

# The Confessor's Tongue for July 28, A. D. 2019

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

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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## Ascetical and Theological Chapters

By St. Justin Popovich

1.7 "For all the promises of God in Him are 'yes' and in Him are 'Amen'" (2 Corinthians 1:20). In Him—yes, in Him—in Christ the Godman—all the promise of God—in Him, not in man, not in culture, not in civilization. His is the "yes" in which all the rest is enclosed; each pain is fulfilled by the promise. In Him is everything.

1.8 Prayer is the distiller of thought, a sieve, a smithy, a crucible smelting the impure.

1.9 Psalm 50:19: The sacrifice to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart God will not despise.

1.10 Dostoyevsky and St. Paul: "Our warfare is against the spirits of wickedness in heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:8). In Dostoyevsky, you constantly feel yourself as if between two Testaments, between the Old and the New. Always Isaiah cried out for the Messiah, for the Lord, not for man, not for faith in man. Indeed, no one believes in man—in this is Dostoyevsky. All Western literature believes in man and cringes before him. Dostoyevsky always lifts his hands to Christ from his Sodom and Gomorrah.

*Translation by Fr. Justin Frederick*

## The Sayings of St. Anthony the Great 32

*Abba Anthony said, "I no longer fear God, but I love Him. For love casts out fear." (1 John 4:18)*  
Saying 32 *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*

*Commentary:* The Scriptures teach us that "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding." True knowledge of God, of His character, His power, His holiness, will naturally bring about fear in us. To fear God recognizes that we shall one day stand before Him and account for all our actions and words. Wisdom in man begins with this recognition of God and resultant fear of One who sees all, knows all, is a holy, consuming fire who presence tolerates no impurity. The wicked have no fear of God for they suppress their native knowledge of Him and refuse to let themselves think of Him, or they imagine Him to be other than He is, One who is not holy consuming fire; thus, they have no concern about judgment to restrain their evil desires and deeds.

We cannot have wisdom unless we begin with a fear of God. That fear represents the correct apprehension of reality, looks it in the face, and accepts it. "God is, and I must take that into account in all that I do," we realize. This apprehension of reality leads us to wisdom rather than folly and delusion.

We come to God first out of fear of judgment and eternity with the devil. This is normal and healthy.

But over time, we realize that God promises rewards to those who serve Him, and while we still fear, we are increasingly motivated to serve Him out of desire for reward, for our long-term benefit. This is rational and right. But it should not stop there. As we become more intimately acquainted with God, we grow to love Him. We see clearly His goodness, His mercy, His love, His faithfulness, His beauty, and we delight to serve Him and do His will. Being close to Him and basking in His glory is enough for us; it satisfies us. When we reach this state of true love for God, fear is driven away and the desire for reward pales in comparison with our desire for God Himself. St. Maximus expresses it this way: "Fear of hell causes beginners to shun evil. Desire to be rewarded with divine blessings confers on those who are advancing a readiness to practice the virtues. But the mystery of love transcends all created beings and makes the intellect blind to all that is sequent to God. Only upon those who have become blind to all that is sequent to Him does the Lord bestow wisdom, showing them what is more divine." To come to this place of loving God without craven fear is to taste of paradise while we yet live. *Chapters on Theology, 2.9*

## The Dormition Fast at St. Maximus

The Dormition Fast offers an abundance of spiritual good packed into two weeks. Besides daily services and the usual Saturday Vigil and Sunday Liturgy, between August 1 and 15 there will be a total of eight Liturgies, six Vigils, daily services, Paraclesis at Vespers (when there is no Vigil), and Baptisms. In particular, we shall celebrate two Great Feasts (Transfiguration and Dormition) and two great saints (St. Herman of Alaska and St. Maximus). Take advantage of this rich, concentrated liturgical season to worship, to confess, and to commune.

In some monasteries, the fasts are observed with a doubling of the cell rule, which would correspond to our prayer rule at home. If someone normally does a dozen prostrations, he would do twenty-four; if he normally says three ropes of the Jesus Prayer, he would say six; if he normally reads one kathisma from the Psalter a day, he would read two. This is a simple way to increase prayer during the Fast. Of course, if one is to do this, one must lay aside some of one's usual activities to make time, which is why Orthodox Christians cut back or cut out entertainments and unnecessary secular events during a fast. We are not obligated to double our rule, but we should make serious effort to increase it in both quantity and quality over the two weeks of the fast.

