

# The Confessor's Tongue for October 21, A. D. 2018

21st Sunday After Pentecost: Venerable Hilarion the Great

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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## On Idle Curiosity

We all know the saying "Curiosity killed the cat." The cat, viewed as a curious creature readily poking its nose into everything, in this case did so to its hurt. We say this when our curiosity about things not truly our concern gets us into trouble of one sort or another.

In his book *Path of Salvation*, St. Theophan the Recluse defines 'curiosity' as "an irresistible inclination to see and hear without purpose". It "consists of trying to know everything without order, without aim, without distinguishing whether it is needful or not" (pp. 54-55).

Curiosity is a gift from God. It helps us to live and learn in our world. Without curiosity, there would be little innovation, little advance of knowledge. Asking why things are this way and how they work and then investigating guided by such questions leads to much useful knowledge.

The curiosity that kills the cat and that of which St. Theophan writes might be termed "idle curiosity" to distinguish it from curiosity purposefully directed towards an end. "Idle curiosity" seeks to see and hear and know things without aim, without purpose, without need. It pokes its nose unabashedly into the business of others. The fading tabloids and the internet replacing them are full of material that panders to our idle curiosity. Much of the news consists of this sort of material as well. The internet and its search engines make indulging in idle curiosity easier than it has ever been.

Idle curiosity will inevitably get us, like the cat, into trouble. Curiosity properly used will bring us to knowledge of God. *Fr. Justin Frederick*

## 22 October St. Abercius, Equal to the Apostles

*We shall serve Vespers today at 2:30 and Divine Liturgy tomorrow morning at 6:00 in honor of him.*

Saint Abercius, Bishop and Wonderworker of Hieropolis lived in the second century in Phrygia. The city of Hieropolis was inhabited by many pagans and very few Christians. The saint prayed to the Lord for the salvation of their souls and that they might be numbered among God's chosen flock. An angel appeared and bade Saint Abercius to destroy the idols in the pagan temple. He fulfilled the command of God with zeal. Hearing that the idol-worshippers wanted to kill him, the saint went to the place where the people had gathered and openly denounced the failings of the pagans. The pagans tried to seize the saint.

At this moment three demon-possessed youths in the crowd cried out. The people were dumbfounded, as the saint expelled the devils from them by his prayers. Seeing the youths restored to normal, the people of Hieropolis asked Saint Abercius to instruct

them in the Christian Faith, and then they accepted Holy Baptism.

After this the saint went to the surrounding cities and villages, healing the sick and preaching the Kingdom of God. With his preaching he made the rounds of Syria, Cilicia, Mesopotamia, he visited Rome and everywhere he converted multitudes of people to Christ. For many years he guarded the Church against heretics, he confirmed Christians in the Faith, he set the prodigal upon the righteous path, he healed the sick and proclaimed the glory of Christ. Because of his great works, Saint Abercius is termed "Equal of the Apostles."

Saint Abercius returned home to Hieropolis, where he soon rested from his labors. After his death, many miracles took place at his tomb. He wrote his own epitaph, and it was carved on his tombstone, which is now in the Lateran Museum.

The text of his epitaph is as follows:

The citizen of a chosen city, this [monument] I made [while] living, that there I might have in time a resting-place of my body, [I] being by name Abercius, the disciple of a holy shepherd who feeds flocks of sheep [both] on mountains and on plains, who has great eyes that see everywhere. For this [shepherd] taught me [that the] book [of life] is worthy of belief. And to Rome he sent me to contemplate majesty, and to see a queen golden-robed and golden-sandalled; there also I saw a people bearing a shining mark. And I saw the land of Syria and all [its] cities; *Nisibis* [I saw] when I passed over Euphrates. But everywhere I had brethren. I had Paul ... Faith everywhere led me forward, and everywhere provided as my food a fish of exceeding great size, and perfect, which a holy virgin drew with her hands from a fountain and this it [faith] ever gives to its friends to eat, it having wine of great virtue, and giving it mingled with bread. These things I, Abercius, having been a witness [of them] told to be written here. Verily I was passing through my seventy-second year. He that discerneth these things, every fellow-believer [namely], let him pray for Abercius. And no one shall put another grave over my grave; but if he do, then shall he pay to the treasury of [the] Romans two thousand pieces of gold and to my good native city of Hieropolis one thousand pieces of gold.

## All-Night Vigil: Gospel to Canons

Following the reading of the Gospel at the Resurrectional Vigil, the choir leads the faithful in singing "Having beheld the Resurrection of Christ" as the priest stands on the ambon, holding the Gospel Book before his face. At the words, "Come, all ye faithful," he descends and brings the Gospel into the center of the nave to be venerated.

After the singing of this glorious hymn, one of the most festive moments of Matins, the reader chants Psalm 50. Thus, in the midst of celebrating the "joy come into the world," we realize how far short we fall the gift that brings joy. We remember that the proper

response to the proclamation of the Gospel is to repent, as John the Baptist and Christ preached, "Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand." Thus we cry out in David's words, "Have mercy, on me, O Lord," so that we might more fully receive the Kingdom.

