

The Confessor's Tongue for March 31, A. D. 2019

Fourth Sunday of Lent: St. John of the Ladder; St. Tikhon of North America

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.

An Address by St. Tikhon

San Francisco, February 23, 1903

St. Tikhon, Patriarch of Russia and Enlightener of North America, was once the ruling bishop in America. This address speaks to us still.

Orthodoxy is a precious treasure: in it we were born and raised; all the important events of our life are related to it, and it is ever ready to give us its help and blessing in all our needs and good undertakings, however unimportant they may seem.

Orthodoxy supplies us with strength, good cheer, and consolation; it heals, purifies, and saves us. The Orthodox Faith is also dear to us because it is the Faith of our Fathers. For its sake the apostles bore pain and labored; martyrs and preachers suffered for it; champions who were like unto saints shed their tears and blood; pastors and teachers fought for it; and our ancestors stood up for it, whose legacy it was that to us it should be dearer than the apple of our eyes.

Today there are many who were born, raised, and glorified by the Lord in the Orthodox Faith, yet who deny their faith, pay no attention to the teachings of the Church, do not keep its injunctions, do not listen to their spiritual pastors and remain cold towards the divine services and the Church of God. How speedily some Orthodox people lose their Faith in America—this country of many creeds and tribes of peoples! They begin their apostasy with things which in their eyes have little importance. They judge the Church as “old-fashioned” and “not accepted among educated people” to observe all such customs as praying before and after meals, or even morning and evening prayers, to wear the holy cross, to keep icons in their house and to keep Church holy days and fast days. Such people do not even stop at this—but go further; they do not go to Confession, they dispense with Church Marriage and delay baptizing their children. In this way, their ties with the Orthodox Faith are broken! They remember the Church on their death bed, and some don't even do that! To excuse their apostasy the naively say: “this is not the old country, this is America, and, consequently, it is impossible to observe all the demands of the Church.” As if the words of Christ were of use for the old country only and not for the whole world! As if the Orthodox Faith is not the foundation of the world!

If you do not preserve the Orthodox Faith and the commandments of God, the least you can do is not to humiliate your hearts by inventing false excuses for your sins! If you do not honor our customs, the least you can do is not to laugh at things you do not know or understand. If you do not accept the motherly care of the Holy Orthodox Church, the least you can do is to confess that you act wrongly, that you are sinning against the Church and behave

like children! If you do, the Orthodox Church, like a loving mother, may forgive you your coldness and slights, and will receive you back into Her embrace.

The light of Orthodoxy was not lit to shine only on a small number of people. Orthodox people ought to spread it among people of other beliefs. The Orthodox Church is universal; it remembers the words of its Founder: *Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature*, (Mark 16:15). We ought to share our spiritual wealth, our truth, light, and joy with others who are deprived of these blessings, but often are seeking them and thirsting for them. We live in a country surrounded by people of other creeds; in the sea of other religions our Church is a small island of salvation, towards which swim some of the people, plunged in the sea of life. Are we to remain deaf and insensible? God save us from such a lack of sympathy!

The spread of Christ's Faith ought to be near and precious to the heart of every Christian. Pastors are not alone in the work of spreading the Orthodox Faith. Every member of the Church ought to take a lively and heartfelt interest in spreading the Faith. This interest may show itself in personal preaching of the Gospel of Christ. In many places of the United States, those who have joined Orthodoxy point out that the truth was found by their being disposed to it by the laity.

Earnest prayer and material support are also essential to the work of spreading the Gospel. We pray with our lips but seldom with our hearts. If you can offer much, offer all you can, but do offer. Do not be ashamed of the smallness of your offering.

Orthodox people! you must devote yourselves to the Faith, not only in word or tongue, but in deed and truth.

From St. John of the Ladder

All who have willingly left the things of the world have certainly done so for the sake of the future Kingdom, or because of the multitude of their sins, or for love of God. If they were not moved by any of these reasons, their withdrawal from the world was unreasonable. But God who sets our contests waits to see what the end of our course will be. *Step 1.5*

Let us who are weak and passionate have the courage to offer our infirmity and natural weakness to Christ with unhesitating faith, and confess it to Him; and we shall be certain to obtain His help, even beyond our worth, if only we continually plunge to the depth of humility. *Step 1.8*

Exile means that we leave forever everything in our own country that prevents us from reaching the goal of piety. Exile means modest manners, wisdom which remains unknown, prudence not recognized as such by most, a hidden life, an invisible intention,

unseen meditation, desire for humiliation, longing for hardship, constant determination to love God, abundance of love, renunciation of vainglory, depth of silence. *Step 3.1*

