

The Confessor's Tongue for March 8, A. D. 2020

1st Sunday of Lent: Sunday of Orthodoxy

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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What Is An Anathema?

St. Theophan the Recluse

Rarely does the Rite of Orthodoxy, which is now being performed, take place without censures and reproaches on somebody's part. And no matter how many sermons are given explaining that the Church here acts wisely for the salvation of her children -- still the malcontents just keep repeating their line. Either they do not listen to the sermons, or these sermons do not strike home as regards the latters' perplexities, or perhaps they have formed their own conception of this rite and do not want to abandon it, no matter what you tell them.

To some people our anathemas seem inhumane, to others constricting. Such charges might be valid in other situations, but there is no way they can apply to our Rite of Orthodoxy. I will clarify for you briefly why the Church acts thus, and I think you yourselves will agree with me that in so doing, the Church acts wisely.

What is the holy Church? It is a society of believers, united among themselves by a unity of confession of divinely revealed truths, by a unity of sanctification by divinely established Mysteries, and by a unity of government and guidance by God-given shepherds. The oneness of confession, sanctification, and administration constitutes the rule of this society, which is obligatory for anyone who joins it. Membership in this society is contingent upon accepting this rule and agreeing with it; remaining in this society is contingent upon fulfilling it. Let us see how the holy Church grew and how it continues to grow. The preachers preach. Some of the listeners do not accept the preaching and leave; others accept it and as a result of accepting it are sanctified by the holy Mysteries, follow the guidance of the shepherds, and thus are incorporated into the holy Church -- they are churched. That is how all the Church's members enter her. In entering her, they are mingled with all her members, they are united with them, and they remain in the Church only as long as they continue to be one with them all.

From this simple indication regarding how the Church is formed, you can see that as a society, the holy Church came to be and continues to exist just like any other society. And so regard it as you would any other, and do not deprive it of the rights belonging to any society. Let us take, for example, a temperance society. It has rules which every member must fulfill. And each of its members is a member precisely because he accepts and abides by its rules. Now suppose that some member not only refuses to abide by the rules but also holds many views completely opposed to those of the society and even rises up against its very goal. He not only does not himself observe temperance but even reviles

temperance itself and disseminates notions which might tempt others and deflect them from temperance. What does the society ordinarily do with such people? First it admonishes them, and then it expels them. There you have an anathema! No one protests this, no one reproaches the society for being inhuman. Everyone acknowledges that the society is acting in a perfectly legitimate manner and that if it were to act otherwise, it could not exist.

So what is there to reproach the holy Church for when she acts likewise? After all, an anathema is precisely separation from the Church, or the exclusion from her midst of those who do not fulfill the conditions of unity with her and begin to think differently from the way she does, differently from the way they themselves promised to think upon joining her. Recollect how it happened! Arius appeared, who held impious opinions concerning Christ the Savior, so that with these notions he distorted the very act of our salvation. What was done with him? First he was admonished, and admonished many times by every persuasive and touching means possible. But since he stubbornly insisted upon his opinion, he was condemned and excommunicated from the Church -- that is, he is expelled from our society. Beware, have no communion with him and those like him. Do not yourselves hold such opinions, and do not listen to or receive those who do. Thus did the holy Church do with Arius; thus has she done with all other heretics; and thus will she do now, too, if someone appears somewhere with impious opinions. So tell me, what is blameworthy here? What else could the holy Church do? And could she continue to exist if she did not employ such strictness and warn her children with such solicitude about those who might corrupt and destroy them?

Let us see -- what false teachings and what false teachers are excommunicated? Those who deny the existence of God, the immortality of the soul, divine providence; those who do not confess the all-holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the One God; those who do not acknowledge the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ and our redemption by His death on the Cross; those who reject the grace of the Holy Spirit and the divine Mysteries which bestow it, and so forth. Do you see what manner of issues they touch upon? These are issues which are the very reason the holy Church is the Church, principles upon which she is founded and without which she could not be that which she is. Therefore those who rise up against such truths are to the Church what those who make attempts against our lives and our property are to us in our daily life. Robbers and thieves, after all, are nowhere permitted to carry on freely and go unpunished! And when they are bound and handed over to the law and to punishment, no one considers

this to be inhumane or a violation of freedom. On the contrary, people see in this very thing both an act of love for man and a safeguard for freedom -- with regard to all the members of society. If you judge thus here, judge thus also concerning the society of the Church. These false teachers, just like thieves and robbers, plunder the property of the holy Church and of God, corrupting her children and destroying them.

