

# The Confessor's Tongue for January 19, A. D. 2020

31<sup>st</sup> Sunday after Pentecost; St. Mark of Ephesus; Two Ven. Macarius of Egypt  
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.

## The Commandments of Christ

"If ye love Me, keep My commandments." (John 14:15)

*But I say unto you, swear not at all . . . but let your communication be Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil. Matthew 5:37*

With this command, Christ calls His followers to keep their word and to do what they say. Many people resort to swearing to convince others that they will do what they say: "I swear I'll do it!"; the more important the matter, the more important the thing by which they swear. Of course, when no oath is given, then all bets are off as to whether such a person will keep his word.

Christ keeps His word. He does what He says He will do; He does not do what He says He will not do. He does not resort to swearing oaths to convince us that He is serious. He simply says He will do it, and He does. 'Yes' in Christ's mouth means 'yes' and not 'maybe'. So should it in our mouths.

We speak far too carelessly, treating our words as light, trivial things. We say we will do things to please others with words while having little intention of carrying them out; or we say 'yes' to something and promptly forget. But the person who heard our 'yes' will not forget that word as quickly as we do. Our word has created an expectation in him, and our failure to keep our word brings him disappointment.

The command to let our yes be yes and our no, no, is more important than we adults might think. Very often, it is a parent's failure to keep his word, to let his yes be yes, that allows bitterness and the beginning of estrangement to creep into a child's heart. A child hears his father promise to take him fishing. He is excited. He anticipates. The day arrives, and no fishing. Dad had some business come up and felt he could release himself from his promise to attend to it. How does the child feel? He is disappointed, and the possibility of a root of bitterness springing up in his heart that will hinder free relations with his father is now present.

But what about those things that "come up" to interfere with things we told others we would do? In Psalm 14 (15):4, we read that a righteous man "swears to his own hurt and does not change." In other words, once a righteous man gives his word, he keeps it, even though it is not to his immediate advantage so to do.

There is a story told about the young Thomas Jackson, long before he became known as "Stonewall". He had agreed with a local man to bring him a fish once a week or so for a certain price. One day in his fishing for his employer, he caught a whopper. He brought the princely fish to the man to fulfill his bargain, who on seeing the size of the fish, wanted to pay Thomas more for it. Thomas refused, saying he had agreed to bring a fish for such and such a price and he couldn't accept more.

In the case above, the father would need to tell the business associates that he had a prior engagement that day that he could not break and that he'd meet another time for business.

A flourishing society depends upon honesty and men keeping their given word. When the aphorism of Miguel de Cervantes, "An honest man's word is as good as his bond" is generally true, people can trust each other, rely on each other, and there is little need for much oversight by the state. But when men swear and do not keep their word, then the legal machinery needed to try to protect the innocent must grow, and cynicism increases with it.

May God help us keep to saying simply "yes" and "no" and to doing what we say we will do.

## January 19: St. Mark of Ephesus

St. Mark, Archbishop of Ephesus, was the well-known defender of Orthodoxy at the Council of Florence. Nothing could make him agree at this council to the submission of the Eastern Church to the Roman Pope. Quietly leaving Florence for Constantinople, he zealously convinced its inhabitants to be faithful to Orthodoxy. The people, inspired by St. Mark and despite the persuasions of their emperor and patriarch to the contrary, rejected the union with Rome effected at Florence. He died in peace in 1444. He is known as one of the three 'pillars of Orthodoxy' along with St. Photius the Great and St. Gregory Palamas.

### From St. Mark of Ephesus

It is impossible to recall peace without dissolving the cause of the schism—the primacy of the Pope exalting himself equal to God."

We seek and we pray for our return to that time when, being united, we spoke the same things and there was no schism between us."

All the teachers of the Church, all the Councils, and all the Divine Scriptures, exhort us to flee those who uphold other doctrines and to separate from communion with them.

### Travel By Automobile

The dangers of the road are self-evident, given the number of people who lose their lives on the road each year. One must always be alert and exercise one's responsibility to be a good, courteous driver. While careless driving might be an involuntary sin, reckless driving is a voluntary sin of serious character, because we endanger not only our own lives but the lives of others. Need it be said? Texting while driving is reckless driving.

As pious Christians we entrust ourselves to the providence of God whenever we travel. Making the sign of the Cross as we begin our daily travels should be as standard as wearing our seat belt. The following troparion may be sung in tone 2 or said upon setting out:

O Christ the Way, the Truth, and the Life, / as Thou didst send Raphael the archangel as a guide for Tobias, / so now send Thine angel to accompany Thy servant. / May he protect him from every evil thing. / Bless this journey, that Thy servant may glorify Thy name, through the prayers of the Theotokos.

