

# The Confessor's Tongue for April 26, A. D. 2020

## Thomas Sunday

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.

### Thomas Sunday

The eighth day after Pascha as the ending of the celebration of Bright Week was a special celebration since ancient times, as if it replaced the very same Day of Pascha and was called Antipascha and means 'instead of Pascha.' From this day the cycle of Sundays and weeks of the entire year begins. On this day the commemoration of the resurrection of Christ is updated for the first time. This Sunday of the Antipascha was called the New Sunday, i.e. the first day of renewal or simply renewal. The more proper name is the real day, the eighth day after Pascha, that on this eighth day the Lord Himself willed the renewal of the joy of His resurrection with a new appearance to the Holy Apostles.

St. Gregory the Theologian says in his Homily on this Sunday, "With the ancient and good purpose, it is to honor the day of renewal as established law, or better to say, to honor the new benefactions with the day of renewal. But was not the day of renewal also the first Resurrection Day, followed by the blessed and radiant night? Why you give this name to the present day? That was the day of salvation, but this day is the commemoration of salvation. That day differentiates the burial and the resurrection in itself, but this day is purely of the new birth. It is the first day among those following it and eighth among those coming before it".

Commemorating this day of "renewal" the Holy Church inspires in us the necessity for our beneficial spiritual renewal. "The real renewal", the same Holy Father teaches, "we now celebrate, is the going from death to life. And so we put off ourselves the old man and renewed ourselves; that we too might walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:4)". "The old has passed away, behold, the new has come" (2 Cor. 5:17). "Let us bridle all lusts from which death was born, let us become accustomed to the feeling of obedience, let us begin to hate any evil food from prohibited fruit and let us remember the former only and henceforth first be wary of the same. Christian be made new from the old and in this way celebrate the renewal of the soul". "Change yourself with a good change, and in this case do not think highly of yourself, but say with David: "This is a change being wrought by the right hand of the Most High" (Ps. 76:11), from whom is everything successful in people. God the Word wants that you not stand in the place alone, but that you ever move, moving smoothly, be completely newly created and if you sin turn yourself away from the sin, and if you are successful, you will have strained the powers even more".

"It is needful to know that on this Antipascha Sunday that we do not sing the Resurrection services, but that everything is of the feast". This means, that we do not sing the stichera of Pascha with the known refrains: "Let God Arise" at Vespers "for the Aposticha" that is sung on following Sundays before the Ascension of the Lord. In Matins the Paschal Canon is not sung but is sung on the following Sundays. All this is not sung, certainly, so that in the eyes of the faithful it will be closer to the subject of the actual festival, which in itself is the most amazing proof of the Resurrection of Christ, solemnly celebrated by us during all of Bright Week (Manual for Village Pastors 1892, 15). *Bulgakov Handbook*

### The Commandments of Christ

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

*Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.*  
*Matthew 6:19-21*

What are treasures? Treasures are those things we value and to which we are attached. "I treasure this ring," we say, which indicates our attachment to it. What constitutes treasure, then, will differ from person to person. Gold, silver, jewels are the stuff of our childhood notions of buried treasure, and some store up such treasures for themselves. Treasures can also take the form of clothing, exotic and fine foods, fast cars, technological gadgets, computers, and experiences of travel, sporting events, concerts, dining out, sex. Some people treasure gaining power over others and getting things done in this world or having leisure and free time to spend as they please. For others, treasure may be found in people, in family, friends, and children. Still others treasure praise, popularity, and attention from others. Then there are those whose treasure is found in obedience to God and carrying out His work on earth.

Treasures are of two types: those stored up on earth, and those stored up in heaven.

Earthly treasures are subject to being taken from us through moth, rust, and thieves. Think about that sports car that was so impressive twenty years ago. Chances are, it quietly rusts away now in a junkyard. Moths eat clothes. They also lay eggs, and the hatched larva will infest and eat man's stored food. Other things decay. Our treasured computers decay quickly, their life-spans are short, and when they no longer serve us, they create a problem of toxic waste management. Our houses age, foundations shift, wood rots or is eaten by termites, bricks crumble, adhesives no longer adhere, roofs leak. That outfit that was so fashionable (and expensive) now hangs unworn in the closet, and even if the moths haven't eaten it yet, the moths of the fickle fashion gods have consumed its appeal and rendered it worthless. And things that do not readily tarnish, rust, or rot such as precious metals, precious stones, and land are still threatened by thieves and governments and unstable markets. Family members and friends are ultimately stolen from us by the thief Death. Even if we manage to hold on to our earthly treasures throughout our life, Death will still come for us, depriving us of all our treasures for good.

Heavenly treasures have the advantage that they do not rust, moths do not eat them, and no thieves can steal them. The investment is perfectly secure, and it pays dividends for eternity.

