

# The Confessor's Tongue for January 12, A. D. 2020

30<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost; Sunday after Theophany: St. Sava, Martyr Tatiana  
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 you love Me, keep My commandments."*

*"Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him."*  
John 6:27

The one who received unprecedented wisdom from God, King Solomon, characterized the vanity of man's life thus in Ecclesiastes: "All the labor of man is for his mouth, and yet the appetite is not filled" (6:7). Man's basic physical need is for food and drink, and his labor on earth is directed towards acquiring it. Historically, he expended great energy in hunting, gathering, fishing, farming, and herding to satisfy the appetite of his mouth. For nearly all of human history, except for a small number of the rich and powerful, the mass of the human race lived at a subsistence level, with supply of food uncertain from year to year.

God's original intent for man was not this. He placed man in a Paradise of Bliss where food was abundant. Man's task was to tend the garden. In response to man's rebellion and failure to repent, God cursed the ground for man's sake, that it would more readily yield thorns and weeds than food to eat. Only by hard work, "by the sweat of his brow", would man now be able to eat. The fall brought scarcity, and human economics is the description of man's attempts to overcome it.

Christ acknowledges man's historical preoccupation with having a full belly in His negative command that man not labor for the food which perishes. But how else is a man to eat, if he does not work?

We are not to understand Christ as commanding us not to work for food. Elsewhere, St. Paul says clearly that "if a man does not work, neither shall he eat" expecting the faithful to engage in productive labor to support themselves. He writes, "Let him that stole, steal no more; but rather let him labor, working with his own hands, that he may have to give to him that needeth" (Eph. 4:28). The Proverbs of Solomon are full of warnings against sloth. In the Sermon on the Mount, Christ commands His disciples to "take no thought" for the food and drink after which the Gentiles seek. This means not to worry about it or obsess over it. Rather Christ's follower is to seek first the kingdom and trust God to provide all the material things he needs for life: job, food, clothing, housing. Hence we understand Christ as not commanding His followers not to work, but not to make the whole point of their lives the regular acquisition of a full belly and comfort for the body. They are to labor to support themselves and to always have something to give to those in need, but not to make acquiring the "food that perishes" the consuming goal of their lives.

Christ also gives a positive command. While the Christian is not to labor for the food which perishes, he is to labor for the food that endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give. Contrary to the notions of some, the Christian life involves work—work that Christ commands! The food He gives is freely available, but work is required to secure it.

The context for the command is as follows. The day after Jesus feeds the five thousand in the wilderness by blessing and multiplying five loaves and two fish, Jesus slips away across the Sea of Galilee. The crowds, hungry for more food, work at searching for Him until they find Him. Engaging them, He tells them that they make this effort to find Him not because they saw the signs of power He has performed which point to His divinity but because He filled their mouths with food, and they want them to be filled again. Christ deliberately fed the people in the wilderness, multiplying the loaves and fishes to feed the multitude, to show that He was the same One who fed Israel in the wilderness with manna. The feeding was a sign that He was the promised one who came to give far more than bread.

Thus, Christ is not content to be used simply as a provider of physical bread. He is the Son of God incarnate. To pursue Him only for the sake of a full belly is to miss the whole point of His presence among men. He calls the people to seek from Him something more valuable than bread. It is as if He says, "Pursue Me, yes, but pursue Me for the right reason, for the truly valuable thing I have to offer you."

It is in the context of the Old Testament manna that this command must be understood. God freely provided manna for the Israelites to eat six days a week, but they had to get up early each morning to gather it before it melted in the warming sun. Food was provided, but effort was required to secure it. Hence, Christians pray "give us this day our daily bread", recognizing their need daily to approach the throne of grace to ask and receive not only material things but especially heavenly bread to feed their souls, the grace of God poured out daily in their lives. God gives this grace freely to those who ask, but we must do the work of standing before Him to ask for what we need and to prepare our hearts that they may be able to receive and benefit from what the Lord gives. This latter work, the preparation of the heart, is often the greater, more difficult work.

The seasonal fasts provide times in which Christians in a more intense way fulfill this command of Christ to labor for the bread which does not perish. By increased prayer, fasting, almsgiving, spiritual reading, and works of mercy, they cultivate repentance, the confess their sins and so remove defiling clutter from their souls to make room to receive the heavenly nourishment Christ would give

them. They wait upon the Lord looking for Him to renew their strength. The fast teaches them that all man's labor is not for the belly, for man does not live by bread alone but every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God. May God grant us all to labor for and receive this food which endures to everlasting life.

