

# The Confessor's Tongue for November 3, A. D. 2019

20th Sunday after Pentecost; Synaxis of the Holy Unmercenary Healers

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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## First Sunday in November

The Church devotes the first Sunday in November to the memory of all the unmercenary healers, those saints who healed others by both natural and supernatural means without taking money for their services.

The Apostle and Evangelist Luke heads list, followed by three different pairs of Cosmases and Damians, Cyrus and John, Panteleimon, Hermolaus, Diomedes, Sampson, Mocius, Anicetus, Artemius, Thelalaeus, Tryphon, Antipas, Haralampus, and Blaise, each of whom has his own feast day during the year.

The Unmercenary Healers represent one of the nine ranks of the Saints that are commemorated at every Divine Liturgy. We do well to seek their prayers when we are ill. An Akathist to St. Panteleimon is readily available for this purpose

## The Commandments of Christ

"If ye love Me, keep My commandments."

*Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.*

*Matthew 6:31-33*

As the Nativity Fast approaches, it is fitting to consider this passage, as the Fast used well provides spiritual recalibration and this command expresses the primary principle to accomplish it. Two commandments are here, both pertinent to the fast.

First, the negative command "take no thought" does not mean "don't think about food, drink, and clothes" but means "don't be anxious or concerned" about such things. As Jesus says earlier (v.25), "Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?" Christian life does not consist in such things, though living in the fallen world, Christians may be tempted to think that it does. After all, most people in the world live as though life consists of food, drink, clothing, and other such possessions—especially in the time leading up to Christmas.

Jesus speaks about how God feeds the birds and clothes the flowers of the field and then challenges his disciples: if He provides necessities for birds and grass, will He not care much more for man made in His image, out of love for whom He became man and died? The answer to that rhetorical questions is, "Of course He will!" It is man's little faith that blinds him to God's love and providential care. Jesus adds: "your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things." Christians do not deny the legitimate needs of the body, contrary to the perception of some. God the Father knows those needs and promises to provide

them. Salvation does not consist in escaping the body and its needs. Rather, it is connected with the deification of the whole man and the proper subjection of the body to the soul and spirit of man illumined by Christ so that the body becomes a faithful, reliable servant of the soul in doing the will of God.

In conjunction with the negative command "take no thought," Christ adds a positive command: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." Here is a classic case of saying 'no' to one thing so that one may say yes to something much better. Competing goods may be mutually exclusive; because both cannot be possessed, one must be rejected to possess the other. Worry about material things cannot be said to be a good and all, and if it possesses a person, he cannot seek first the kingdom of God. A Christian banishes worry about material needs so that he can seek first Christ and His Kingdom. This is to his advantage in every way, for Christ promises that if a disciple will seek Him first, all the things he needs for his body will be given to him.

What is given when a person seeks first the kingdom of God is the "all these things" that he needs to care for his body, the things the world spends all its time pursuing. Notice that what is given to man is all the things the Father knows he has *need* of. This does not mean he gets everything he might *want*. The modern world excels at creating new wants in man and then transforming those wants into needs and rights. This leaves people so obsessed with the material world and its goods that they can scarcely glimpse the things of God. No, the Christian is not to worry, but is to seek God first and be grateful for what He provides for him to meet his needs. Here is Christian liberty: to be thankful for the good things the Father has given, trusting He has given what one truly needs to work out his salvation. Content in this faith, a person is freed from envy, from worry, and from the compulsion to keep up with his neighbor.

What does it mean to "seek the Kingdom of God"? The Kingdom is that over which God reigns. All of creation obeys God except man and the fallen angels. Man has to actively seek to submit himself to his true King. He does this by repentance, in which he renounces his own claims to sovereignty and independence. He does it by prayer, in which he submits his life to God's will as revealed in Christ's commandments and seeks the grace to empower him to live by them. With the Kingdom, he seeks God's righteousness to make it his, for this is the way of being necessary to life in the Kingdom.

Made made in the image of God is to seek the kingdom as his first priority in life. This search, this desire, this need lies at the center of human life, for it is that for which God made man, and without it, man

cannot truly live in the full sense of the word. Given the nature of man's need for the Kingdom, other pursuits can occupy only a subordinate place in our lives. But in seeking first the Kingdom, one may rest assured that God will provide the things one needs to live—for as long as He wills one to live. So paradoxically, by giving up worry over material things to seek first the Kingdom of God, we assure ourselves of God's provision of the very material things that those without God spend their whole worried lives seeking.