Psalm 50 is followed by the singing of a few brief hymns that reiterate the prayer of the Psalm and then the great Prayer of Intercession, which begins with the words, "O God, save Thy people." The prayer asks God to look upon His world "in mercy and compassion," to send down upon us His "rich mercies," and to "exalt the horn of Orthodox Christians." The "horn" is a Biblical symbol of power and victory, so the prayer essentially asks God to grant us victory in the struggle against sin and the devil. These requests are made "through the intercessions of the Theotokos" and a long list of saints, which can vary according to local custom. This prayer clearly shows the oneness of the Church. We who are yet on earth join in prayer with those already in Heaven. Those in Heaven pray with and for those of us still struggling on earth. Together the saints in Heaven and on earth, along with the Holy Angels, glorify the One God in Three Persons. This prayer is followed by the canons, during which the people normally come to venerate the Gospel and receive the priest's blessing or be anointed with holy oil.

A canon is essentially a musical composition. It was created to be a symphony of sorts. Typically today, only the first troparion of each Ode, known as the *Irmos*, is sung, and the rest is chanted by readers, but originally, it was all sung. In Athonite monasteries, whole odes may be sung while others are read. Singing more makes it more festive: witness Pascha, at which the canon is entirely sung.

Music in worship is essential. Singing is the real communication between God and Man. Speech, on the other hand, is a fallen function of man in a world that has fallen. The Logos, the Word, combined with music, has great power. Instrumental music is not used in the Church because instruments make music without the Word, and even when the Word is added to instrumental music, the instruments tend to overwhelm the Word. In any case, the Church considers the human voice to be the highest, most glorious instrument for making music. All this points to why the Gospel is not read in a conversational voice, and, in fact, why all the services in the Church are sung or chanted and not spoken. Only the sermon is spoken. The whole Liturgy of the Church is musical in nature, echoing the Angelic choirs of Heaven.

At every Matins service, multiple canons are sung. At a Resurrectional Matins, typically four canons are appointed: one for the Resurrection, one for the Cross and Resurrection, one for the Theotokos, and one for the Saint(s) of the day.

Each canon consists of nine "odes". Each ode is based on a Biblical passage and contains additional hymns called troparia between which are interspersed exclamations appropriate to the canon, such as "Glory

to Thy holy Resurrection, O Lord!" "Most Holy Theotokos, save us!" or "Venerable Father Maximus, pray to God for us!" The second ode was eventually dropped because of its length and because it had importance only when the canon was sung. After the third and sixth odes, Little Litanies occur and special hymns. Between the eighth and ninth odes, the Magnificat is sung, which is actually the Biblical passage upon which the ninth ode is based (Luke 1:46-55, 68-79): Mary's song of joy to God when she met her cousin Elizabeth after the Annunciation. It is accompanied by a great censuring of the church. The Magnificat is sung at nearly every Matins service except at the Twelve Great Feasts and Pascha.

The ninth ode of every canon is always dedicated to the Theotokos. The other odes are dedicated to various Old Testament Saints, to whom reference is often made in the *irmos* of the ode. The first ode (Exodus 15:1-9) is dedicated to Moses and the crossing of the Red Sea; the second, (when it is used: Deuteronomy 32:1-43) also to Moses; the third (I Kings 2:1-10) to Hannah, mother of the Prophet Samuel, the fourth (Habbakuk 3:2-19) to the Prophet Habakkuk, the fifth (Isaiah 26:9-20) to the Prophet Isaiah, the sixth (Jonah 2:3-10) to the Prophet Jonah, the seventh (Daniel 3:26-56 LXX) and eighth (Daniel 3:57-88 LXX) to the Three Holy Children, popularly known by their Babylonian names: Shadrach, Meschach, and Abednego. Though some theme from the Biblical Ode is contained in each *irmos*, the Biblical odes themselves are not now used except on weekdays during Great Lent.

The canons contain rich theological material that expresses the inner meaning of the feasts of the Church and the lives of the Saints. The troparia sung at Liturgy interspersed between the Beatitudes are normally taken from the third and sixth odes of one or more of the canons for Matins.

The canon is often a difficult time for those at the Vigil. There is no movement, the Royal Doors are closed, the church is in darkness, and only the choir and reader are doing anything. This, however, is a time for the faithful to be vigilant and keep watch by attentively listening to the troparia and singing the exclamations between them. There is much Biblical interpretation conveyed during the canon to those who listen. It is normal to stand during the canons, but sickness or fatigue may have us do otherwise.

The most noted composers of canons were Saints John of Damascus, Cosmas of Maiouma, and Andrew of Crete, who wrote the Great Canon of Repentance used in Great Lent.

#### Upcoming Events 2018

31 October: All Saints Party  
11 November: Parish Thanksgiving Meal  
15 November: Nativity Fast Begins  
2 December: Children's Craft Fair

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!