

# The Confessor's Tongue for February 16, A. D. 2020

35<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost; Prodigal Son; Martyr Pamphilius, St. Nikolai of Japan  
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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## Lenten Reading

One activity that nourishes our soul and strengthens our life in Christ is spiritual reading. The time of the upcoming Great Fast should be marked by an increase in spiritual reading made possible by decreasing one's secular reading. This may mean leaving social media for the fast, laying aside novels, political reading, etc. The Fast calls us to lay aside lesser things to make room for more important things which have eternal value.

Scripture should always be part of the Christian's daily life. A minimum is to read one chapter from the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John) each day, paying special attention to Christ's commands therein. There are only 89 chapters in the four gospels, so one may easily read through them in three months. Add to that two chapters from the rest of the New Testament, and you have a rule for reading that will take you through the NT four times a year. Reading the whole Bible takes more effort, but if one uses the Psalter as part of one's prayers and reads the rest of the OT at a rate of three chapters a day, one will read through the whole Bible in a year (assuming one is reading the NT as above).

During the Fast, one may establish a regular practice of reading Scripture if one lacks it, maintain what one is doing and increase reading elsewhere, or increase one's rule for reading Scripture. An optional rule to help with this is made available in the parish before Lent begins, for those who wish to use it.

Spiritual reading also includes the *Lives* of saints. In them, one sees the precepts of the Gospel applied and lived out in the lives of Christians. One sees what a Christian life looks like. In them, we see practical theology. The lives of the saints are great teachers of the faith to us. We do well to read them. The *Prologue from Ocbriid* is probably the best single resource in this regard. More detailed accounts may be found in the *Synaxarion*, two versions of which are in English, the *Lives of the Saints* written by St. Dmitri of Rostov and translated into English (Sept—April so far), and online at oca.org. These provide general awareness of the saints through the ages. Special books are more focused: *New Martyrs of the Turkish Yoke*, *Russian New Martyrs*, etc. There are also many individual lives of saints with whom we do well to get to know: St. Seraphim of Sarov, St. Silouan of Athens, St. Paisios, St. Porphyrios, St. Paissy Velichkovsky, St. Sava of Serbia, Lives of eight of the sainted elders of Optina Monastery, New Martyr Grandduchess Elizabeth, *Consoler of Suffering Hearts: The Life, Counsels and Miracles of Eldress Rachel*, *Visionary of Russia*, St. Matrona of Moscow, St. Xenia of St. Petersburg, St. Joseph the Hesychast, St. Nektarios of Aegina, and other modern elders and elderesses. Works such as these warm our hearts, inspire us, and show us what

the Gospel lived out looks like.

The spiritual writings of the saints form another category. Often examples of their teachings are included in their *Lives*, but separate volumes may be found that contain the counsels and advice given by many of the saints above.

Then there are the writings of the Fathers. Some take the form of letters (St. Ignatius of Antioch, St. Basil, St. Athanasius Paschal letters, St. Theophan). Others express the dogma and teaching of the church (St. Athanasius, St. Basil, St. Gregory the Theologian, St. Gregory of Nyssa, St. Cyril of Alexandria, St. Gregory Palamas, St. John of Damascus). Still others explain the goals and practical means of spiritual life: *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, the *Philokalia*, St. Maximus, St. Theophan, St. Gregory of Nyssa, St. John Cassian, St. John Climacus, St. John Chrysostom, St. Marcarius the Great, St. Paisios of Athos, St. Porphyrios of Athos, St. John of Kronstadt, St. Ignatius Brianchaninov, and many others.

Your priest highly recommends *The Field* by St. Ignatius Brianchaninov, published in English in 2016. Written for laymen, this work is excellent and really is a necessity for all of us who wish to live an Orthodox life in a non-Orthodox world. *The Theology of the Body* by Jean-Claude Larchet and published by SVS Press makes clear the body's place in spiritual life and the place of the ascetic practices that involve it. His three-volume work *Therapy of Spiritual Illnesses* is an exhaustive treatment of the teaching of the Church Fathers on the subject. *The Spiritual Life and How To Be Attuned To It* by St. Theophan the Recluse is another classic that may be of great benefit to us. So too Dorotheos of Gaza's *Discourses and Sayings* and St. John of Kronstadt's *My Life in Christ* are generally applicable.