Does the holy Church really err in judging them, binding them, and casting them out? And would it really be love for man if she regarded the actions of such people with indifference and left them at liberty to destroy everyone else? Would a mother permit a snake to freely crawl up to and bite her little child, who does not understand the danger? If some immoral person were to gain access to your family and begin tempting your daughter, or your son -- would you be able to regard their actions and their speeches with indifference? Fearing to gain a reputation for being inhumane and old-fashioned, would you tie your own hands? Would you not push such a person out the door and close it against them forever?! You should view the actions of the holy Church in the same way. She sees that individuals of corrupt mind appear, and corrupt others -- and she rises up against them, drives them away, and calls out to all those who are her own: Beware -- so-and-so and such-and-such people wish to destroy your souls. Do not listen to them; flee from them. Thus she fulfills the duty of motherly love, and therefore acts lovingly -- or as you put it, humanely.

At the present time, we have a proliferation of nihilists, spiritists and other pernicious clever ones who are carried away with the false teachers of the West. Do you really think that our holy Church would keep silence and not raise her voice to condemn and anathematize them, if their destructive teachings were something new? By no means. A council would be held, and in council all of them with their teachings would be given over to anathema, and to the current Rite of Orthodoxy there would be appended an additional item: To Feyerbach, Buchner, and Renan, to the spiritists, and to all their followers -- to the nihilists -- be anathema. But there is no need for such a council, and there is no need either for such an addition. Their false teachings have already all been anathematized in advance in those points where anathema is pronounced to those who deny the existence of God, the spirituality and immortality of the soul, the teachings concerning the all-holy Trinity and concerning the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ. Do you not see with what wisdom and foresight the holy Church acts when she makes us perform the present proclamation and listen to it? And yet they say, "This is outdated." It is precisely now that it is relevant. Perhaps 100 years ago it was not relevant. But one must say concerning our time, that if a Rite of Orthodoxy did not as yet exist, it would be needful to introduce one, and to perform it not only in the capital cities but in all places and in all churches: in order to collect all the evil teachings opposed to the

Word of God, and to make them known to all, in order that all might know what they need to beware of and what kind of teachings to avoid. Many are corrupted in mind solely due to ignorance, whereas a public condemnation of ruinous teachings would save them from perdition.

Thus, the Church excommunicates, expels from her midst (when it is said, "Anathema to so-and-so", that means the same thing as, "So-and-so: out of here"), or anathematizes for the same reason that any society does so. And she is obliged to do this in self-preservation and to preserve her children from destruction. Therefore there is nothing blameworthy or incomprehensible about this present Rite. If anyone fears the act of anathema, let him avoid the teachings which cause one to fall under it. If anyone fears it for others, let him restore him to sound teaching. If you are Orthodox and yet you are not well disposed toward this act, then you are found to be contradicting yourself. But if you have already abandoned sound doctrine, then what business is it of yours what is done in the Church by those who maintain it? By the very fact that you have conceived a different view of things than that which is maintained in the Church, you have already separated yourself from the Church. It is not inscription in the baptismal records which makes one a member of the Church, but the spirit and content of one's opinions. Whether your teaching and your name are pronounced as being under anathema or not, you already fall under it when your opinions are opposed to those of the Church, and when you persist in them. Fearful is the anathema. Leave off your evil opinions. Amen.

The Anathemas From the Rite of Orthodoxy

And though there are enemies of Orthodoxy, and adversaries to the providential and salutary revelation of the Lord towards us, yet hath the Lord considered the reproaches of his servants; for he hath covered the blasphemers of his glory with shame, and shown the perverses and enemies of Orthodoxy as timorous and fugitives.

As therefore we bless and praise those who have submitted their reason to the obedience of Divine Revelation, and have contended for it; so following the sacred scriptures, and holding the traditions of the primitive Church, we reject and anathematize all those who oppose his truth, if while awaiting their conversion and repentance, they refuse to repent to the Lord.

