

The Confessor's Tongue for March 29, A. D. 2020

4th Sunday of Lent: Sunday of St. John of the Ladder

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 you love Me, you will keep my commandments."

But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd. Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few; Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth laborers into his harvest.

Matthew 9:36-38

As Orthodox Christians and followers of Jesus Christ, we must always share Christ's concern for the multitudes outside of the Church who faint in their lack of spiritual nourishment and are scattered as sheep without a shepherd. Christ became man to reveal God and to die for every human being on the face of the earth. God loves each man alike, with no favoritism. Thus we cannot be indifferent to the fate of those around us who may die without Christ. We share in Christ's concern for the lost sheep by praying to the Lord of the harvest that He will send laborers into the harvest, for "the laborers are few," though "the harvest is truly plenteous."

In these past few weeks, we may clearly see the world's need for Christ and the laborers to convey Him to it as our world has descended into a frenzied panic driven by fear of death in the face of the Corona Virus. Without Christ, all life is to fear for life. People become paranoid over possible dangers and pursue safety at all costs. Yet life is unavoidably unsure and dangerous. Only faith in Christ, when we commend ourselves into His providential care, lifts us out of fear for life in the face of every danger.

We need laborers here in Denton County, where many live entirely without Christ, and many others live with distorted and incomplete versions of the Christian faith. Christ commands us to pray for those laborers to be sent out. Perhaps they will be some of us; perhaps others whom God will send here.

Nonetheless, we must pray. Nearly 800,000 people live in Denton County, and there is but one Orthodox parish. We should pray and work towards the construction of a beautiful, permanent temple for our parish that we may receive them. We should work and pray for the founding of new missions in our own county and in the neighboring counties (particularly Wise and Cooke counties). The harvest is truly plenteous. There is no good reason why there should not be five or ten parishes in Denton County alone, and there is no good reason why even small towns should not have an Orthodox parish.

But whatever God gives, let us pray for laborers in Denton County: at UNT, at TWU, at NCTC, in every town, city, neighborhood, and place of employment. Our task here at very least is to be the Church and to pray for laborers. We may not be

confident about how to start more missions. We may not see where the people and money will come from. But we can pray as Christ commanded, and we are remiss if we do not.

How may we pray for this? Here are three suggestions. First, we may offer a petition in our own words as part of our daily prayers. Second, as we head out of our homes each day for work, school, or errands, we may ask God to send out laborers into the harvest, and offer ourselves to Him for this purpose. Third, we could read an Akathist to St. Innocent of Alaska, St. Nicholas of Japan, St. Nina of Georgia, or some other missionary saint, asking his prayers for our area.

March 29: St. Diodochus of Photike

St Diadochos, who was born around 400 and died before 486, was bishop of Photiki in Epirus (North Greece); he wrote against the Monophysites and supported the Council of Chalcedon (451). In the work *On Spiritual Knowledge and Discrimination* he reveals, as St Nikodimos puts it, 'the deepest secrets of the virtue of prayer'. Written in a sensitive style of great beauty, the work is of basic importance for an understanding of Orthodox mystical theology. Diadochos' thought is of exceptional subtlety and precision, and his exact meaning is not easy to grasp.

St Diadochos borrows many of the Evagrian technical terms, but his work contains certain features not found in Evagrius: an emphasis, for instance, upon the primacy of love (see especially §§ 90-92), upon the sacraments, and upon the heart as well as the intellect (*nous*). His teaching on baptism (§§ 76-78) is closely parallel to that of St Mark the Ascetic; here, and in many other passages of the work, St Diadochos has particularly in view the errors of the Messalians. St Diadochos emphasizes the fundamental unity of man's body and soul: our present state of dividedness is the consequence of the fall (§§ 24-25). He attaches great importance to the continual remembrance and invocation of the Lord Jesus (§§ 31, 32, 33, 59, 61, 85, 88, 97).

He is commemorated on March 29.

From St. Diodochos

Definitions

Faith: dispassionate understanding of God.

Hope: the flight of the intellect in love towards that for which it hopes.

Patience: with the eyes of the mind always to see the Invisible as visible.

Freedom from avarice: to desire not to have possessions with the same fervor as men generally desire to have possessions.

Knowledge: to lose awareness of oneself through going out to God in ecstasy.

Humility: attentive forgetfulness of what one has accomplished.

Freedom from anger: a real longing not to lose one's temper.