The books we have mentioned and many others will nourish our souls and help us on the path of salvation. Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, movies, television, and the newsmidia generally work to hinder us on that path. Novels may or may not hinder us, but they do not usually help us as much as these books do. The Fast, then, is a time to consume what will help us, not what helps not. Your priest is always ready to answer questions and advise you in these matters. May we all find good reading for the Fast before the Fast begins.

## February 3/16: St. Nicholas of Japan

*St. Nicholas of Japan is one of the great modern missionaries of the Orthodox Church. For some reason, his feast is given on its Old Style date, February 16, on our OCA wall calendars.*

Nicholas was born Ivan Kasatkin in Berezovsky village, Volsk district, in the province of Smolensk. There his father, Dmitri, served as a deacon. When

the child was five, his mother died. The deacon's family was big and very poor. Despite that young Ivan was sent to the Belsk Theological School and later to the Smolensk Theological Seminary.

In 1857, Ivan, one of the best students, was sent to study in the St. Petersburg Theological Academy, where he demonstrated remarkable talents. When Ivan was about to finish his studies, his future mission—to preach the Orthodox faith in Japan—was revealed by Divine Providence.

The Russian consul in Japan sent a request to the Holy Synod (later forwarded to the Academy), asking for a pastor "who would be useful both as a spiritual director and a scholar and whose private life would give a good idea of our clergy not only to Japanese, but also to foreigners." He filed a petition to Bishop Nectarius, the rector, asking to profess him and to appoint him to the Russian Consulate in Japan.

On June 24, 1860, Bishop Nectarius professed Ivan Kasatkin with the name of Nicholas in the academic church of the Twelve Apostles. On June 29, the day of Apostles Peter and Paul, monk Nicholas was ordained hierodeacon, and on June 30, when the Synaxis of the Twelve Apostles was celebrated, he became hieromonk.

Remarkable were the bishop's words of blessing of the young monk's new mission: "You are supposed to live your ascetic life outside the monastery. You will have to leave your homeland and to serve God in a country that is distant and unfaithful. Along with the cross of an ascetic you must take your staff of a pilgrim, along with monastic exploits you must embark on an apostolic mission!

In June 1860, hieromonk Nicholas set off for his duty station in the town of Hakodate, taking along the icon of Smolensk Mother of God. Unable to reach Japan before winter set in, he was forced to spend the winter in city of Nikolaevsk in the Russian Far East. While this delay seemed at first to be a waste of time, the words of Proverbs 19 once again proved true in the life of the young priest. While in Nikolaevsk he was able to meet and spend time with Archbishop Innocent (Veniaminov) the great missionary to Alaska (now St. Innocent, Apostle of America). With decades of missionary experience behind him, St. Innocent advised Father Nicholas to first learn the Japanese language, begin translating the Scriptures and not be tempted by setbacks and disappointments. St. Innocent even sewed a new cassock for the priest and gave him the bronze cross he had been wearing.

On July 2, 1861 Nicholas arrived Hakodate. At first, to preach the Gospel in Japan seemed next to impossible. According to Fr Nicholas' words, "the Japanese of that time regarded foreigners as beasts, and considered Christianity to be a vicious church, to which only notorious evildoers and magicians could belong." It took him eight years to familiarize himself with the country, its people and language, and the customs and traditions of those to whom he had to preach.