To those who deny the existence of God, and assert that the world is self-existing, and that all things in it are made by chance, without the providence of God, *Anathema!*

To those who say that God is not a Spirit, but flesh: or that he is not just, merciful, wise, omniscient, and utter such like blasphemies, *Anathema!*

To those who dare to say that the Son of God and likewise the Holy Spirit are not one in essence and of equal honor with the Father; and confess that the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit are not one God, *Anathema!*

To those who foolishly say that the coming of the Son of God into the world in the Flesh, and his voluntary Passion, Death and Resurrection were not necessary for our salvation and the expiation of sin, *Anathema!*

To those who reject the grace of redemption preached by the Gospel as the only means of our justification before God, *Anathema!*

To those who dare to say that the all-pure Virgin Mary was not a Virgin before her childbirth, during her childbirth, and after her childbirth, *Anathema!*

To those who do not believe that the Holy Spirit inspired the Prophets and Apostles, and by them instructed us in the true way to eternal salvation, and confirmed the same by miracles, and now dwelleth in the hearts of all faithful and true Christians, and guideth them in all truth, *Anathema!*

To those who do not confess with heart and mouth that the Holy Spirit proceedeth from the Father alone, essentially and hypostatically, as Christ saith in the Gospel, *Anathema!*

To those who reject the immortality of the soul, the world's end, the future judgment, and eternal reward for virtues in heaven, and condemnation for sins, *Anathema!*

To those who reject all the Holy Mysteries held by the Church of Christ, *Anathema!*

To those who renounce the Councils of the holy fathers, and their Traditions which are agreeable to Divine Revelation, and piously preserved by the Orthodox Catholic Church, *Anathema!*

To those who reason that Orthodox sovereigns are elevated to their thrones not by God's special good will for them, and that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are not poured out upon them during the anointing for the fulfillment of this great calling; and who likewise dare to rise up against them in revolt and betrayal, *Anathema!*

To those who insult and blaspheme the Holy Icons which the Holy Church receives, in remembrance of the works of God and of those pleasing to him, to inspire their beholders with piety, and to incite them to imitate their examples, and to those who say that they are idols, *Anathema!*

To the Theosophists and other heretics who dare to say and teach mindlessly that our Lord Jesus Christ did not descend to the earth and become incarnate only once, but hath been incarnate many times; and who likewise deny that the true Wisdom of the Father is His Only-begotten Son, and, contrary to the divine Scriptures and the teaching of the Holy Fathers, seek other wisdoms, *Anathema!*

To the Masons, the occultists, spiritualists, sorcerers, and all who do not believe in one God, but honor the demons, who do not humbly surrender their life to God, but strive to learn the future

through the sorcerous invocation of demons,
Anathema!

To the blasphemers of the Christian Faith, the ecumenists who say that they do not confess the Orthodox Eastern Church to be One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic, but madly say that the true Church seems to be a combination of various heresies, *Anathema!*

To those apostatize from the Orthodox Faith and accept other beliefs, to the scandal of our brethren, and fall into schism, *Anathema!*

To the persecutors of the Church of Christ, the impious apostates who have lifted their hands against the anointed of God, who slay the sacred ministers, who trample the holy things underfoot, who destroy the temples of God, who subject our brethren to inquisition and have defiled our homeland, *Anathema!*

The Commandments of Christ

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

And he cometh, and findeth them sleeping, and saith unto Peter, Simon, sleepest thou? couldest not thou watch one hour? Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation. The spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak. Mark 14:37-38

Having considered the command to be spiritually alert and aware of danger ("watch"), we turn to the command Christ joins to it, "pray". If watching keeps the Christian from being caught by the enemy by surprise, prayer is the means by which he fights the enemy. To overcome, both watching and praying are needed.

Christ commanded His disciples not merely to watch, but to watch and pray, that they not enter temptation. The Christian lives in a state of alertness for spiritual danger from thoughts the enemy insinuates into his mind. Each thought must be examined and discerned as to its nature and treated accordingly. The good thoughts may be embraced, the bad ones leading to sin must be rejected. It is not always so easy, however, simply to exclude a thought from the mind. The ready response to persistent thoughts leading to sin is to pray, to turn the occasion of the provocative thought into an occasion for prayer. As St. Porphyrios says, "The person who belongs to Christ turns everything into prayer." "All matters are sorted out with prayer."

How do we do this? A judgmental thought (what we call a provocation) comes into your head about someone in the Church. Turn the provocation into prayer for the person: pray for his salvation, healing, repentance. Thank God for putting this brother in your life. Ask God for grace to love him and serve him. A flood of angry thoughts in reaction to someone's offense against you rushes into your mind. Turn those thoughts into prayer for the offender in accordance with Christ's command to pray for your enemies and to do good to those who offend you. A lustful thought slips in. Do not dwell in it. Praise God for the beauty He has created, ask Him to help you

see Him as the Source of all beauty to be worshipped rather than the creature, and pray for the person who is the object of your lust and God will preserve him in chastity and that he would not misuse the beauty given him. Pray for that person's salvation as well.

