

# The Confessor's Tongue for March 15, A. D. 2020

2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Lent: Sunday of St. Gregory Palamas

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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## From St. Gregory Palamas

There are times when illness is better for sinners than good health, because it helps them towards salvation and blunts their inborn evil impulses. Inasmuch as it repays the debt of sin by means of suffering, it makes them able to receive healing of their souls in the first instance, then healing of their bodies. This happens most of all when the sick person, understanding that the affliction is a remedy from God, bears it courageously, falls down before God with faith, and asks for forgiveness, through whatever works he can manage.

*Homily 10 on Mark 2:1-12*

There are three degrees of eating: self-control, sufficiency, and satiety. Self-control is to be hungry after having eaten. Sufficiency is to be neither hungry nor to be weighed down. Satiety is to be slightly weighed down. To eat again after reaching the point of satiety is to open the door of gluttony, through which unchastity comes in. Attentive to these distinctions, choose what is best for you according to your powers, not overstepping the limits. For according to St. Paul, only the perfect can be both hungry and full, and at the same time be strong in all things (Philippians 4:12).

## Second Sunday of Fast: St. Gregory Palamas

The Orthodox teaching about fasting as a means for the beneficial inner light is revealed with special power in the commemoration on this Sunday of St. Gregory Palamas, Archbishop of Thessalonica and Wonderworker (see Nov. 14). St. Gregory is known as the one who exposed the heresy of Barlaam, the Calabrian monk, who rejected the Orthodox teaching about the blessed light, which illuminates the internal person sometimes openly visible (as for example on Tabor and Sinai), and who did not admit the possibility to achieve this inner light through both prayer and fasting and other individual efforts. At the Council in Constantinople called in 1341 concerning this heresy, Barlaam, his disciple Akindynos, and their other accomplices were condemned for this false teaching. And for the rest of his life, St. Gregory zealously struggled for Orthodoxy, "not once", but "many times many" through his inspired speeches and writings denying the teachings and compositions of the evil followers of Akindynos and Barlaam. For this ascetic effort for the benefit of the Holy Church, and also for the confession and witness for the faith and Christ's flock, for the sanctity of the strict ascetic life and the deep edification for all ascetics through his works, St. Gregory is also glorified in the service on this day by the Holy Church. Thus the Holy Church, celebrating on the previous Sunday the triumph of Orthodoxy over all heresies, on the present Sunday

celebrates the victory of Orthodox ascetic teachings over all false doctrines opposing it. *Bulgakov*

## On Being Troubled By Thoughts

*St. John Cassian*

It is, indeed, impossible for the mind not to be troubled by thoughts, but accepting them or rejecting them is possible for everyone who makes an effort. It is true that their origin does not in every respect depend on us, but it is equally true that their refusal or acceptance does depend on us. By saying that it is impossible for the mind not to be attacked by thoughts, however, we do not mean that all of this must be attributed to an invasion and to those spirits which try to impose them on us. Otherwise there would be no free will in a person, nor would the effort expended in our own correction be of any help to us. But it is, I say, largely up to us whether the character of our thoughts improves and whether either holy and spiritual thoughts or earthly and carnal ones increase in our hearts. Therefore we practice the frequent reading of and constant meditation on Scripture, so that we may be open to a spiritual point of view. For this reason we frequently chant the psalms, so that we may continually grow in compunction. For this reason we are diligent in vigils, fasting, and praying, so that the mind which has been stretched to its limits may not taste earthly things but contemplate heavenly ones. When these things cease because negligence has crept in again, then, it is inevitable that the mind, by the accumulated filth of the vices, will soon turn in a carnal direction and fall.

This activity of the heart is not inappropriately compared to millstones, which the swift rush of the waters turns with a violent revolving motion. As long as the waters' force keeps them spinning, they are utter incapable of stopping their work, but it is in the power of the one who supervises to decide whether to grind wheat or barley or darnel. Indeed, only that will be ground which has been accepted by the person entrusted with the responsibility for the work.

In the same way, the mind cannot be free from agitating thoughts during the trials of the present life, since it is spinning around in the torrents of the trials that overwhelm it from all sides. But whether these will be either refused or admitted into itself will be the result of its own zeal and diligence. For I, as we have said, we constantly return to meditating on Holy Scripture and raise our awareness to the recollection of spiritual realities and to the desire for perfection and the hope of future blessedness, it is inevitable that the spiritual thoughts which have arisen from this will cause the mind to dwell on the things that we have been meditating on. But if we are overcome by laziness and negligence and let ourselves be taken up with wicked behavior and silly conversations, or if we

get involved in worldly concerns and unnecessary preoccupations, the result will be as if a kind of weed had sprung up which will m pose harmful labor on our heart. And, according to the words of the Lord, the Savior, wherever the treasure of our works and intentions is, there also will necessarily abide our heart.