Some Christians will sing the Troparion to St. Nicholas, the patron of travellers, upon setting out.

Thou wast revealed to thy flock as a rule of faith, / an image of humility and a teacher of abstinence, / because of thy lowliness, the heights were opened to thee, / because of thy poverty, riches were granted to thee. / O holy Hierarch, Father Nicholas, / intercede with Christ our God // that our souls be saved.

There is also an excellent pious custom practiced by many saints of saying the prayer "Let God Arise, and let His enemies be scattered..." (found at the end of the evening prayers) upon leaving one's home. Such practices are recommended to us to establish.

## 21 January: St. Maximus

Monday night and Tuesday, we celebrate the feast of our Patron, St. Maximus the Confessor, one of the Churches profoundest theologians (in the top three for certain) and the writer whose works occupy a greater proportion of the famous *Philokalia* than anyone else's.

The Church honors the memory of the Venerable Maximus with two feasts during the year: January 21 and August 13. Because the latter feast corresponds with the leavetaking of Transfiguration, the celebration of the summer feast of St. Maximus is sometimes transferred to August 12.

St. Maximus was an official in the court of the Emperor Heraclius of the East Roman Empire. About the year 614, after having served the emperor for three years, Maximus, longing for a life of solitude, of *hesychia*, left his position and became a monk. He lived the rest of his life as a simple monk, never being ordained.

St. Maximus' keen mind was illuminated with the light of Christ through his ascetic struggles, and he wrote extensively about the spiritual life based in the writings of those who had gone before and his own experience of those truths. But in 634, through his association with St. Sophronius, Patriarch of Jerusalem, St. Maximus was enrolled in the struggle against the Monothelite heresy, which taught that Jesus Christ had had only one will—a divine one. But for Christ to lack a human will was to render Him less than fully human. The consequences of this were not merely academic, for as St. Gregory the Theologian had taught, "What is not assumed is not healed." If Christ had not assumed a human will, then man's will was not healed by Christ—and it was man's will above

all, perhaps, that needed to be healed. Man could not be saved if Christ lacked a human will. For the rest of his life, and sometimes nearly alone, St. Maximus eloquently defended Christ's full divinity in the face of political pressure, heretics, and wavering churchmen. He was tried by imperial authorities, condemned, and exiled three times: in 655, 656, and finally, in 662. The last time, his right hand and his tongue, the instruments of his teaching, were cut off. He died in exile in what his modern Georgia shortly afterwards on August 13, 662.

St. Maximus bears the titles "venerable" and "Confessor". "Venerable" (*prepodobnii*) is the title given to monastic saints. "Confessor" (*ispovednik*) is the glorious title given to a saint who has been persecuted and has suffered for the Faith.

One of the Church's most profound theologians, St. Maximus possessed equally profound insight into the spiritual life which he acquired through his practice of it. True Christian life always consists both of believing and confessing the right doctrine as well as doing the right things or living the right way (the path of love). In his writings, the intimate relation between theology and spirituality is manifest. Christian spirituality (how one approaches and interacts with God in and by the Holy Spirit) depends on Christian theology (what is said about God—what God is like determines how you approach Him); Christian theology, likewise, is confirmed and illuminated in the experience of the true God in the spiritual life. If the Church's confession of who God is, and especially, who Jesus Christ is, becomes corrupt or distorted, it cannot but have a corrupting influence on spiritual life.

St. Maximus shines as an example both of faithfulness to the Truth and as one who practiced the life he taught to others. His teachings instruct us not only in the mysteries of the highest theology, but also in how to live the Christian life, conquer our passions, attain the love of God and our fellow man, and be deified. Let us honour his memory by receiving his instruction and striving to follow his example in our own time.

The ikos from the canon of Matins for the saint well sums up his life:

Showing thyself to be an emulator of the sufferings of the Savior, and having Him in thy soul, O most blessed one who art most rich, thou didst appoint ascents in thy heart. And He hath given thee grace from heaven; for thou didst manfully oppose the tyrants, O wise one; and preaching the unoriginate, divine, and consubstantial Trinity, and denouncing the heretics who fought against God, thou didst endure boundless trials, O venerable and most praised one: the severing of thy theologizing tongue together with thy hand. Yet didst thou not cease to speak with boldness, confirming the faithful with thy divine teachings, manifestly preaching the transcendent and unoriginate Trinity unto all the people.

### 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

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!