Exile is separation from everything in order to keep the mind inseparable from God. *Step 3.3*

In hastening to solitude and exile, do not wait for world-loving souls, because the thief comes unexpectedly. In trying to save the careless and indolent along with themselves, many perish with them, because in course of time the soul's fire goes out. As soon as the flame is burning within you, run; for you do not know when it will go out and leave you in darkness. Not all of us are required to save others. The divine Apostle says: 'Everyone of us shall give account of himself to God.' And again he says: 'Thou therefore that teachest another, dost thou not teach thyself?' This is like saying: I do not know whether we must all teach others; but we must most certainly teach ourselves. *Step 3.4*

Run from places of sin as from the plague. For when fruit is not present, we have no frequent desire to eat it. *Step 3.9*

He whose will and desire in conversation is to establish his own opinion, even though what he says is true, should recognize that he is sick with the devil's disease [pride]. And if he behaves like this only in conversation with his equals, then perhaps the rebuke of his superiors may heal him. But if he acts this way even with those who are greater and wiser than he, then his malady is humanly incurable. *Step 4.48*

He who is not submissive in speech, clearly will not be so in act either. For he who is unfaithful in little is unfaithful in much, and is intractable. He labors in vain, and he will get nothing from holy obedience but his own doom. *Step 4.49*

Do not be deceived, son and obedient servant of the Lord, by the spirit of conceit, so that you confess your own sins to your master as if they were another person's. You cannot escape shame except by shame. It is often the habit of demons to persuade us either not to confess, or to do so as if we were confessing another person's sins, or to lay the blame for our sin on others. Lay bare, lay bare your wound to the physician and, without being ashamed, say: "It is my wound, Father, it is my plague, caused by my own negligence, and not by anything else. No one is to blame for this, no man, no spirit, no body, nothing but my own carelessness. *Step 4.62*

Greater than baptism itself is the fountain of tears after baptism, even though it is somewhat audacious to say so. For baptism is the washing away of evils that were in us before, but sins committed after baptism are washed away by tears. As baptism is received in infancy, we have all defiled it, but we cleanse it anew with tears. And if God in His love for mankind had not given us tears, those being saved would be few indeed and hard to find. *Step 7.6*

If nothing goes so well with humility as mourning, certainly nothing is so opposed to it as laughter. *St 7.8*

The beginning of freedom from anger is silence of the lips when the heart is agitated; the middle is silence of thoughts when there is a mere disturbance of soul; and the end is an imperturbable calm under the breath of unclean winds. *Step 8.4*

If the Holy Spirit is peace of soul, as He is said to be and as He is in reality, and if anger is disturbance of heart, as it actually is and as it is said to be, then nothing so prevents His presence in us as anger. *8.14*

Do not regard the feelings of a person who speaks to you about his neighbor disparagingly, but rather say to him: 'Stop, brother! I fall into graver sins every day, so how can I criticize him?' In this way you will achieve two things: you will heal yourself and your neighbor with one plaster. This is one of the shortest ways to forgiveness of sins; I mean, not to judge. 'Judge not, and ye shall not be judged.' *Step 10.7*

Do not condemn, even if you see with your eyes, for they are often deceived. *Step 10.17*

He who has become aware of his sins has controlled his tongue, but a talkative person has not yet come to know himself as he should. *Step 11.4*

He who is anxious about his departure [from life], cuts down words; and he who had obtained spiritual mourning, shuns talkativeness like fire. *Step 11.9*

A man in obedience does not know despondency [accidie], having achieved spiritual things by means of sensory things. *Step 13.3*

He who mourns over himself does not know despondency [accidie]. *Step 13.14*

Satiety in food is the father of fornication; but affliction of the stomach is an agent of purity. *Step 14.5*

He who fondles a lion often tames it, but he who coddles the body makes it still wilder. *Step 14.6*

With beginners, falls [from chastity] usually occur by reason of luxury; with intermediates, because of haughtiness as well as from the same cause which leads to the fall of the beginners; and with those approaching perfection, solely from judging their neighbors. *Step 15.20*

Do not expect to overthrow the demon of fornication with refutations and pleadings. For with nature on his side, he has the best of the argument. *Step 15.24*

I have seen pride lead to humility. And I remembered him who said: Who hath known the mind of the Lord? The pit and offspring of conceit is a fall; but a fall is often an occasion of humility for those who are willing to use it to their advantage. *Step 15.38*

He who wants to cover come the demon of fornication with gluttony and surfeiting is like a man who puts out a fire with oil. *Step 15.39*

