mania.

The world has no need of Christ, as long as it has its own darkness as light.

A great chasm is formed between Christians and others, even if the others are the best, most philanthropic ones. It's like another world. Completely another creation, "a new creation."

One whose heart has not had misfortune and has not been hurt or tightened, has not truly felt the hope of God.

Whoever has not despaired of everything does not run near God, because he considers that other protectors exist for him to lean on.

Whoever has been greatly embittered by the world is sweetened more by God, and nothing else pleases him anymore, except Christ, the saints, and humble Christians.

When we become Christians, the praises of people leave a bitter taste inside us, whereas the accusations of others embitter us sweetly and make us draw into ourselves, and our heart becomes warmer.

Christ enlarged man's heart, which haughtiness had narrowed. Humility widened it, something most strange.

He who sinned in the flesh is saved more easily than he who sinned with the spirit.

Photius Kontoglou was a famous 20th century Greek Iconographer and Theologian who had a great influence on his generation.

From Our Parish History in Augusts Past

Our first coffee hour was held this day in 2001.

The second weekend of our existence, August 4-5, 2001, six people attended Vespers and eight the Divine Liturgy.

On August 26, 2001, we announced the patron of our parish, St. Maximus the Confessor, chosen by Archbishop Dmitri off a list of names suggested by Fr. Justin.

In August 2003, our first family went to seminary, the Biberdorfs.

On August 24, 2004, we set a new Sunday record in attendance with 54 and two deacons, a number not surpassed on a "normal" Sunday (no bishop, not Pascha) until January of 2007.

August 4, 2009 saw the first death among active parishioners, Nicholay Gluschenko.

August 28, 2011 saw Archbishop Dmitri repose.

Upcoming Events 2018

19 August: Blessing of Pupils, Students, and Teachers
22 September: Baptisms of Emily Stokes & Jacob Skelton
30 September: Annual Meeting
14 October: Octoberfest
31 October: All Saints Party
11 November: Parish Thanksgiving Meal
2 December: Children's Craft Fair

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!