

The Confessor's Tongue for June 21, A. D. 2020

Sunday of All Saints of North America; Martyr Julian of Tarsus; St. Julius

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.

Elder Zacharias of Essex on Thanksgiving

In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you. I Thessalonians 5:18

Through thanksgiving to God for His merciful providence, the believer is enriched with spiritual gifts. We receive grace in proportion to the gratitude we show. As the great Saint Maximus says, God measures out His gifts to men according to the gratitude with which they receive them. Thus we enter the blessed fullness of God's grace: the greater the gratitude and glory we offer Him, the more abundant is the measure of His gifts to us. By thanksgiving, man acquires a hypostasis in the sight of God and his life has value in eternity, so that in the day of His glorious coming he will be able to stand in His unshakeable presence.

Moreover, with the gifts that he has, the believer enters into the communion of the gifts of the other members of the Body of Christ, the Saints, and all of the Lord's elect upon earth. In this rich assembly of grace, which the believer enters through thanksgiving and gratitude, he forgets about the smaller gifts he has received, and reaches out to a greater fullness of love and perfection, hungry and thirst for the gift of God. Anyone who thanks God is a stranger to despondency, yet is overcome by a blessed sadness, because he cannot thank God for all His benefits in a manner worthy of Him, even for every breath of air which He pours out upon the face of the earth. Consequently, thanksgiving such as this leads to true repentance of which there is no end in this life. Then we understand why, in His Gospel, the Lord places self-condemnation arising from gratitude above all the commandments, deeming that we are useless and unworthy even when we have fulfilled all His commandments. "So Likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say we are unprofitable servants: we have done what which was our duty to do." Such a spirit preserves divine grace fervent in the lives of the faithful, and this leads to inspiration that saves, by sending away deathly despondency and giving strength daily to "perfect holiness in the fear of God."

The way of thanksgiving heals us from the passion of pride and strengthens us against the temptation to despair. Thanksgiving and gratitude equal humility, which can be inferred from the word of the Apostle Paul: "Now we have received, not the (proud) spirit of the world, but the (humble) spirit which is of God; that we might (gratefully) know the things that are freely given to us of God." It is important, consequently, to remember that the blessing and the grace of God increase within us through humility and particularly through thanksgiving. Holy Scripture, both Old and New, confirms this saying, "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble". When we enter the grace of thanksgiving, we acquire the right kind of godly zeal, which befits the children of God.

Those who thank God never fall into despair, and their heart is never empty of His consolation. This is illustrated by the example of a Christian man who once made a confession that he wanted to commit suicide because there was nothing but pain in his life. His spiritual father responded by asking him if there was anything good in his life, if, for instance, he was breathing and alive at that moment. His reply was positive, after which his spiritual

father told him, "Start thanking God for the breath He gives you, for you physical life, and then for anything else God reveals that you have received as a gift from Him" The man started to thank God that he could breathe and that he was alive and began to feel stronger within. Then he thanked God for knowing His Name, and that he received consolation from prayer in His Holy Name. Finally, his thanksgiving was so sincere and fervent, that he completely forgot about his despair and thoughts of suicide, and escaped this demonic temptation.

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According to the teaching of the Holy Father, there is no greater virtue in the sight of God, than the giving of thanks while going through ill-health, persecution, injustice, or rejection. It pleases God when we are in pain and say, "Glory to Thee, O God! I thank Thee, Lord, for all that Thou hast done for me." When guards were dragging Saint John Chrysostom into exile, sick, much afflicted, and maltreated, they passed by a church. The Saint asked them to let him stay for a while in front of the Holy Altar, on which he leaned and said to God, "Glory be to Thee, O Lord, for everything", and at that moment he committed his holy soul into the hands of God. When our life is in danger, there is no attitude more pleasing to God than thanksgiving. If in that moment of pain, we cling to God with our mind and say to Him, "I thank Thee, Lord, for everything. Neither death, nor any other sorrow can separate me from Thee, for Thou art He that doth overcome death", then this proves that our faith has become stronger than the death which threatens us. This is a great feat in the sight of God which carries us over to the other shore. In other words, it leads us into a dynamic life, into the blessed communion of all the Saints, into an everlasting doxology and thanksgiving to God throughout all ages in His Kingdom.

Everything in our life is sanctified if we receive it with gratitude.

The Divine Liturgy is a great means given to us of fighting the passion of despondency, so that we can overcome the spiritual death which preys upon our life. In the Liturgy, we learn to do what the Apostle Paul describes in his Epistle to the Philippians, that is, first to offer up mighty thanksgiving to God, and then humbly, with shame because of our spiritual weakness, to make our petitions for all that we need of Him. This is well pleasing to God, so He gives His grace, and gradually light and the feeling of his presence increases in the heart. This small light shines more and more until it breaks forth into a perfect day in our hart, as the Prophet Solomon says, and Christ dwells in our heart by faith.