A vigilant eye makes the mind pure; but much sleep hardens the soul. *Step 20.3*

Long sleep produces forgetfulness, but vigil purifies the memory. *Step 20.9*

Long sleep is an unjust comrade; it robs the lazy of half their life, and even more. *Step 20.11*

The inexperienced monk [and Christian] is wide awake in friendly conversation; but his eyes become heavy when the hour of prayer is upon him. *Step 20.12*

Fear is a rehearsing of danger beforehand; or gain, fear is a trembling sensation of the heart, alarmed and troubled by unknown misfortunes. Fear is a loss of assurance. *Step 21.3*

A vainglorious person is a believing idolater; he apparently honors God, but he wants to please not God but men. *Step 22.6*

God often hides from our eyes even those perfections that we have obtained. But he who praises us or, rather, misleads us, opens our eyes by his praise, and as soon as our eyes are opened, our treasure vanishes. *Step 22.10*

Where a fall has overtaken us, there pride has already pitched its tent; because a fall is an indication of pride. *Step 23.4*

It is a sign of the beginning of health when or thought no longer prides itself on its natural gifts. But as long as it has that stench in its nose, it cannot detect the fragrance of myrrh. *Step 25.22*

Talkativeness is born sometimes of gluttony, and sometimes of vainglory. *Step 26.43*

Sickness is sometimes for the cleansing of sins, and sometimes to humble our soul. *Step 26.54*

If you feel sweetness or compunction at some word of your prayer, dwell on it; for then our guardian angel is praying with us. *Step 28.11*

Love is essentially the banishment of every kind of contrary thought, for love thinketh no evil. *Step 30.8*

The Sayings of St. Anthony the Great 21

It happened one day that one of the brethren in the monastery of Abba Elias was tempted. Cast out of the monastery, he went over the mountain to Abba Anthony. The brother lived near him for a while and then Anthony sent him back to the monastery from which he had been expelled. When the brothers saw him, they cast him out yet again, and he went back to Abba Anthony saying, 'My Father, they will not receive me.' Then the old man sent them a message saying, 'A boat was shipwrecked at sea and lost its cargo; with great difficulty it reached the shore; but you want to throw into the sea that which has found safe harbor on the shore.' When the brothers understood that it was Abba Anthony who had sent them this monk, they received him at once.

Anthony Saying 21 *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*

Commentary: "One rotten apple spoils the whole barrel." This saying, which is certainly true in the physical world and at least partially true in the spiritual world, would seem to be the thought of the monks moving them to cast out their fallen brother. St. Paul says something similar to the Corinthians in the case of the man who had taken his father's wife as his own (I Cor. 5). Paul expresses his displeasure over their toleration of this immorality and tells them to "deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." He warns his spiritual children that "a

little leaven leavens the whole lump" and calls on them to cast out the old leaven and "put away from yourselves the evil person".

Thus, the brothers seem to have acted on a solid principle. That they did is confirmed by Anthony not reproving them for casting the brother out in the first place. The brother, leaving the monastery, settles near Anthony for a time. Anthony sees his repentance, and, when he deems the time ripe, he sends him back to his monastery healed. But the brothers refuse him entrance, and it is for this refusal to receive the penitent that Anthony reproves them with his parable of the wrecked ship.

The Church is a hospital for those wounded and disfigured by sin, but we must not abuse this image: the Church *is* a hospital, but only for the sick, wounded person who recognizes his ill health and desires to be well. The whole Church is founded upon repentance. Without initial repentance, one may not enter Her, and without continued repentance until life's end, one may cannot remain in Her. The basic message of both St. John the Baptist and Christ was "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." The Church is a hospital for sinners, sick and wounded by sin, but one must acknowledge one's sin to be admitted for care. To reject the Church's diagnosis, to stubbornly and pridefully insist on acceptance in the Church as an unrepentant sinner is to exclude oneself from the community of penitent sinners.

While this was initially the case with the man in Corinth, after being excluded from fellowship, he repented, and St. Paul in his second epistle to that church called on them to receive him back into fellowship. The same principle is at work here. The fallen brother repented and demonstrated that repentance in his way of life. Anthony sent him back in that repentant state, but the brothers would not receive him because of his prior sin. Anthony properly but gently chastises them through his parable, and they relent.

A baptized brother who chooses to live in sin without repentance is as pernicious to others in the Church as a rotten apple in a barrel is to the other sound apples. If the Church acts to exclude him from fellowship formally, it merely confirms what the man has already effected spiritually by his choice of sin. Very often, such people simply remove themselves from fellowship, sensing the incompatibility of their willful sin with the life of repentance leading to holiness in the Church. He who does not remove himself and who refuses to repent after private admonition must be removed to protect others from his bad example, to humble him, and to move him to repentance. The goal is always humility and renewed repentance for the sinner.