Nicholas learned Japanese culture and language eagerly. Especially after he met Archbp. Innocent (Veniaminov) in September 1861 in Hakodate, his motivation seemed to be accelerated. In Japan, the young Nicholas tried to keep his competence for Western languages and read foreign books. Innocent eventually found him reading Western novels, and upbraided him. According to Innocent, all Nicholas's efforts should be focused on learning Japanese language, culture, and history so that he would be able to make a correct translation of the Scripture. Nicholas was impressed greatly with the words of Archbishop Innocent and changed his ways.

Hieromonk Nicholas attended popular gatherings to listen to visitant storytellers and Buddhist preachers. By 1868, Fr. Nicholas had already mastered spoken Japanese. His knowledge of the history of Japan was deeper than that of many Japanese. In the meantime, he also learned English, which was becoming an international language.

Nicholas worked tirelessly, but made little progress among the Japanese. He waited on God to open a means of reaching them. This happened through an unlikely encounter.

A certain Samurai Shinto priest named Sawabe Takuma was employed by the Russian Consulate to give fencing lessons to the son of a Russian officer. Sawabe was a xenophobe who openly expressed his contempt for Christianity and considered Nicholas to be a worthy object of his disdain. One day he decided to confront the Christian priest.

"Why are you angry at me?" Fr. Nicholas asked Sawabe.

"All you foreigners must die. You have come here to spy on our country and even worse, you are harming Japan with your preaching," answered Sawabe.

"But do you know what I preach?"

"No, I don't," he answered.

"Then how can you judge, much less condemn something you know nothing about? Is it just to defame something you do not know? First listen to me, and then judge. If what you hear is bad, then throw us out."

Sawabe returned the next day, and Fr. Nicholas presented to him the sacred history of the Scriptures. The samurai's demeanor changed. He began to take notes and started to ask penetrating questions. He made a commitment to Christ and started his own catechesis under Fr. Nicholas's direction. Even before he had finished his catechumenate, he started sharing his faith with his friends, even at the risk to his own life. Initially, two friends, John Sakai and James Urano joined him in Baptism, he himself taking the name Paul. This group started to evangelize those they know, and within one year, there were twelve baptized Christians and 25 catechumens.

In late 1869, hieromonk Nicholas came to St. Petersburg to report on the results of his work to the Synod. A decision was made "to set up a special Russian Ecclesiastical Mission to preach God's Word

among pagans." Fr. Nicholas was promoted to the rank of archimandrite and appointed head of the Mission.

Upon his return to Japan, the prospective bishop turned over his Hakodate's congregation to hieromonk Anatole, his new associate, and relocated the missionary centre to Tokyo.

In 1871, the persecution of Christians began in Japan, which affected many people, including Paul Sawabe, the first Orthodox Japanese, who would later become a famous missionary priest.

It was not until 1873 that the persecution lessened a little and a free propagation of Christianity became possible. In the same year Archimandrite Nicholas started to build a church and a school for fifty people in Tokyo, followed by a theological school, which was transformed into a seminary in 1878.

In 1874, His Eminence Paul, Bishop of Kamchatka, arrived in Tokyo to ordain local candidates recommended by Archimandrite Nicholas. By that time, there were four schools in Tokyo: a catechist school, a seminary, a girls' school, and a clerical school; and two schools in Hakodate, one for boys and one for girls.

In late 1877, the Mission began to publish a magazine, *The Church Herald*, on a regular basis. By 1878, there were 4115 Christians in Japan. In public worship and education of local communities, the vernacular was used. The publication of books on spirituality and ethics was initiated as well.

In 1880, the Holy Synod decided to increase the staff of the Mission and to elevate the head of it, Archimandrite Nicholas, to the rank of bishop. On March 30, 1880, Archimandrite Nicholas was consecrated bishop of Tokyo in the Trinity Cathedral of Alexander Nevsky Lavra. The bishop wrote later: "During the sacrament of consecration, feelings seem to overwhelm the man against his will, his eyes get wet, his soul embarrassed. His inner being is transformed as soon as hierarchs place their right hands upon him. He stands up a totally different person than he was before kneeling down in front of the altar."

