

# The Confessor's Tongue for October 6, A. D. 2019

16th Sunday after Pentecost; St. Innocent of Alaska, Apostle Thomas

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.

## October 6: St. Innocent of Alaska

People were not created merely to live here on earth like animals that disappear after their death, but to live with God and in God, and to live not for a hundred or a thousand years, but to live eternally. But only Christians can live with God; that is to say, those who rightly believe in Jesus Christ.

Everyone, whoever he may be, desires and seeks prosperity and happiness. To desire what is good for oneself and to seek prosperity or happiness is part of man's nature, and therefore it is not a sin or vice. But we need to know that here on earth there has not been, and is not, and never will be true and perfect happiness and prosperity; for all our prosperity and happiness is only in God. No one will ever find true happiness and perfect prosperity without God or outside God.

Nothing in this world but God can fill our heart or fully satisfy our desires. A fire cannot be put out with brushwood and oil, because only water will put it out. In exactly the same way, the desires of the human heart cannot be satisfied with the goods of this world, because only the grace of God can quench the thirst of our desires.

Everything we desire pleases us only so long as we do not possess it; and when we get it, we soon get tired of it. Or only what we do not as yet have seems to us good and attractive; while all that we have, even though it is the very best, is either not good enough for us or does not attract us. A good example of this is King Solomon who, as is well known, was so rich that all the household plate and furniture in his palaces was of pure gold; he was so wise that kings came to visit him; and he was so glorious that his foes were terrified of him. Being wiser and mightier than all his contemporaries, he was able to satisfy all his wishes and desires, so that there was hardly a thing in the world which he did not possess or could not obtain. But with all this he could not satisfy his heart, and the desires of his heart wearied and tormented him far more than an ordinary man: and in the end, having tried everything in the world, he said in his writings: Everything in this world is vanity, and nothing can satisfy our desires.

Truly not a single earthly pleasure can satisfy our heart. We are strangers on earth, pilgrims and travelers; our home and fatherland are there in heaven, in the heavenly Kingdom; and there do not exist on earth things which could perfectly satisfy our desires. Let a man own the whole world and all that is in the world, yet all that will not interest him for more than a minute, so to speak, and it will never satisfy his heart: for the heart of man can be fully satisfied only by the love of God and therefore God alone can fill the heart and soul of man and quench the thirst of his desires.

And so, do you wish to live with God there, in the Kingdom of Heaven? Be an Orthodox Christian. Do you want prosperity and happiness? Seek it in God. Do you want your heart to be fully satisfied? Turn it to God from Whom you have been separated by your sins.

However, no one by himself, without Jesus Christ, can turn and draw near to God, because our sins, like a high wall, do not let us come to Him. And unless Jesus Christ in His mercy to us had come down to earth, and unless he had taken to Himself our human flesh and by His death destroyed the wall which separated us from God, everyone

would have perished and not a single soul could have drawn near to God or lived with Him. For everyone is a sinner and is born in sin from his mother's womb; and even in an infant, though it knows nothing of the world and does nothing, there is already the seed of sin.

Therefore Jesus Christ is our Redeemer, Saviour, Deliverer and Benefactor. Now everyone who wants to do so can return to God and enter the Kingdom of Heaven

But there is only one way into the Kingdom of Heaven, and that is the very way that Jesus Christ went when He lived on earth. There is no other way, and never was and never will be, for Jesus Christ said: I am the way, and if anyone wishes to follow Me let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow Me.

And so, for every Christian, and even for every human being, it is extremely necessary to know how to find the way and how to follow it. And there I want to talk to you about the way; and although I know myself that I cannot show it to you as I ought, yet I shall try according to my powers, trusting in Jesus Christ Who can use dirt itself for healing and curing.

Now, whoever comes across my book and wants to read it will find in it nothing but a poor and feeble explanation of the Way into the Kingdom of Heaven. But if anyone reads it through with prayers to Jesus Christ, He, being almighty, even by these words of mine can enlighten and warm the heart of the reader.

I divide my book into four parts: 1. On the benefits which Jesus Christ has granted us by his death, 2. How Jesus Christ lived on earth, and what He suffered for us, 3. The way by which we must go into the Kingdom of Heaven, 4. How Jesus Christ helps us to go by this way, and how we can receive this help.

Lord Jesus Christ, to Thee I cry: hear me Thy unworthy servant! Enlighten my mind; grant that I may truly and clearly describe Thy way into the Kingdom of Glory which Thou, in Thy mercy, has granted us! Grant that those who read and listen to my words may be filled with Thy love, enlightened by Thy knowledge and made strong by Thy power. Warm our hearts with Thy Spirit – and we shall joyfully and fervently go the way which Thou hast shown us. *Introduction to Indication of the Way into the Kingdom of Heaven, by St. Innocent of Alaska, written for the Aleut peoples of Alaska.*

## The Commandments of Christ

*"If ye love Me, keep my commandments." John 14:15*

Orthodox Christianity is not some abstract system of belief to which a man gives intellectual assent for salvation. Rather it is a whole way of life in Christ's Church. It is man's response to God's revelation of Himself in the God-man Jesus Christ. This response inseparably unites right belief with right action. Right belief is expressed in the dogmas and teachings of the Church, while right action is most fully expressed by Christ's commandments in the Gospel.

The way of life is initiated with faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God made man leading to repentance and Baptism. At Baptism, the new Christian decisively rejects Satan and joins himself to Christ. The priest asks him, "Have you united yourself to Christ?" He responds, "I have united myself to Christ." "Do you believe in Him?" "He

answers, "I believe in Him as King and God," and then he recites the Creed. Following that, he bows down "before the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the Trinity one in essence and undivided." This public declaration marks a most profound moment of the transfer of allegiance to a new Master—a King whom the Christian invites to rule in his heart and all his life.