The season of fasting provides a particular time in which Christians concentrate on detaching themselves from the world and attaching themselves to Christ. Fasting and almsgiving teach us to take no thought for our food and clothing. By becoming less attached to the material side of life, we are freed to attach ourselves more fully to Christ.

### The Nativity Fast

The Nativity Fast begins in twelve days on Friday, November 15 and lasts for forty days, ending with the Liturgy on Christmas Day. To make a good beginning on the fast, now is the time to start preparing for the fast by gathering fast-worthy recipes, planning meals, preparing the family budget for almsgiving, adjusting one's schedule so that one may pray more effectively, deciding how to increase reading of the Scriptures and other Orthodox spiritual literature to nourish the soul, and, in general, planning how to keep the fast to our spiritual benefit and profit.

Perhaps one wishes to read through the New Testament during the Fast? Now is the time to plan. Reading two chapters from the Gospels each day (with nine days of reading three chapters) and four chapters from the rest of the NT (with nine days of reading five chapters) one may finish the whole NT in forty days.

The fast is a suitable time to examine one's prayer rule, to adjust it, to strengthen and increase it. Now is the time to set one's hearts on seeking God's face in prayer and determining how and when each day to do this. Monks will double their usual cell rule during a fast. Perhaps one can increase the daily number of prostrations, add Psalms to one's prayer rule, increase the number of Jesus Prayers, or add an additional time to pray during the day. Come to the full Vigil or choose a weekday service to attend regularly.

Christmas has long been a time for giving, but much of that giving is focused on families and friends. Giving alms to those less fortunate or to those who are in need is a natural and proper part of the fast, but one must plan ahead lest it be lost in competition with Christmas shopping. The parish will put out a collection box during the fast for non-perishable food keep our food pantry here stocked that we may help those among us in need and those God brings to us.

Perhaps we realize that we have been taking in too much of the world through movies, internet, video games, music, television, radio, novels, etc., and

that our mind is too full of thoughts about many things to think clearly about God and hear His voice. Now is the time to plan how we may cut back on such entertainments so that we might not have minds full of noise and endless thoughts and find the room silence affords us to meet God.

Finally, the Nativity Fast is difficult for us because the world feasts before the Feast and fasts (diets) after it. The endless round of pre-Christmas Christmas parties (or in proper modernspeak 'Holiday parties') makes it difficult for us to keep the Fast before the Feast. Now is the time to plan as well as we can to keep the Fast and then to commend ourselves to God and His grace to help us keep it and help us up quickly if we fall.

Naturally, all Orthodox Christians, regardless of how often they commune, should prepare themselves for a thorough Confession and Holy Communion during the Fast. If you have any questions about how you should keep the Fast, please see your priest or spiritual father. *Fr. Justin Frederick*

### Homily: the Call of All Christians to Become Saints

St. Nikolai of Zicha

To the saint which are at Ephesus...(Ephesians 1:1)

*Note: In Greek, Slavonic, and Russian, the word 'saints' is the same word that is translated as 'holy': hagios, or svyatoi. Hence, the English word 'saint' means 'holy one'—a person who is holy. Fr. JF*

The Apostle calls the Christians in Ephesus 'saints'. He does not call one or two of them saints, nor one group of them, but all of them. Is this not a wondrous miracle of God for people, not in the wilderness but in a city—and an idolatrous and corrupt city—to become saints? That married men who sire children, who trade and work, become saints! Indeed, such were the first Christians. Their dedication, fidelity, and zeal in the Faith as well as their holiness and purity of life, completely justified their being called 'saints.' If in latter times saints have become the exception, in those earlier times the unholy were the exception. Saints were the rule. Therefore, we must not wonder that the Apostle calls all baptized souls in Ephesus 'saints' and that he has an even loftier name for all Christians, i.e., 'sons,' the sons of God (Galatians 4:6). Christ the Lord Himself gave us the right to call ourselves such when he taught us to address God as *Our Father* (Matt 6:9).

O my brethren! Do we not say to God every day: "Holy God?" Do we not call the angels holy? Do we not call the Mother of God holy? And the prophets, apostles, martyrs, and the righteous? Do we not call heaven holy and the Kingdom of Heaven holy? Who then is able to enter into the holy Kingdom but the saints [holy ones]. Therefore, if we have hope for salvation, we also have hope for holiness.

O Holy God, who dwellest in the holy place and resteth among the saints and callest the holy to Thyself and showest mercy to them, help us also that we may become holy—in words, in thoughts, in deeds—to Thy glory and our salvation. To Thee be glory and praise forever. Amen.

#### Upcoming Events 2019

10 November: Parish Thanksgiving Meal

15 November: Nativity Fast Begins

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!