

# The Confessor's Tongue for October 20, A. D. 2019

18th Sunday after Pentecost; Great Martyr Artemius

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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## The Commandments of Christ

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

Before attempting to discuss any important matter, the wise and honest man will think through his key terms and make clear to his listener what he means by them. This is particularly important when using terms that everybody knows and supposes he understands. Great errors may arise from not clarifying the meaning of key terms.

Everyone knows the word "love." Everyone supposes he knows what it means. But what is love? The Christian will know that "God is love," but unless he has a clear and accurate conception of God, saying that does little to clarify the term. If fact, unless one has a clear and accurate conception of "love", to say "God is love" invites a mass of misunderstanding.

The dictionary, that treasury of meaning, defines love variously: "a strong affection", "an attraction based on sexual desire", "affection base on admiration," "warm attachment or devotion", "concern for the good of another." Perhaps this one sums popular notions best: "an intense feeling of deep affection." Do these definitions or descriptions capture how the Christian is to love God? Do they adequately express God's love for man? Could one properly paraphrase Christ to read, "If ye have intense feelings of deep affection for me, keep My commandments"?

The dictionary's definition describes how men use words rather than prescribing what those words should mean and thus it cannot be relied upon for an authoritative definition. If mankind's notion of "love" is distorted, the dictionary will reflect the distortion. Truth must be sought elsewhere.

What is love? St. John's dictum, "God is love" points the way. Where is God most clearly seen by man? It is in the person of Jesus Christ that God is most clearly manifest, and it is because "God so loved the world" that He sent His only-begotten Son into the world to become man in order to deliver mankind from sin, death, and the devil. Christ's mission motivated by love manifests God's love for man. To know love, one must know Christ through his words and deeds. Christ identifies himself with man by becoming man, by joining himself to the human race by His incarnation forever. This is love. He veils His consuming glory with human flesh that God might speak to man face to face without terrifying or harming His creature. This is love. God descends and humbles himself to dwell among men. This is love. He patiently teaches and instructs. He comes not to condemn the world but to save it. He reveals the Father. He goes to an unjust death that He might give Himself as a offering for man's sin. He descends to Hades and plunders it. He rises from the dead. He ascends into heaven and sits down at the right hand of

God, elevating and glorifying human nature. All this shows love in action. All this teaches man the true nature of love. To know love, one must contemplate God in human flesh on the Cross.

Christ's life becomes the standard of love for His disciples. He gives them a new commandment to "love one another, just as I have loved you." No longer is the standard that of the Law, "love your neighbor as yourself" but a new one, a higher one. This love of Christ for His disciples becomes the standard of love of a husband for his wife as St. Paul instructs, "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it." It is on this basis that the wife is to submit herself unto her husband even as the Church submits to Christ.

Thus, if Christ's earthly life of self-sacrifice defines love for mankind rather than the dictionary, the Christian who would speak of love must have Christ's life clearly before Him before essaying to speak of it. But since to contemplate Christ's life in all its fullness is the work of a lifetime, to help the Christian on his way to grasp the nature of love, St. Paul provides an invaluable summary in the celebrated thirteenth chapter of his first epistle to the Corinthians. There one will discover that love is patient (it suffers long), is kind, does not envy or boast, is not arrogant or rude, does not insist on its own way, is not irritable or resentful, does not rejoice at wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth, bears, believes, hopes, and endures all things. This, of course, is more a description of love than a definitions, but it is also a much more accurate guide to the true nature of love than the dictionary's definition.

Christ and St. Paul show the believer what love is. Such is the love the believer is to have for his wife, for his children, for his neighbor, for his fellow Christians. This conception of love should define the nature even of courtship, when one Christians seeks to discern whether he should be joined to another in marriage. The world's way of dating has almost nothing in common with love.

If the Christian is called to love his fellow Christian as Christ has loved Him, it stands to reason that his love for God should be nothing short of his love for others. Christ's life of self-sacrifice establishes a model of man's love for God, and Christ himself says, "If you love me, keep my commandments." Christ's commandments lay out in detail for man the path of self-sacrificial love. They reveal in different settings and circumstances what loving others as Christ loves looks like. Christ's commandments overturn and displace human ways of thinking and acting and replace them with the human-divine ways of Christ. They reveal that the essence of love for God is not "an intense feeling of deep attachment" but is found in obedience. With

obedience, intense feelings of attachment can come; without it, one can have but fickle and contrived feelings which readily fly off in the face of hardship.

*Fr. Justin Frederick*

### **Minor Words of the Liturgy: Lord Have Mercy**

*Archpriest George M. Benigsen*

"LORD HAVE MERCY." How frequently these three words are repeated in our churches and in our personal prayers. They are repeated in litanies, which consist of short petitions, each of which ends with the words "Lord have mercy." At evening services and during the reading of the Hours we repeat these words sometimes 3, sometimes 12 and sometimes even 40 times. How marvelous is the score of the Russian composer Lvovsky for the multiple "Lord have mercy" sung at the Elevation of the Cross. And there are many other services during which "Lord have mercy" is repeated many times, insistently, repentantly...

