

The Confessor's Tongue for January 27, A. D. 2019

35th Sunday After Pentecost; New Martyrs and Confessors of Russia

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.

New Martyrs & Confessors of Russia

The Church has appointed this Sunday for the commemoration of the New Martyrs and Confessors of Russia, those who suffered and died for their faith under the atheist Bolsheviks.

Following the October Revolution, the Bolsheviks launched their primary assault against the Church, perceiving it as the bulwark of the old order they wanted to destroy. In the first 20 years of Communism, they nearly succeeded: from more than 50,000 working parishes in Russia in 1914, they had reduced the number to 100 by 1939. Most of the clergy had been slain or imprisoned in labor camps to die of overwork, malnutrition, and exposure. Unknown multitudes of the faithful suffered the same fate. But by God's grace and the blood of the martyrs, the Church in Russia survived and today is being renewed, in part through their faithful confession unto death and their prayers.

From Vespers for the Feast

O wondrous army of new athletes of Russia! Who is able to glorify you worthily? Truly blessed is the land which hath been watered by your blood; and its cities and villages are mystically hallowed, having received your precious relics, often without hymnody of the Church or honorable burial. Yet pray, O ye saints, for the land of Russia and for all who honor you!

From Matins for the Feast

Condemned by the godless, the priests of God, whom the holy patriarch had blessed to undergo torments and death for Christ, refused to ask for mercy, and when, on the next day, they were led to execution, the guards were at a loss how to drive back the faithful who came to meet them; for the people kissed the doomed ones condemned to death and their sacred hands and the hem of their garments; and some chanted triumphantly: "Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death!" O Lord, through the prayers of these hieromartyrs, have mercy on us!

February 2: Meeting of Christ in the Temple

The Nativity cycle of feast days concludes with the Great Feast of the Meeting of Christ in the Temple on February 2nd, the fortieth day after the Nativity of our Lord. This feast is closely connected with the Nativity, for just as Christ's divinity was revealed at His Nativity and His Baptism, so it is also manifested at His meeting in the temple with Simeon and Anna.

According to the Law of Moses, all Hebrew parents were to bring their first-born son and a sacrifice in thanksgiving on the fortieth day after birth to the temple to be consecrated to God. The

law was established in remembrance of the exodus of the Hebrews from Egypt—freedom from slavery, when the first-born Hebrews were spared from death.

In fulfillment of this law, the Theotokos with Joseph brought the infant Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem, and for their sacrifice brought two doves—the sacrifice of a poor family. At that time, the Elder Simeon by the Holy Spirit recognized the infant Jesus as the Christ, the anointed one of God, as did the Prophetess Anna. Thus these two joined the company of shepherds and magi as being among the first to recognize Him for who He was.

The spirit of the festal service is the same as that of the Nativity and Theophany: to glorify the manifestation of God on earth, to extol Christ's divinity, and to give honor to the most pure Virgin Mary as the Mother of God. St. Cyril of Alexandria speaks beautifully of the profound content and significance of this feast in his sermon for the day:

The Eternal, is both a small Child and the 'Ancient of Days' (i.e. God). A child at the breast and, at the same time, the Creator of ages. I behold a Child and recognize God. The Child is nourished, and, at the same time, he gives life and joy to the world. The Child is in swaddling clothes, and, at the same time, he delivers me from the bonds of sin... This Child—the angels glorify him, the archangels bow before him. The Principalities tremble in his presence, the Powers praise him, the Cherubim minister to him, the Seraphim bless him, fountains and seas yield to him... This Child conquered death, overcame the devil, abolished Adam's curse, ...washed away all sins, condemned all heresy, adorned all creation, saved Adam, renewed Eve, summoned all the nations, and sanctified the universe... Therefore, let us brighten this day with candles, as befits the children of light, and let us bring to Christ the Light of spiritual illumination.
(Prologue 1)

The Feast of the Meeting of Our Lord has a post-feast until February 9th. During the festal time, the troparion and kontakion of the feast are said along with our daily prayers and at meals. As it is customary to bless candles at this feast, you may bring or purchase candles to be blessed at the end of Liturgy for use at home. In the West, this feast is known as Candlemass.

Troparion, tone 1

Rejoice, O Virgin Theotokos full of grace, / for from thee hath shone forth the Sun of Righteousness, Christ our God, / who doth illumine those in darkness. / Be glad also, thou righteous elder, / for thou hast received in thine arms the Deliverer of our souls, // who bestoweth upon us Resurrection.

Kontakion, tone 1

Thou who hast sanctified by Thy birth a virgin womb / and fittingly blessed the hands of Simeon, / Thou art come, O Christ our God, and on this day hast saved us. / Give peace to thy commonwealth in time of battle / and strengthen the Orthodox people whom Thou hast loved, // O Thou who alone lovest mankind.