Since then, Bishop Nicholas continued his apostolic labor with even greater zeal. He finished in 1891 the construction of the Holy Resurrection Cathedral (Tokyo, Japan), then proceeded with the translation of liturgical books, and composed *The Orthodox Theological Dictionary* in Japanese. He paid much attention to numerous Orthodox communities.

The Russian-Japanese War of 1905, however, turned out to be the time of ordeals for St Nicholas and his flock. He withstood them with honor, to the great surprise of the Japanese. He found a way to help Russian prisoners of war in their difficult situation. In recognition of this unprecedented effort, he was promoted to the rank of archbishop.

In 1911, after fifty years' missionary work of St Nicholas, the Church of Japan numbered 266 communities, including 33,017 Orthodox laymen, one

archbishop, one bishop, 35 priests, six deacons, 14 teachers of singing, and 116 catechists.

Throughout his life, St Nicholas set an example of a true spiritual director wholly devoted to his ministry. He was a man of inexhaustible energy, firm commitment, and outstanding efficiency. He said once: "I consider it inappropriate for a missionary to retire unless he is totally unable to serve. I have never tried on a 'robe de chambre,' not even in my dreams. I would better die on the field where God's Providence destined me to plough and sow."

These words fully reflect his human nature. His private life was that of an ascetic. He never tried to perform any special feat, but rather surrendered his entire soul to God. His life was marked with hardships and willfulness, self-appraisals and tiredness, and the feebleness of an old man. However, the saint's life was a clear manifestation of success in overcoming these hardships through the fulfillment of Christ's commandments, shown to the whole world.

On February 3, 1912, Archbishop Nicholas, the enlightener of Japan, peacefully reposed in the Lord at the age of 75, to be succeeded by his assistant the future Metropolitan Sergius (Tikhomirov) of Japan. On April 10, 1970, the Church of Russia headed by Patriarch Alexis I of Moscow and all Russia decided to glorify Archbishop Nicholas naming him Equal-to-the-Apostles. Among the Orthodox, in Japan especially, St Nicholas is now venerated as a man of great sanctity and a special intercessor with the Lord.

### **On a Rule for Beginners**

*St. Isaac the Syrian, From Homily 17*

This is the rule of life that is chaste and pleasing to God: to refrain from glancing here and there with your eyes, but always to gaze steadily on what lies before you; to refrain from speaking idly and to say only what is necessary; to regard mean attire as sufficient for your body's need and, in like manner, to make use of foods that sustain the body, and not those that satisfy gluttony; to take a little from all foods, and not disdain some and select others and choose to fill your belly with these. Discretion is greater than all the other virtues. Without companions (when not ill or infirm), do not partake of wine. Do not interrupt the words of one who is talking, and contradict him like someone uncouth; but like a wise man be patient. And wherever you find yourself, consider yourself the inferior, and the servant of your brethren. Do not expose any part of your body in front of any man; and do not touch the body of another, except for some necessary reason, nor permit anyone to touch your body without good cause, as I have said. Shun familiarity as death. Acquire a chaste rule for your sleep, lest the power that guards you remove itself far from you. Wherever you sleep, if possible, let no man see you. Do not spit in front of anyone. If a fit of coughing comes over you while seated at table, turn your face to your back, and cough in this manner. Eat and drink with moderation, as befits the children of God....

O glutton, bent on the worship of your own belly! It is better for you to cast live coal into your stomach than the fried foods of rulers and princes. Pour your mercy out on all, and be moderate in all things. Keep yourself from much talk, for it is this that extinguishes the noetic movements produced in our heart by God. Flee from discussions of dogma as from an unruly lion; and never embark upon them yourself, either with those raised in the Church or with strangers. Do not pass through the streets of the hot-tempered and quarrelsome, lest your heart be filled with anger, and the darkness of delusion dominate your soul. Do not dwell with a proud man, lest the energy of the Holy Spirit be taken from your soul and she become the dwelling of every evil passion. If you keep these observances, O man, and occupy yourself continuously with the study of God, in truth your soul will see the light of Christ in herself, and will never be darkened unto all eternity. To Him be glory and dominion to the ages. Amen.