### Homily on How Men Must Be as Children to Be the Sons of God

St. Nicholas of Zicha (+1956)

*"Verily I say unto you; except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven" (Matt. 18:3).*

Thus speaks the Lord, and His word is holy and true. What sort of primacy to children have over adults? They have a threefold primacy: in faith, in obedience, and in purity. Children question their parents about everything, and believe whatever reply their parents give. A child is obedient to his parents and easily subjects his will to theirs. A child is pure and, although he quickly becomes angry, he quickly forgives. The Lord demands these three things of all men: faith, obedience, and purity. He seeks that men should believe in Him unconditionally, that they should be pure in their bearing towards another, not remember evil and not returning evil for evil.

Faith, obedience, and purity are the chief characteristics of a child's soul. Added to these are also passionlessness and joy. A child is not greedy, nor lascivious, nor ambitious; he has an eye untroubled by vice and a joy undisturbed by cares.

O my brethren! Who can make us children again? None but the one Christ. He is able to make us children once more, and to aid our rebirth by His example, His wisdom, and the power of His Holy Spirit.

O Lord Jesus, perfect in obedience and purity, the eternal Child of the heavenly Father: help us to be as infants by faith in Thee, by obedience to Thee, and by purity towards one another. To Thee be glory and praise for ever. Amen.

### The Hundredth Person

During the time Father Moses was abbot of Optina Monastery in Russia, a certain rich merchant stayed at a monastery guest house with his grown-up son. Because of unexpected flooding, they had to remain several days. This merchant did not trust monks and was not well disposed toward them, and he was only staying so long at the monastery because he was forced to by circumstances.

Seeing that the monastery guestmaster had diligently waited on them for several days and brought them meals, he once said to him at dinner time, "You sure treat us well, but just how much are you going to charge us later?"

"We're not going to charge you anything."  
"What, nothing?"

"This is how we do it—we have a box on the wall and you just put in there whatever amount God puts into your heart to give."

"Why, of course I'll put something in, but the next person won't, and maybe there will be a lot of people like him, and so the monastery will go broke feeding everyone for free!"

"Our Father Abbot says that even if ninety-nine people do not give anything, God will send a hundredth person to make up for them all."

At this the merchant looked at his son and said, "Well, my boy, it looks like that hundredth person is you and me." Astonished at the Superior's faith, he became a regular benefactor of Optina Hermitage from that time forth. From *The Elder Moses of Optina*

### On Idle Curiosity

We all know the saying "Curiosity killed the cat." The cat, viewed as a curious creature readily poking its nose into everything, in this case did so to its hurt. We use this saying when our curiosity about things not truly our concern gets us into trouble of one sort or another—or threatens to.

In his book *Path of Salvation*, St. Theophan the Recluse defines 'curiosity' as "an irresistible inclination to see and hear without purpose". It "consists of trying to know everything without order, without aim, without distinguishing whether it is needful or not" (pp. 54-55).

Curiosity is a gift from God. It helps us to live and learn in our world. Without curiosity, there would be little innovation, little advance of knowledge. Asking why things are this way and how they work and then investigating guided by such questions leads to much useful knowledge.

The curiosity that kills the cat and that of which St. Theophan writes might be termed "idle curiosity" to distinguish it from curiosity purposefully directed towards an end. "Idle curiosity" seeks to see and hear and know things without aim, without purpose, without need. It pokes its nose unabashedly into the business of others. The fading tabloids and the internet replacing them are full of material that panders to our idle curiosity. Much of the news consists of this sort of material as well. The internet and its search engines make indulging in idle curiosity easier than it has ever been.

Idle curiosity indulged will inevitably get us, like the cat, into trouble. Curiosity properly used can help bring us to knowledge of God. *Fr. Justin Frederick*

*Note well the dates below to avoid planning vacations and travel during them.*

#### Upcoming Events 2019

21 January: Feast of St. Maximus  
1 March: Forgiveness Vespers  
2-7 March: Clean Week  
12-18 April: Holy Week  
19 April: Great and Holy Pascha  
20-25 April: Bright Week

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!