

# The Confessor's Tongue for October 13, A. D. 2019

17th Sunday after Pentecost; Fathers of the Seventh Ecumenical Council

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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## Father of the Seventh Council

Today is the Commemoration of the 365 Holy Fathers who gathered at the Seventh Ecumenical Council, the second one in Nicaea, in order to cast out and eradicate atheist teachings, the haters of Christ and blasphemers of Christianity the iconoclasts: Copronymus and those condemned sophist bishops, and unholy priests, and all that atheist and corrupted assembly with them.

"We define that the holy icons, whether in color, mosaic, or some other material, should be exhibited in the holy churches of God, on the sacred vessels and liturgical vestments, on the walls, furnishings, and in houses and along the roads, namely the icons of our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ, that of our Lady the Theotokos, those of the venerable angels and those of all saintly people. Whenever these representations are contemplated, they will cause those who look at them to commemorate and love their prototype. We define also that they should be kissed and that they are an object of veneration and honor (*imitiki proskynisis*), but not of real worship (*latreia*), which is reserved for Him Who is the subject of our faith and is proper for the divine nature, ... which is in effect transmitted to the prototype; he who venerates the icon, venerated in it the reality for which it stands."

## St. John of Damascus on the Holy Icons

In former times God, who is without form or body, could never be depicted. But now when God is seen in the flesh conversing with men, I make an image of the God whom I see. I do not worship matter; I worship the Creator of matter who became matter for my sake, who willed to make His abode in matter; who worked out my salvation through matter. Never will I cease honoring the matter which wrought my salvation! I honor it, but not as God. How could God be born out of things which have no existence in themselves? God's body is God because it is joined to His person by a union which shall never pass away. The divine nature remains the same; the flesh created in time is quickened by a reason-endowed soul. Because of this, I salute all remaining matter with reverence, because God has filled it with His grace and power. Through it my salvation has come to me. . . . Do not despise matter, for it is not despicable. God has made nothing despicable. To think such things is Manichaeism. Only that which does not have its source in God is despicable—that which is our own invention, our willful choice to disregard the law of God—namely sin.

## God is Our Ally in the Struggle

St. Symeon the New Theologian (Oct 12)

When God endowed us with free will, giving commandments to teach us instead how we must oppose our adversaries, He left it to the free choice of

each either to oppose and vanquish the enemy, or to relax and be miserably defeated by him. Nor does He leave us entirely to ourselves—for He knows the weakness of human nature—but rather is present Himself with us and, indeed, allies Himself with those who choose to struggle, and mysteriously imbues us with strength, and Himself, not we, accomplishes the victory over the adversary....

God,...who is mighty and invincible, becomes, as we just said, an ally of those who willingly choose to do battle with the enemy, and he establishes them as victors over the cunning of the devil. He does not, however, compel to this war any who do not so choose, in order that He not destroy the power of choice which is proper to our reasoning nature, made according to His own image, and bring us down to the level of unreasoning brutes.

## The Commandments of Christ

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

A Christian is one who confesses his faith in the God revealed in the person of Jesus Christ and who loves that God. But how can man know that he, in fact, loves God, whom he has not seen?

For those who conceive of love as an emotion of warm, favorable disposition to another, love for God is either something you have or do not have. Those who do not feel the emotion may feel bad that they do not feel love for God and may try to manufacture the feeling. This is one reason why much current Christian music outside the Orthodox Church is characterized by a saccharine emotionalism calculated to stir up the desired emotions in the listener.

But Christ Himself tells us what love for God is and how we can know that we love Him; "If ye love Me, keep my commandments." Here is an objective standard to discern love for God. He who loves God demonstrates it by submitting himself to Christ in keeping Christ's commandments. Whether one feels loving toward God or not is irrelevant here: one's love is manifested in one's obedience to the Master. Lack of obedience reveals that love is absent, regardless of how warm and loving one may feel. God Himself cries out against feeling without action when he says, This people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor me, but have removed their heart far from me" (Isaiah 29:13). And again, "They come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they show much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness. And, lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they hear thy words, but they do them not" (Ezekiel 33:31-32).