Because the Church is a hospital, any sinner who is willing to repent and believe may be admitted, and a fallen brother who demonstrates his repentance in deed as well as word must be re-admitted. Of course, the brother who falls and gets up again in repentance is not excluded at all. Depending on his sin, it is

possible he will not be re-admitted immediately to the Chalice, but he will not be sent out the door. That measure is reserved for those who sin and will not repent, and so, by their bad example, would cause others to fall. *Fr. Justin*

From St. Gregory Palamas

There are three degrees of eating: self-control, sufficiency, and satiety. Self-control is to be hungry after having eaten. Sufficiency is to be neither hungry nor to be weighed down. Satiety is to be slightly weighed down. To eat again after reaching the point of satiety is to open the door of gluttony, through which unchastity comes in. Attentive to these distinctions, choose what is best for you according to your powers, not overstepping the limits. For according to St. Paul, only the perfect can be both hungry and full, and at the same time be strong in all things (Philippians 4:12).

On Praying for the Departed

Some ask, what is the use of naming the departed, or of praying for them? God Himself knows the names and needs of all. But those who so speak forget, or do not know, the importance of prayer, do not realize the importance of every word uttered from a whole heart; they forget that the justice and mercy of God are moved by your heartfelt prayer, which the Lord In His goodness imputes to the merit of the living or the departed themselves, as to the members of the one body of the Church. They do not know that the *Church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven*, in her love continually prays to God for us, and expressly names before God those who pray for them—equal for equal. We name them, and they name us. But he who does not lovingly remember his brethren in prayer will not himself be remembered, and does not deserve to be named. Even one word of faith and love means much in prayer: *The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.*

Pray to the Lord for the repose of the souls of your departed forebears and brethren each day, at morning and at evening, in order that the remembrance of death may live in you, and that hope of the life to come, after death, may not become extinct in you; and that your spirit may daily be humbled by the thought of the transitory nature of your life. *St. John of Kronstadt*

St. John of Kronstadt on Prayer

We must carefully tend the field of our heart, let the tares of every vice should grow in it; we must daily weed it—at least by morning and evening prayers—and water it with abundant tears, as with rain.

Our heart dies spiritually every day. Only ardent, tearful prayer can restore it to breath and life. If we do not pray fervently every day, we may easily and speedily overtaken by spiritual death.

With sincere Christians, prayer is continual, because we continually sin; gratitude is perpetual, because every day, every moment, we receive fresh mercies from God, beside the old mercies, which are numberless. Praise is also perpetual, because we perpetually see the glory of God's works in ourselves and in the world, especially the glory of his infinite love towards us.

Prayer for others is very beneficial to the man himself who prays; it purifies the heart, strengthens faith and hope in God, and arouses love for God and our neighbor.

Travel By Automobile

The dangers of the road are self-evident, given the number of people who lose their lives on the road each year. One must always be alert and exercise one's responsibility to be a good, courteous driver. While careless driving might be an involuntary sin, reckless driving is a voluntary sin of serious character, because we unnecessarily endanger not only our own lives but the lives of others. Need it be said? Texting while driving is reckless driving.

As pious Christians, we entrust ourselves to the providence of God whenever we travel. Making the sign of the Cross as we begin our daily travels should be as standard as wearing our seat belt. The following troparion may be sung in tone 2 or said upon setting out:

O Christ the Way, the Truth, and the Life, / as Thou didst send Raphael the archangel as a guide for Tobias, / so now send Thine angel to accompany Thy servant(s). / May he protect him/ber/them from every evil thing. / Bless this journey, that Thy servant(s) may glorify Thy name, through the prayers of the Theotokos.

Some Christians will sing the Troparion to St. Nicholas, the patron of travellers, upon setting out.

Thou wast revealed to thy flock as a rule of faith, / an image of humility and a teacher of abstinence, / because of thy lowliness, the heights were opened to thee, / because of thy poverty, riches were granted to thee. / O holy Hierarch, Father Nicholas, / intercede with Christ our God // that our souls be saved.

There is also an excellent pious custom practiced by many saints of saying the prayer "Let God Arise, and let His enemies be scattered..." (found at the end of the evening prayers) upon leaving one's home. Such excellent practices are recommended to us to establish and maintain.

Upcoming Events 2019

13 April, Saturday: Men's Meeting 3:00 p.m.
13 April, Saturday at Vigil: Fr. Michael Oleska
20 April: 10:00 a.m. Baptisms
28 April: Great & Holy Pascha

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!