In the Divine Liturgy, we are taught to give perfect thanks to the almighty and beloved God in a manner worthy of Him. The Divine Liturgy is the Cross and Resurrection at the same time, because the Body and the Blood of the Lord which we received contain the same grace and the same blessing which His Body had after the

Resurrection, when He ascended into heaven. The Divine Liturgy is the expression of our gratitude for the Passion, the Cross, and the Resurrection of the Lord, This is why in the heart of the Liturgy we hear, "Take, eat; this is my Body." "This is the Body", the Lord says, "Which I offered, lifted up upon the Cross, led into the grave and raised up into the heavens resurrected; but I also left this Body on the earth on the night of the Last Supper so that you may partake in it and in all the grace which accompanies it, because in it dwells the fullness of Divinity." And then he continues, "Drink ye all of it; this is my Blood. The Blood which I shed on the Cross as a ransom for the sins, and for the salvation of the whole world." Therefore, when we repeat these words at every Liturgy, it is as if we are saying to Him, "To Thee, O Lord, is due all thanksgiving, all glory, every blessing, for Thou hast offered Thy Body and Thy Blood as nourishment for us so that we may be saved and live for all eternity." Of course, in heaven and on earth, there is no other matter or vision that occupies the souls of the Saints, than Christ's saving sacrifice. The study of God's indescribable love toward us strengthens the souls of the righteous to remain always in an everlasting doxology of joy thanksgiving, and love worthy of God who is holy and good.

The Apostle Paul writes, "For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving." Everything in our life is sanctified if we receive it with gratitude. When we offer thanksgiving to God, all things every object, and every creature, become a means of salvation for us. God's words are, "Take, eat..., drink ye all of it; this is my Blood." The Divine Liturgy is founded on these words and then follows the prayer that God may come and fill everything with the Holy Spirit, just as He fulfilled these great and saving mysteries which remain forever. In response, at the end of the Liturgy, we can chant a new and triumphal hymn, "We have seen the true Light. We have received the heavenly Spirit. We have found the true faith. We worship the undivided Trinity; for the same hath saved us." This is the "new song" of the children of God, which they chant every day out of gratitude and love. Such is the zeal and inspiration of Christians who have been born again through the Divine Liturgy. From *The Engraving of Christ in Man's Heart (A2)*

Sunday of All Saints of North America

This second Sunday after Pentecost, we remember all the Saints who have blossomed in our land just as the Russian Church remembers all the Saints of the Russian land on this day.

We remember St. Herman, the monk who came to Alaska as one of the original missionaries in 1794 and lived there on Spruce Island until his repose in 1837, teaching the Christian Faith to the native Alaskans. We remember St. Innocent, who first came as a married priest to Alaska in 1824, was made the first bishop of the area in 1840 after the death of his wife, and served there as a tireless missionary and translator of the Scriptures and services of the Church into the native tongues until he was called back to Moscow in 1868 to become Metropolitan of Moscow and all Russia.

We remember the first martyrs of our land, St. Peter the Aleut, and Aleut lad who was tortured to death for his faith by Jesuits wanting him to convert

in San Francisco in 1815, and St. Juvenaly, a Russian priest-monk and missionary who was martyred by natives near Lake Illiamna in Alaska in 1796.

We remember St. Tikhon, who served as bishop in America from 1898 to 1907 and was instrumental in seeing the services of the Church translated into English to make her worship and faith accessible to the English speakers of America, and who as Patriarch of Moscow from 1917 until his death in 1925, stood firm against the atheist Bolsheviks who sought to destroy the Church.

We remember St. Jacob Netsvetov of Alaska, the first native priest to be ordained to serve the Alaskan peoples, who labored as a missionary priest from 1828 until his repose in 1864.

We remember St. Alexis of Wilkes-Barre, an Eastern-rite Roman Catholic Priest (Uniate), who returned to the Orthodox Church in 1891 bringing 361 others with him, and who from then until his repose in 1909 labored tirelessly to reconcile Uniate Catholics with the Orthodox Church, himself personally bringing in about 15,000.

We remember St. Raphael, the first Arabic speaking bishop to labor in North America as an auxiliary to St. Tikhon in 1904, and, who established more than 30 Syrian and Lebanese parishes, and who founded *The Word* journal in Arabic (which continues to be published to this day, in English now) before his repose in 1915.

We remember two priests, Alexander Hotovitsky and John Kochurov who labored in America for a time and who both were martyred back in Russia by the Bolsheviks, St. John being the first of many priest-martyrs under communism in 1918; St. Alexander died in the Solovki labor camp in 1930.

Finally, we remember two beloved hierarchs, St. Nikolai of Zicha and St. John of San Francisco. St. Nikolai was a Serbian bishop, known as a second Chrystosm for his powerful preaching and inspired writings. After suffering during the Second World War at the hands of the Nazis in the Dachau death camp, he came to America and taught at St. Tikhon's seminary until his repose in 1956. St. John of Shanghai and San Francisco was a Russian bishop who escaped the Bolsheviks, for a time was in Serbia, and who later served the Russian emigre community in Shanghai, China with special care for orphans until Mao's communists drove them out; he brought his orphans to the United States and ended his life as Bishop in California. He is much beloved and is known as a wonderworker.

These are but the Saints known to us who labored in North America. Doubtless there are others known to God. O all ye Saints of North America, pray to Christ God for us!

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!