The idea of a king and his commands is not in favor with modern man. Worshipping himself and his own will, man wants little to do with commandments from any source (even though he readily resorts to legislation—the commands of the State—to address his perceived problems). The very word "command" is repugnant to him, for he considers himself free to do as he wishes. The prayers and hymns of the Church, which often mention the commandments of Christ, acknowledge the conflicted relationship man has with them. "I have made myself a stranger to every divine commandment..." (*Tone 8, Mon Vespers*) and "I have fled from Thy commandments, estranging myself from life, and draw nigh unto death..." (*Tone 8, Fri Matins, canon, ode 6*).

Man's estrangement from Christ's commandments darkens his spiritual sight, blinding him. It renders him unfit to see the Light, hindering him from looking upon Christ. The man who is aware laments this: "With what eyes shall I look upon Thee, O Christ, not having kept even one of Thy commandments?" (*Tone 8, Mon Matins, canon, ode 3*) He cries out for a remedy: "Why hast Thou cast me away from Thy face, O never-setting Light? Why hath this dismal darkness covered me, the wretched one? But turn me and guide my path towards the light of Thy commandments I pray Thee" (*Irmos of 5<sup>th</sup> Ode for Sun. and Wed. Matins*).

Man in this state finds hope in the words of the Psalmist: "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (*118/119:105*). The word and the commandments bring us light to dispel the gloom of sin. Thus we pray, "...grant me to walk in the light of Thy commandments, O Word, that I may glorify Thee in the morning watches" (*Tone 8, Tue Matins, canon, ode 5 irmos*).

When the Church makes a man a catechumen, she prays, "Enable him to walk in all Thy commandments and to fulfill those things which are well-pleasing unto Thee; for if a man do those things, he shall find life in them." By confessing Christ as King and Lord, a man voluntarily submits himself to Christ's commandments; and the struggle to conform his life to them is at the heart of the process of purification, which is preeminently the purpose of the catechumenate. The keeping of the commandments and cleansing are connected as a hymn shows: "Make me to fulfill the commandments of God and cleanse the movements of my heart that I may praise Thee" (*Tone 8, Monday Vespers*).

Having baptized the catechumen, the Church requests in the closing litany "that he may be kept in the faith of a pure confession, in all godliness, and the fulfilling of the commandments of Christ, all the days of his life," for Christ did not simply command us to baptize, thereby making converts, but also to teach "them to do all things whatsoever I have commanded you" (*Matt. 28:20*). For, after all, the new Christian has acknowledged a new Master, the Lord Jesus Christ, who has won the kingship of the human race by conquering its deadly enemies of sin, death, and the devil. Hence he is "King of kings" and "Lord of lords." The King expresses His general will to his subjects through his commands; good subjects hear and delight to obey.

Thereafter, after every Communion in the Holy

Mysteries, in giving thanks the faithful say, "Grant that they [these Mysteries] may become for me unto the observance of Thy commandments," and "grant that the communion of thy Holy Body and Blood of Thy Christ may be for us...unto the accomplishment of Thy commandments..." Christ's commandments remain the compass for the Christian's life, and he seeks through the Eucharist the grace to keep them. At Compline, the "after-supper" daily prayer of the Church, the Church asks the Theotokos to "show me forth a proven doer of His commandments". And even at Marriage, the Church prays for the newly united couple, "Mercifully grant that they may life together in purity; and enable them to attain to a ripe old age, walking in Thy commandments with a pure heart."

Ultimately, the path of the commandments brings enlightenment, illumination, and holiness, and prepares us for *theosis* (divinization, union with God). The seventh prayer of light at Vespers, speaks of us being "enlightened by the exercise of Thy commandments." In the prayer at Vespers "Vouchsafe, O Lord, to keep us this evening without sin..." we pray, "Blessed art Thou O Lord, teach me Thy statutes. Blessed art Thou, O Master, make me to understand Thy statutes. Blessed art Thou, O Holy One, enlighten me with Thy statutes." A man must first learn God's statutes or commands if he is to do them. But he must also learn to understand them, why he needs them, what they imply for his life, and that they are not merely arbitrary 'do's' and 'don'ts', but that they express God's will for man and work to render him human and holy and fit for divine service and habitation with God. Knowing and understanding the commandments, a man will endeavor to do them rather than resist them, and the doing of them brings enlightenment and the deep experiential knowledge of God in which is abundance of life.

One of the twelve prayers prayed by the priest at Matins during the Six Psalms expresses similar ideas: "Teach us, O God, Thy righteousness, Thy commandments, and Thy statutes; enlighten the eyes of our intelligence that we may never fall asleep unto death in sin." One of the reasons we struggle so much with sin is that we have not had "the eyes of our intelligence" sufficiently enlightened to see God's light clearly, and it is that light which allows us to see sin for what it is and be properly repulsed by it. Having the commandments and a fear of them is a great help in the battle against sin. As the priest prays in the ninth prayer of Matins and before the Gospel reading at the Liturgy, "Instill in us also the fear of Thy blessed commandments that, trampling down all carnal desires, we may pursue a spiritual way of life, both considering and doing all things well-pleasing unto Thee."

Understanding the centrality of Christ's commandments to the Christian life, that it is by keeping them a Christian demonstrates his love for Christ and actually loves his neighbor should move the seeker of Truth to study the commandments, to treasure them as the path to his object, and to pray and sing fervently at every Vespers and Vigil, "Blessed art Thou, O Lord; teach me Thy statutes." *Fr. Justin Frederick This series on the commandments was last run three years ago. It is being reworked and much expanded and will appear regularly in the months ahead.*

#### Upcoming Events 2019

- 13 October: Octoberfest
- 31 October: All Saints Party
- 10 November: Parish Thanksgiving Meal

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!