Let us not be disturbed by such frequent repetition of some of our short prayers, in particular the prayer "Lord have mercy." The object of such repetition is to imbue our hearts, our minds, and our souls with the prayer. The aim is to focus our attention on the topic of the prayer, which the Church considers of particular importance for our spiritual growth. This repetition, as leitmotif in music, penetrates our consciousness and remains long in our memory, staying with us even as we leave the church for our everyday existences.

"Lord have mercy." Three words, but what depth of meaning do they hold. First, by calling God "Lord", we confirm His rule over the world, the mankind and, most importantly, over ourselves, over those who speak these words. "Lord" means master, ruler. This is why we call ourselves the "servants" of God. This appellation has nothing offensive about it, as is readily suspected by some of those who would fight the Lord. Servitude by itself is negative as it deprives the human being of the original gift - the gift of freedom. But, as this gift was given to man by God, only in God can man find the plenitude of freedom. It follows, therefore, that service to God is in fact the perfect freedom in God.

Our service to God is far from perfect. Every day, every hour we flee from that blessed Servitude. We flee to where there is neither light, nor love, nor joy, nor life-which we can only find in God. We flee from perfect joy to the bottomless pit of sorrow. Then, we awake spiritually, we return to our senses, we begin to understand that we have nowhere to go, when we flee God, except to death. As King David said: "Whither shall I go from Thy spirit and from Thy countenance whither shall I flee?" We return to God - some of us after a momentary absence, some after many years of alienation. And, in order to reestablish our filial servitude to Him, the servitude, which we are constantly fleeing, we beg for forgiveness and repeat: have mercy, have mercy.

So there they are, these minor words, these few words of prayer with which we can pray in all places and at all times: "Lord have mercy." It is good to value them, cherish and nurture them. They are our praying beads made up of words and they link our hand with the right hand of the Lord. *Originally broadcasted via Radio Liberty to Russia, Translated from the Russian*

**Love Your Wife As Christ Loves the Church**

St. Timothy of Esphigmenou (feast October 29), gives us a nearly contemporary example of a husband loving his wife like Christ loves the Church, one we do well to contemplate and emulate.

From Thrace in Greece, the peasant Timothy was married and had two daughters. At this time, in the early 1800s, shortly before the Greek Revolution, Thrace was ruled by Muslim Turks. A Muslim neighbor conceived a lust for Timothy's wife, and, unable to contain his passion, he took her away by force. Somehow he persuaded her to become a Muslim and to be added to his harem.

Timothy, whose given name was Triantaphylos, was deeply grieved by his wife's double tragedy of losing both her marriage and her faith. As Christians under the Turkish yoke had no legal rights in such cases against Muslims, he had no hope of getting her back by legal means. But his love for her did not die, and he turned to God in fervent prayer for his wife's return to Christ. Continuing his prayers, he eventually began sending secret messages to her urging her to abandon Islam and come back to Christ.

In time, his prayers were answered. By God's grace, she came to her senses and her heart was kindled with desire to return to her former faith and way of life and husband, while her new faith and husband seemed to be repugnant to her. She wept bitterly in repentance over her sins. She knew her captor would not easily let her go, so she suggested to Timothy that he pretend to accept Islam, thereby gaining legal rights and a basis for getting her back. His wife's repentance delighted Timothy. Thinking of St. Paul's willingness to be "accursed from Christ" for the sake of his Jewish brethren (Romans 9:3), he accepted his wife's suggestion.

Timothy went to the Turkish magistrates, declared his intention to be Muslim, was accepted, and received circumcision according to the Muslim practice. He was then given his wife back. For a time they lived together secretly practicing their Christian faith, but had to flee to another region when the Muslims became suspicious. Timothy's wife entered a women's monastery while he went to the Great Lavra on Mt. Athos. There he took up the monastic life and cultivated repentance for his unavoidable sin committed out of love for his wife and the desire for her salvation.

After seven years, the monk Timothy heard of an Athonite monk named Agathangelos from the monastery of Esphigmenou who, like Timothy, had once denied his faith but had now confessed it and his renunciation of Islam publicly and had been martyred. Timothy began to long to make his confession of Christ in the same way. He moved to Esphigmenou Monastery to receive guidance from the elder who had prepared Agathangelos. After a period of preparation, the abbot blessed Timothy to declare his Christian faith and renunciation of Islam before the Turkish authorities in Adrianopol. He set off joyously to receive martyrdom from the Turks on 29 October 1820. May God grant us all such love and care for one another as St. Timothy demonstrated for his wife. Holy Martyr Timothy of Esphigmenou, pray unto God for us!

#### **Upcoming Events 2019**

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

**GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!**