We may do this in every situation. When your child is difficult, thank God for the child He has given you, pray for the child, and ask God for grace and wisdom to love him. When married life is hard, thank God for your spouse and pray fervently for the growth and salvation of both of you through your marriage. When life is unfair, give glory to God, thank Him for providing your basic needs, and thank Him for showing you mercy in abundance rather than dispensing justice to you.

Thoughts enter our minds throughout the day. Is it any wonder, then, that St. Paul commands us to "pray without ceasing"?

Another way of fulfilling these two commands is to say the Jesus Prayer throughout the day. That helps keep us spiritually awake—watchful. It also constitutes prayer. And in the moments of temptation or provocative thoughts, we may put more energy and attention into praying it. And when we don't know what else to pray in response to the thoughts, the Jesus Prayer will always serve.

Failure to watch and pray is a primary reason we fall again and again into the same old sins. May God give us new grace to watch and pray that we may not enter into temptation! *Fr. Justin Frederick*

The Word "Anathema" and Its Meaning

Saint John of San Francisco

The Greek word "anathema" consists of two words: "ana", which is a preposition indicating movement upwards and "thema", which means a separate part of something. In military terminology, "thema" meant a detachment; in civil government "thema" meant a province. We currently use the word "theme", derived from "thema", to mean a specific topic of a written and intellectual work.

"Anathema" literally means the lifting up of something separate. In the Old Testament this expression was used both in relation to that which was alienated due to sinfulness and likewise to that which was dedicated to God.

In the New Testament, in the writing of the Apostle Paul it is used once in conjunction with "maranatha", meaning the coming of the Lord. The combination of these words means separation until the coming of the Lord; in other words - being handed over to Him (1 Cor 16:22).

The Apostle Paul uses "anathema" in another place without the addition of "maranatha" (Gal 1:8-9). Here "anathema" is proclaimed against the distortion of the Gospel of Christ as it was preached by the Apostle, no matter by whom this might be committed, whether by the Apostle himself or an angel from the heavens. In this same expression there is also implied: "let the Lord Himself pass judgment", for who else can pass judgment on the angels?

St John the Theologian in Revelation (22:3) says that in the New Jerusalem there will not be any anathema; this can be understood in two ways, giving the word anathema both meanings: 1) there will not be any lifting up to the judgment of God, for this judgment has already been accomplished; 2) there will not be any special dedication to God, for all things will be the Holy things of God, just as the light of God enlightens all (Rev 21:23).

In the acts of the Councils and the further course of the New Testament Church of Christ, the word "anathema" came to mean complete separation from the Church. "The Catholic and Apostolic Church anathematizes", "let him be anathema", "let it be anathema", means a complete tearing away from the church. While in cases of "separation from the communion of the Church" and other *epitimia* or penances laid on a person, the person remained a member of the Church, even though his participation in her grace filled life was limited, those given over to anathema were thus completely torn away from her until their repentance. Realizing that she is unable to do anything for their salvation, in view of their stubbornness and hardness of heart, the earthly church lifts them up to the judgment of God. That judgment is merciful unto repentant sinners, but fearsome for the stubborn enemies of God. "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God ... for our God is a consuming fire" (Heb 10:31; 12:29). Anathema is not final damnation: until death repentance is possible. "Anathema" is fearsome not because the Church wishes anyone evil or God seeks their damnation. They desire that all be saved. But it is fearsome to stand before the presence of God in the state of hardened evil: nothing is hidden from Him. *from Orthodox Life, vol 27, Mar-April 1977, pp 18,19*

From St. Theophan the Recluse

"For, if we have problems in our lives, it is almost always not so much from ill will and a bad heart so much as it is from a lack of zeal for what is worthwhile." *SL, p. 34*

"For, I propose that everything that is worthwhile comes out of the structure of man's nature. It is necessary for us to live as God created us, and when someone does not live this way, I may confidently state that he does not live at all. I ask that you be satisfied with this for the time being." *SL, p. 39*

Upcoming Events 2019

- 1 March: Forgiveness Vespers
- 14 March: Retreat at Nativity Monastery with Fr. Reardon
- 19 March: Orthodoxy on Tap, 7:00 p.m. St. Maximus, Fr. Justin on "Engaging the World on Our Terms"
- 25 March: Annunciation, Vesperral Divine Liturgy
- 13-18 April: Holy Week
- 19 April: Holy Pascha, the Feast of Feasts & Picnic

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!