### From St. Ignatius Brianchaninov

#### For Success with the Jesus Prayer

An indispensable, essential condition of success in the prayer of Jesus is the keeping of His commandments. *Continue ye in My love* (John 15:9), He said to His disciples. What does it mean to remain in love for the Lord? It means to remember Him unceasingly, to remain unceasingly in union with Him in spirit. The former without the latter is dead, and it cannot even exist. *If ye keep my commandments ye shall abide in My love* (John 15:10). If we constantly observe the Lord's commandments, then by our spirit we shall be united with Him. Direct your actions, all your conduct, by the commandments of the Lord Jesus, direct your words by them, direct your thoughts and feelings by them, and you will get to know the virtues of Jesus. When you feel within yourself these virtues by the action of divine grace, and when you acquire through these feelings an experimental knowledge of them, you will be ravished by the incorruptible sweetness which is not of this world or age, a gentle but powerful sweetness that annihilates the heart's inclination for all earthly enjoyments and pleasures. Having been ravished by the virtues of Jesus, you will love Him, and you will yearn for Him to dwell in you completely. Without Him, you will regard yourself as perishing and lost. Then you will cry incessantly, cry from the fullness of conviction, with all your soul: *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.* The prayer of Jesus will replace all other prayers for you. And all of them—what thought can they contain and express more comprehensive than the thought of the pardon of sinners by Jesus? Make your one aim in life the doing of the will of Jesus in every circumstance, however important or trifling it may seem. *On the Prayer of Jesus, pp. 98*

#### By the Waters of Babylon Psalm 136 (137)

At Matins for the Sunday of the Prodigal Son, and

then also for the Sundays of Meatfare and Cheesefare, after singing the Polielely of the Psalms: "Praise the name of the Lord" and "O give thanks unto the Lord", we sing also Psalm 136: "By the rivers of Babylon", "with the beautiful alleluia", i.e. in the known chant with special tenderness, with sweet singing. This psalm arouses in the sinners to understand their unfortunate condition in their captivity in sin and by the devil, similarly to the Jews in captivity in Babylon, who understood their bitter situation and repented, and represents the sorrowful soul nostalgic for the heavenly fatherland. The last verse of this psalm: "Blessed shall he be who shall seize and dash thine infants against the rock", in translation means: the one is blessed who has the courage and power to break on the rock of faith sin in its infancy—those things which give birth to evil thoughts, the depraved stirrings of the heart, and the shameful impulses of the will—before they take possession of one's soul. *Bulgakov Handbook*

### Open To Me the Door of Repentance

Beginning Last Sunday and ending with the Fifth Sunday of Lent, we sing during Matins the following hymn, which we all would do well to make our prayer throughout the season of the Fast.

Open to me, the door of repentance, O Lifegiver, for my spirit riseth early to pray towards Thy holy Temple, bearing the temple of my body all defiled. But in Thy compassion, purify me by the lovingkindness of Thy mercy.

Lead me on the paths of salvation, O Mother of God, for I have profaned by soul with shameful sins and have wasted my life in laziness; but by thine intercessions, deliver me from all impurity.

Have mercy on me, O God, according to Thy great mercy, and, according to the multitude of Thy compassions, blot out my transgressions.

When I think of the many evil things I have done, wretch that I am, I tremble at the fearful day of judgment, but trusting in Thy lovingkindness, like David I cry to Thee: have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me, O God, according to Thy great mercy.

### The Commandments of Christ

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

*This series will resume next week. Please note St. Ignatius Brianchaninov's comments about the commandments in his piece above on success with the Jesus Prayer.*

#### Upcoming Events 2019

1 March: Forgiveness Vespers  
2-7 March: Clean Week  
25 March: Annunciation  
13-18 April: Holy Week  
19 April: Great and Holy Pascha, Picnic

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!