The connection between love for God and the

keeping of His commandments is not new with Christ but is clearly to be seen in the Old Covenant with Israel. In the second commandment from Sinai (graven images), God concludes by speaking of Himself as One who shows “mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep My commandments” (Exodus 20:6). Very often in the Hebrew Scriptures, an idea is put forward in the first half of a sentence and elaborated upon in the second. Thus those who love God are the same ones who keep His commandments. This appears again in Deuteronomy (11:1): “Therefore thou shalt love the Lord thy God, and keep his charge, and his statutes, and his judgments, and his commandments, always.” A man loves God by keeping His charge, statutes, judgments, and commandments; conversely, to do these things is to love God. This juxtaposition of loving God and keeping His commandments, variously expressed occurs at least five more times in Deuteronomy.

Beyond the Torah, Joshua reminds the people of this duty at the end of his life after they have taken possession of the Promised Land: “But take diligent heed to do the commandment and the law, which Moses the servant of the Lord charged you, to love the Lord your God, and to walk in all His ways, and to keep His commandments, and to cleave unto Him, and to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul” (Joshua 22:5). Daniel uses it in his prayer of intercession for the Hebrews in captivity at the conclusion of the seventy years, “O Lord, the great and dreadful God, keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love him, and to them that keep his commandments...” as does Nehemiah in his prayer to God for the Jews who had returned from exile but had not yet rebuilt Jerusalem’s walls: “O Lord God of heaven, the great and terrible God, that keepeth covenant and mercy for them that love Him and observe His commandments.”

Christ, then, in linking love for God with keeping the commandments expresses an old theme but in a new way, as He speaks of keeping the commandments He Himself gives to His disciples as the basis for loving Him and abiding in His love.

If this is not clear enough, St. John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, puts it unambiguously, when he defines love in his second epistle: “This is love, that we walk according to His commandments” (v. 6) and in the first: “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments, and His commandments are not burdensome” (5:2, 3). Having provided this definition of love, St. John states clearly how we can know that we have come to know him: “Now by this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments” (I John 2:3). To know Christ is to love Him.

By this a Christian may examine himself. Does he readily aim to submit his life to Christ commandments, or does he try to find ways around them, to rationalize not doing them, to ignore them? In the weeks ahead, we shall identify Christ’s

commandments in the Gospels and consider what they mean one by one.

### St. Silouan on the Comandments

St. Silouan used to repeat, ‘It is good at all times and in all things to ask God for understanding of what to do or say, and in what manner.’ In other words, on every occasion without exception we should seek to discover God’s will and the way to perform it.

The quest to know God’s will is the most important thing in a man’s life, since when he happens on the path of the will of God he becomes incorporate with divine, eternal life.

There are various ways of acquiring this knowledge of God’s will. One is through the word of God—through the commandments of Christ. But the Gospel commandments for all their perfection—or rather, by virtue of their perfection—express the will of God in its over-all, ultimate sense, whereas man in his everyday life is confronted with an endless complexity of situations, and very often does not see what to do to comply with God’s will.

For our actions, our deeds to end will, it is not enough just to have a general idea of the Divine will as expressed in the commandments—‘Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength, and thy neighbor as thyself.’ We still need God to show us how to give effect to these commandments in our life. Even more – strength from on high is vital. (*Silouan, p. 77*)

### St. Silouan on Despair

Despair is worse than anything—it is blasphemy against God, as if God were incapable of saving us, as if the scale of our sins could transcend the measure of Divine compassion. He took upon himself the sins of the whole world . . . If a mother can forgive her child’s every misdoing, because it has not yet attained the age of reason, so even more does the Lord forgive us if we humble ourselves and repent . . . The spiritual struggle has much in common with ordinary warfare; and in this battle we must likewise be brave. Spiritual courage consists in having firm faith in God’s mercy. Even if the soul falls into sin or is tempted and thrust off the right path, even bows down to the devil—if she does not panic but immediately, trustfully, turns to God in repentance, the courageous soul thereby vanquishes her enemies; whereas the cowardly soul is disconcerted, despairs, and so perishes. (*Silouan, p. 67*)

#### Upcoming Events 2019

13 October: Oktoberfest  
31 October: All Saints Party  
10 November: Parish Thanksgiving Meal  
15 November: Nativity Fast Begins

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!