The essence of prayer, of course, cannot be reduced to quantity. Prayer should have quality, which means we pray with attention, with feeling, with faith, with love. Yet to achieve quality in prayer,

quantity is needed. A person will master no skill or body of knowledge without a significant quantity of time spent occupied with it. "Practice makes perfect," it is said. So with prayer, our regular practice of it with attention and feeling will move us towards mastery.

The fast comes at a good time for those involved in schooling, coming as it does right before the start of the new school year, giving them means of preparing for it. All of us may use it to prepare for the start of the Church New Year September 1. May God grant us all increase in prayer and grace during this Dormition Fast. Below are the directions from the Typicon for the observance of the fast. This is the fullness of the fast envisioned by the Church for the restraint of passions and acquisition of grace; not everyone may be able to follow the fast fully, but each should engage it for his profit as he may. As always, ask your priest or confessor if you have any questions or concerns about the fast.

*Concerning the Fast of the Most Holy Theotokos it should be known:*

*In the fast of the Dormition of Our Holy Lady Theotokos, 14 days except the Transfiguration of Christ, we fast until the ninth hour in the day [3 p.m. M-F, i.e., one meal on those days]:*

*Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, to eat "dry" [which means that we eat only vegetables cooked with water and salt, and also such things as fruit, nuts, bread, and honey. In practice, octopus and shellfish are also allowed on days of xerophagy; likewise vegetable margarine and corn or other vegetable oil not made from olives.].*

*On Tuesday and Thursday, cooked food without oil.*

*On Saturday and Sunday, cooked food with oil, and we drink wine: we don't eat fish, until the Dormition of the Most Holy Theotokos: but only on the Transfiguration of Christ, we eat fish, twice a day.*

### Confession Mechanics

When we come for Confession, we stand before the icon of Christ and the Cross; we cross ourselves and bow twice, kiss the cross and the icon, and then cross ourselves and bow a third time. When the priest prompts us, we begin humbly naming our sins.

When our Confession is done and the priest has given us absolution, we again cross ourselves and bow twice, kiss the Cross and icon, and the cross and bow a third time. We then turn, bow (without crossing ourselves) to the priest, and ask his blessing by holding out our hands in the form a cross, right over left, and then kiss the priest's hand when he finishes giving his blessing.

During Confession, we do not use other people's names. We may speak of our husband, our wife, our third child, our mother, our father, our friend, but we don't use their names. This helps keep us focused on our sin and from speaking unnecessarily about others in our confession, for the focus is our own sins and not their shortcomings. We mention others only to the degree needed to make our own sins clear.

When we come to confession, we come ready to name our sins as specifically as we can. Most of us would do best to have a list of things written down,

which we have prepared beforehand to confess. We name our sins, our faults, our failures to love God with all our heart, our neighbor as ourselves, our wives as Christ loved His Church. Any 'story' needed to give the context of the sin should be only what is needed to make the sin clear and be brief.

This last item becomes particularly important as the parish grows and more people are needing to come to Confession. If you do due diligence and come prepared, the line at confession can be kept moving.

27. Syncletica also said, "There is grief that is useful and there is grief that is destructive. The first sort consists in weeping over one's faults and weeping over the weakness of one's neighbors, in order not to destroy one's purpose, and attach oneself to the perfect good. But there is also a grief that comes from the enemy, full of mockery, which some call *accidie*. This spirit must be cast out, mainly by prayer and psalmody."

### Prayer of the Incense

Every time a censuring is made, the priest makes the sign of the cross over the censer and prays:

*"Incense do we offer unto Thee, O Christ our God, for an odor of spiritual sweetness, which do Thou accept upon Thy most heavenly altar, sending down upon us in return the grace of Thy Holy Spirit."*

Incense is an offering made to God. It costs us.

Incense concretely depicts the rising of our prayers to God and the sweetness He perceives in them.

Incense also evokes for us the sweet presence of God's Spirit.

Man offers incense, something material, something God has made and given to man in the first place, to God who is Spirit. In return for this small offering, we ask not something material but something immaterial, spiritual, and of immense value: the grace of the Holy Spirit, God's uncreated energies which penetrate, sanctify, and empower us.

In church, every time we offer incense, we should remember the great boon we ask of God: His very presence and power to come upon us. To have this awareness with each censuring will help us humbly to open our hearts to God who gives us so much in exchange for so little from us. *Fr. Justin*

### Upcoming Events 2019

1-14 August: Dormition Fast.

6 August: Transfiguration

9 August: Feast of St. Herman

13 August: Feast of St. Maximus and Leavetaking

15 August: Feast of the Dormition of the Theotokos

1 September: Church New Year

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!