Above all we should know what the three sources of our thoughts are: they come from God, from the devil, and from ourselves. They are from God when he deigns to visit us by the illumination of the Holy Spirit, which raises us up to a higher level of progress; and when we have made little gain or have acted lazily and been overcome and he chastens us with a most salutary compunction; and when he opens to us the heavenly sacraments and changes our chosen orientation to better acts and to a better will . . . .

And from the devil a whole series of thoughts is born, when he attempts to subvert us both by delight in wickedness and by hidden snares, fraudulently passing off evil things for good with the most subtle finesse and transforming himself for us into an angel of light. . . .

The also come from us, however, when we spontaneously remember things that we are doing or have done or have heard. . . .

We should, then, be continually aware of this threefold distinction and with a wise discretion examine all the thoughts that emerge in our heart, first tracing their origins and causes and their authors, so that, in accordance with the status of whoever is suggesting them, we may be able to consider how we should approach them.

*From the First Confession*

### **A Homily on the Prayer Before Communion**

*Met. Anthony of Surozh, 18 September 1988*

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. Every time we come to Communion we say to the Lord that we come to Him Who is the Saviour of sinners, but we also state that we consider ourselves as the greatest of all. How much truth is there in such a statement when we make it? Or how can we make such a statement? Is it true? Can we truly say that we do consider ourselves the worst of all sinners? John of Kronstadt in his "Diary" makes a point which I believe is very important; he says that he also asks himself this very question, and he can answer it in all honesty, because, he says, if others had been given so much love, so much grace, so much Divine revelation as was given to him, they would have borne fruit which he proved unable to bear.

And so, this is a way in which we can ask ourselves questions when we come up to Communion, and say the words of the prayer before Communion. Is it simply that we repeat them because they are written in the books? Or is it that we are aware - but aware of what? Aware of being sinners? Yes, we all are aware of being sinners, more or less; but are we aware of how much we have received from God and how little fruit

we have borne? It is only if we see vividly, clearly, the contrast between all that was possible, indeed - all that IS possible, and all that we are, that we can honestly say such words.

Let us reflect on them, because we cannot speak words of courtesy, words of empty politeness to God when we pray. What we say must be true, and we must make of every prayer a test of the truth of our conscience and of our lives.

Let us take this with us until we receive Communion again, so that one day, perhaps not at our next Communion, but after a long life of searching, of praying, of passing judgement on ourselves, we can say truly, "God, O God! How much you have given me, and how little fruit I have borne! If anyone had been given what you gave me, he would already be a Saint of God". Amen.

### **Fr. Epiphanius, *Life & Teaching* (+1989)**

On account of all those who have difficulty with the matter of the Lord's miracles, Father Epiphanius stressed: When someone accepts the Resurrection of Christ—in other words, that Christ is God—then he can easily explain all the miracles.

Once, the Elder related: A certain spiritual child of mine came and was telling me, "You know, Father, I don't accept fasting. What does fasting mean anyway?"

I answered him, "Fasting is an institution of the Church. It was given as a law in Paradise. The Prophets fasted, as did Moses, the Lord Himself, the Apostles, the Fathers.... If you continue not to fast and hold on to this viewpoint, then change Elders!"

That's what I told him. If, however, he told me, "You know, Father, I accept fasting as the Church ordains, but I cannot fast so much. I am trying, however, to achieve something," I would tell him, "I accept you, my little child. Try as much as you can to live up to what our Church says." But to tell me, "I don't accept fasting!" Who are you? What are these things you are saying? Do you hear them?

He responded similarly to someone, who mentioned to him in confession that he placed the fasts among the smaller obligations and for this reason did not keep them, but "strove to be correct in the basic elements of our Faith."

"Won't you tell me—did you come here as a repentant sinner to receive remission, or as a lawgiver? If the first is the case, you cannot place fasting in the secondary elements of Christian life. If the second is the case, then you are not a disciple of Christ and I cannot read the prayer of absolution over you.

#### **Upcoming Events 2019**

25 March: Annunciation, Vespers Divine Liturgy

13-18 April: Holy Week

19 April: Holy Pascha, the Feast of Feasts & Picnic

**GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!**