The Sayings of St. Anthony the Great 12

Some brothers came to find Abba Anthony to tell him about the visions they were having, and to find out from him if they were true or if they came from the demons. They had a donkey which died on the way. When they reached the place where the old man was, he said to them before they could ask him anything, 'How was it that the little donkey died on the way here?' They said, 'How do you know about that, Father?' And he told them, 'The demons showed me what happened.' So they said, 'That was what we came to question you about, for fear we were being deceived, for we have visions which often turn out to be true.' Thus the old man convinced them, by the example of the donkey that their visions came from the demons. Saying 12 in The Sayings of the Desert Fathers

Commentary: The devil is a “liar and the father of lies”, but he and his demons will often mislead men, setting them up for greater deception by telling them the truth to get them to put initial trust in him and by appealing to their vanity. His program for man is nothing “but to kill, to steal, and destroy”. That a vision turns out to be true is no guarantee that it is from God. Because of the danger of deception, we are instructed to disregard dreams and visions. We are to seek God, not visions. Sometimes the demons even foretell the future, which is generally a matter of curiosity to men. St. Anthony explains that they do not know the things that do not yet exist; rather, they see things beginning to happen and run on ahead to tell it to those who have not yet seen, thus appearing to tell the future. Sometimes even those ‘predictions’ fail as things turn out differently from what the initial indication suggests.

In his *Life of Anthony*, St. Athanasius reports much of St. Anthony’s experience with the demons, of which he had much. In short, Anthony’s life demonstrates that Christians need not fear the demons. Christ has conquered them, rendering them powerless against us. Oh, they may rage and scream and threaten, but they have no power. Their only device is to lie and get man to believe their lie, which then gives them a measure of power over man. When they appear to us or rage at us, they are attempting to get us to believe that they can harm us, and if they succeed in arousing such perverse faith in us, they may then afflict us. St. Anthony correctly understood this when a crowd of demons appeared to him. He said, “If you could hurt me, it would be enough for one of you to come. Nor would you all stand roaring and making noise, but would simply get on with harming me. That so many of you appear and make such noise proves your utter weakness.”

In contending with the enemy, we put our faith in Christ, make the sign of the Cross, invoke the name of Jesus, and watchfully guard ourselves against lies. Here we are called to stand firm in the full armor of God. We are called to “resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” We are to resist that lion who “prowls about seeking whom he may devour” and to stand firm in our faith. We do not dwell on the enemy, but

we are aware of his devices. We fear God, not him, but we remain watchful and ready to resist his lies and suggestions, which he insinuates into our minds as thoughts, which is primary battlefield in the spiritual warfare that is the Christian life.

We should recognize that there are those in our time who do not believe that demons exist, considering them the attempt of primitive man to explain certain phenomena, such as mental illness, which they then did not understand. Now we supposedly know better and can dispense with such primitive explanations. According to those holding this view, we may best understand the references to demons and the devil in the Scriptures as a literary device personifying evil. Yet from Christ down to our time, we have a long record of personal encounters with personal but non-human rational powers of evil. One may choose whom to believe: the reasonings of the sceptics or the reports of Savior, the Scriptures, and the Saints. *Fr. Justin Frederick*

(For contemporary reports of Saints, see St. Silouan of Athos, the Life of Elder Joseph the Hesychast, and The Gurus, the Young Man, and Elder Paisios for starters.)

Hymns of Repentance from the Octoechos

Sunday Vespers, tone 2

O Father, the Supreme Good; O Son, Word of the Father; O Holy Spirit, Uncreated Nature: Thou that art the Fount of pity, pouring forth endless mercy and streams of compassion, accept our supplications and our prayers, granting to all those that lie in sin forgiveness, because Thou art merciful, O God, and lovest mankind.

Pity, mercy, and goodness are Thine by nature, because Thou art God. Therefore, we beseech Thee, O Christ our Savior, and falling before Thee call unto Thee and cry without ceasing: Grant Thy servants the remission of their many transgressions, and, as all of us have sinned, forgive us all, because Thou art merciful, O God, and lovest mankind.

Wishing to save all men because Thou art God, O Savior, Thou wast for their sakes made flesh, and Thou didst appear as man. Save us who honor Thy commandments, for Thou hast not come, O Lover of mankind, to save the righteous, but Thou camest to us, captives of transgression through our many sins, to release us by the grace of holy Baptism, because Thou art merciful, O God, and lovest mankind.

From the Service for the New Martyrs of Russia

Upcoming Events 2018

- 1 February: Vigil for the Meeting of the Lord, 7:00 p.m.
- 2 February: Liturgy for the Meeting, 9:00 a.m.
- 9 February: St. David Brotherhood Men’s Meeting with Fr. Nilus of St. Arsenius Skete
- 10 March: Forgiveness Vespers, 6:00 p.m.
- 11 March: Great Lent begins.
- 28 April: Great & Holy Pascha

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!