How do we store up earthly treasure? We think of our time, our energy, and our money as our own, and we use these God-given resources as we please, usually without asking His blessing or His guidance in our use of them. Or we may recognize our duty to God, but once we think we have discharged it, we claim the rest for ourselves ('I paid my tithe, the rest is mine!' or 'I went to church on Sunday, the rest of the week is mine!').

How do we store up heavenly treasures? We begin by remembering that God will reward each man according to his works, and so we pursue those things we know are pleasing to God. Thus we invest our time, money, and energy in the work of God on earth. It is said that every penny given to a beggar is a deposit in our heavenly treasury. So is every good deed done for Christ's sake (rather than for the praise of men). To store up treasure in heaven means we live our lives in accordance with Christ's commandments. We make prayer a priority. We study the Scriptures to know God's will. We participate in our local parish and support it. We invest in ministries doing God's work of preaching the Gospel and serving those in need. We live frugally so that we always have something we may give beyond or basic tithe to those in need. We spend our time not in selfish pleasures that isolate ourselves from others, but we invest time in their lives to help them live more fully in Christ. We take time to instruct our children in the Faith and in training them in godliness. We share our energy and resources in helping those God puts in our lives—all for Christ's sake and in obedience to His commands, seeking to please Him, to do His will, and to further His work on earth.

May we all make more abundant deposits in the heavenly treasury this year and for the rest of our lives. *Fr. Justin Frederick*

### **The Wing of Will** *St. Paisius of Athos*

People can easily be influenced both for good or ill. They are influenced more readily towards evil, because it is the devil who is prompting them. For example, tell someone to quite smoking because it is harmful. As soon as he decides to stop, the devil will run to tempt him: "This type of cigarette has less nicotine, that type has a filter that purifies the smoke. Smoke these; they won't harm you." The devil will find an excuse for him not to quite smoking; he will find a solution! for the devil is capable of finding many excuses. And the cigarette he suggests may be even more harmful. This is why we must be able to exercise our will. For, if someone does not cut out his bad habits when he is young, then it will be very difficult later in life when the will is weakened.

If a person has not willpower, he can do nothing. Saint John Chrysostom says, *All depends upon being willing or unwilling*. This is an important matter. God is by nature Benevolent and always desires our good. But it is essential that we, too, be willing. For man

flies spiritually with two wings: God's will and his own.

One wing—God's own will—He has attached permanently to one of our shoulders. But in order to fly spiritually, we also have to attach our own wing—the human will—to the other shoulder. When someone has a strong will, when he has the human wing, the one which balances the divine wing, then he can fly. But if his will is weak and has not matured, when he tries to fly a little, he merely tumbles. He tries again to take off, but he still tumbles.

– Geronda, can the will be cultivated and strengthened?"

– Haven't we already said that everything can be cultivated? the will exists in all people, in varying degrees. When a person has the desire to struggle, he prays and asks God to increase his will, and God helps. When a person does not progress in the spiritual life, he should know that this is because he either does not contribute any will, or his will is insufficient or too weak, in which case it's of no help. A bird, for example, has one strong wing but neglects the other; it loses some feathers and then it cannot fly right. One wing works well, but the other is like a broken comb. The bird flaps it, but the wind passes through it and the bird cannot fly right. It flies a bit and then falls down. It must have both wings intact in order to be able to fly. What I'm trying to say is that man, too, must be careful not to neglect the human will if he wants to fly securely and properly—that is, spiritually. Do you know what the devil does? He slowly creeps up, and little by little plucks some small feather from the human wing, and then another, a larger one, and if man is not careful the devil can even pluck a large feather and make him unable to fly. And if several feathers are plucked, then, when he tries to fly, air passes through the plucked wing and so he rolls over instead of flying.

The divine wing is always full and complete; there are not missing feathers, because the devil cannot pluck them out; it is a divine wing. Man must be careful not to be negligent and allow the devil to remove any of the feathers from his own wing. When laziness and indifference creep in, will power is eventually weakened. What can God do if man is not willing? God does not wish to interfere, because He has respect for human freedom. So, an unwilling person renders useless even the wing of God. But when man has the will, that is, when he has his own wing intact, and God also is willing, then, with both wings in place, man can fly.

– Geronda, what exactly is this flying you are talking about? Does it mean that I should want to make spiritual progress, to desire my salvation?

– Yes, my child! when I talk about flying I mean our spiritual ascent toward Heaven, not about flying onto some cypress tree!

– Geronda, you had said once that a person can plough, sow, and do all the necessary work, but may not even harvest enough to cover the cost of the seed.

– Yes, that's right. If he is not careful, the devil can rob him of all his efforts. One who is heedful and takes the salvation of his soul seriously, struggles, progresses, bears fruit, is nourished spiritually and rejoices angelically. *from Spiritual Awakening*

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