Purity: unwavering perception of God.

Love: growing affection for those who abuse us.

Total transformation: through delight in God, to look on the repulsiveness of death as a joy.

3. Evil does not exist by nature, nor is any man naturally evil, for God made nothing that was not good. When in the desire of his heart someone conceives and gives form to what in reality has no existence, then what he desires begins to exist. We should therefore turn our attention away from the inclination to evil and concentrate it on the remembrance of God; for good, which exists by nature, is more powerful than our inclination to evil. The one has existence while the other has not, except when we give it existence through our actions.

4. All men are made in God's image; but to be in His likeness is granted only to those who through great love have brought their own freedom into subjection to God. For only when we do not belong to ourselves do we become like Him who through love has reconciled us to Himself. No one achieves this unless he persuades his soul not to be distracted by the false glitter of this life.

5. Free will is the power of a deiform soul to direct itself by deliberate choice towards whatever it decides. Let us make sure that our soul directs itself deliberately only towards what is good, so that we always consume our remembrance of evil with good thoughts.

6. The light of true knowledge is the power to discriminate without error between good and evil. Then the path of righteousness leads the intellect upward towards the Sun of Righteousness and brings it into the boundless illumination of spiritual knowledge, so that henceforward it will grow more and more confident in its quest for love. With an incensive power free from anger we should snatch righteousness from the hands of those who dare to outrage it, since the aspiration for holiness triumphs not by hating others, but by convincing them of their faults.

20. Faith without works and works without faith will both alike be condemned, for he who has faith must offer to the Lord the faith which shows itself in actions. Our father Abraham would not have been counted righteous because of his faith had he not offered its fruit, his son (cf. Jas. 2:21; Rom. 4:3).

27. Very few men can accurately recognize all their own faults; indeed, only those can do this whose intellect is never torn away from the remembrance of God. Our bodily eyes, when healthy, can see everything, even gnats and mosquitoes flying about in the air; but when they are clouded by some discharge, they see large objects only indistinctly and small

things not at all. Similarly if the soul, through attentiveness, reduces the blindness caused by the love of this world, it will consider its slightest faults to be very grave and will continually shed tears with deep thankfulness. For it is written, 'The righteous shall give thanks unto Thy name' (Ps. 140:13). But if the soul persists in its worldly disposition, even though it commits a murder or some other act deserving severe punishment, it takes little notice; and it is quite unable to discern its other faults, often considering them to be signs of progress, and in its wretchedness it is not ashamed to defend them heatedly.

38. We have now explained the distinction between good and bad dreams, as we ourselves heard it from those with experience. In our quest for purity, however, the safest rule is never to trust to anything that appears to us in our dreams. For dreams are generally nothing more than images reflecting our wandering thoughts, or else they are the mockery of demons. And if ever God in His goodness were to send us some vision and we were to refuse it, our beloved Lord Jesus would not be angry with us, for He would know we were acting in this way because of the tricks of the demons. Although the distinction between types of dreams established above is precise, it sometimes happens that when the soul has been sullied by an unperceived beguilement - something from which no one, it seems to me, is exempt - it loses its sense of accurate discrimination and mistakes bad dreams for good.

44. It is in no way contrary to the principles of true knowledge to eat and drink from all that is set before you, giving thanks to God; for 'everything is very good' (cf. Gen. 1:31). But gladly to abstain from eating too pleasurably or too much shows greater discrimination and understanding. However, we shall not gladly detach ourselves from the pleasures of this life unless we have fully and consciously tasted the sweetness of God.

45. When heavy with over-eating, the body makes the intellect spiritless and sluggish; likewise, when weakened by excessive abstinence, the body makes the contemplative faculty of the soul dejected and disinclined to concentrate. We should therefore regulate our food according to the condition of the body, so that it is appropriately disciplined when in good health and adequately nourished when weak. The body of one pursuing the spiritual way must not be enfeebled; he must have enough strength for his labors, so that the soul may be suitably purified through bodily exertion as well.

47. Fasting, while of value in itself, is not something to boast of in front of God, for it is simply a tool for training those who desire self-restraint. The ascetic should not feel proud because he fasts; but with faith in God he should think only of reaching his goal. For no artist ever boasts that his accomplishment is simply due to his tools; but he waits for the work itself to give proof of his skill.

Upcoming Events 2019

13-18 April: Holy Week

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

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!