

The Confessor's Tongue for September 13, A. D. 2020

14th Sunday after Pentecost; Forefeast of Elevation; Martyrs Cornelius, Ketevan
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.

September 14: Exaltation of the Cross

On the 14th of September, the Church celebrates the Great Feast of the Exaltation (Elevation) of the Precious Cross. The Feast is the only one of the Great Feasts that does not commemorate some occasion in the life of either Christ or His mother. The day is a strict fast day.

The Feast commemorates two events: the finding of the Cross by St. Helen, mother of the Emperor Constantine, and the return of the Cross and its elevation before the faithful in 629, fifteen years after it was taken from Jerusalem by Persian invaders.

But more than this, the Feast calls us to celebrate Christ's glory and victory won on the Cross. Christ's agonizing death on the Cross was victory over Satan and sin, and the death of death. Thus we find the Cross indeed to be "precious" and "life-creating" for us. Christ's life-giving death on the Cross transformed it from a feared symbol of Roman public execution of criminals to the symbol of Christ's great love for mankind and of His victory over evil and the evil one.

The Church also honors Christ's Cross on August 1st, the Third Sunday of Great Lent, and every Friday (and Wednesday).

We celebrate the Feast through its Leave-taking, September 21. We may replace our usual prayers at meals with the Troparion (before) and the Kontakion (after), and use them in our daily prayers as well. All the faithful should participate in the services celebrating this Great Feast of the Church.

Troparion tone 1

O Lord, save Thy people / and bless Thine inheritance. / Grant victory to Orthodox Christians / over the enemy; / and by Thy Cross / preserve Thine estate.

Kontakion, tone 4

As Thou wast voluntarily lifted upon the Cross for our sake, / O Christ God, grant Thy mercies to those who are called by Thy name; / make all Orthodox Christians glad by Thy power, / granting them victories over their enemies, / for they have as Thine aid an invincible trophy, Thy weapon of peace.

September 13: Martyr Ketevan

The holy Queen Ketevan was the daughter of Ashotan Mukhran-Batoni, a prominent ruler from the Bagrationi royal family. The clever and pious Ketevan was married to Prince David, heir to the throne of Kakheti. David's father, King Alexander II (1574-1605), had two other sons, George and Constantine, but according to the law the throne belonged to David. Constantine was converted to Islam and raised in the court of the Persian shah Abbas I.

Several years after David and Ketevan were married, King Alexander stepped down from the

throne and was tonsured a monk at Alaverdi. But after four months, in the year 1602, the young king David died suddenly. He was survived by his wife, Ketevan, and two children—a son, Teimuraz, and a daughter, Elene—and his father ascended the throne once more.

Upon hearing of David's death and Alexander's return to the royal throne, Shah Abbas commanded Alexander's youngest son, Constantine-Mirza, to travel to Kakheti, murder his father and the middle brother, George, and seize the throne of Kakheti. As instructed, Constantine-Mirza beheaded his father and brother, then sent their heads, like a precious gift, to Shah Abbas.

Their headless bodies he sent to Alaverdi. (Since the beginning of the 11th century, Alaverdi had been the resting place of the Kakhetian kings.) The widowed Queen Ketevan was left to bury her father-in-law and brother-in-law.

But Constantine-Mirza was still unsatisfied, and he proposed to take Queen Ketevan as his wife.

Outraged at his proposition, the nobles of Kakheti rose up and killed the young man who had committed patricide and profaned his Faith and the throne. Having buried the wicked Constantine-Mirza with the honor befitting his royal ancestry, Ketevan sent generous gifts to Shah Abbas and requested that he proclaim her son, Teimuraz, the rightful heir to the throne.

While she was awaiting his reply, Ketevan assumed personal responsibility for the rule of Kakheti. Concerned that, if he denied this request, Kakheti would forcibly separate from him and unite with Kartli, Shah Abbas hastily sent Prince Teimuraz to Georgia, laden with great wealth.

In 1614 Shah Abbas informed King Teimuraz that his son would be taken hostage, and Teimuraz was forced to send his young son Alexander and his mother Ketevan to Persia. As a final attempt to divide the royal family of Kakheti, Shah Abbas demanded that the eldest prince, Levan, be brought before him, and he finally summoned King Teimuraz himself.

The shah's intentions were clear: to hold all of the royal family in Persia and send his own viceroys to rule in Kakheti. He sought to eliminate King Luarsab II of Kartli as well, but Teimuraz and Luarsab agreed to attack the Persian army with joint forces and drive the enemy out of Georgia.

Shah Abbas sent his hostages, Queen Ketevan and her grandsons, deep into Persia, while he himself launched an attack on Kakheti.

With fire and the sword the godless ruler plundered all of Georgia. The royal palace was razed, churches and monasteries were destroyed, and entire villages were abandoned. By order of the shah, more than three hundred thousand Georgians were exiled

to Persia, and their homes were occupied by Turkic tribes from Central Asia. Hunger and violence reigned over Georgia.

The defeated Georgian kings Teimuraz and Luarsab sought refuge with King George III of Imereti.

After they had spent five years exiled in Shiraz (Persia), the princes Alexander and Levan were separated from Ketevan and castrated in Isfahan. Alexander could not endure the suffering and died, while Levan went mad.

Saint Ketevan, meanwhile, remained a prisoner of the ruler of southeastern Persia, the ethnic Georgian imam Quli-Khan Undiladze, who regarded the widowed Queen of Kakheti with great respect. According to his command, Ketevan was not to discover the fate of her grandsons.

Queen Ketevan spent ten years in prison, praying for her motherland and loved ones with all her might and adhering to a strict ascetic regime. Constant fasting, prayer and a stone bed exhausted her previously pampered body, but in spirit she was courageous and full of vitality. She looked after those assigned to her care and instructed them in the spiritual life.

After some time Abbas resolved to convert Ketevan to Islam, and he announced his intention to marry her. He asked that his proposal be conveyed to her the same day she was informed of the fate of her grandsons. As a condition of their marriage, Abbas insisted that Ketevan renounce the Christian Faith and convert to Islam. In the case of her acquiescence, Imam Quli-Khan was to respect and honor her as a queen, and in the case of her refusal, to subject her to public torture.

The alarmed imam begged the queen to submit to the shah's will and save herself, but the queen firmly refused and began to prepare for her martyrdom. (According to one foreign observer, her steadfastness delayed the Islamization of the Georgians in Persia: "In the course of a conversation at the court of Shah Abbas, where a young and recently converted Georgian was present, the question arose as to why it was that, while all young Georgians were forced to embrace Islam, their mothers were not. The explanation given by one of those present was that since the Queen would not change her faith Georgian mothers likewise refused." (Z. Avalishvili, "Teimuraz I and His Poem 'The Martyrdom of Queen Ketevan,'" *Georgica* [vol I, no. 4/5, 1937] pp. 22.)

Queen Ketevan was robed in festive attire and led out to a crowded square. Her persecutors subjected her to indescribable torment: they placed a red-hot copper cauldron on her head, tore at her chest with heated tongs, pierced her body with glowing spears, tore off her fingernails, nailed a board to her spine, and finally split her forehead with a red-hot spade.

Saint Ketevan's soul departed from her body, and the executioners cast her mutilated body to the beasts. But the Lord God sent a miracle: her holy relics were illumined with a radiant light.

A group of French Augustinian missionary fathers, who had witnessed the inhuman tortures, wrapped Queen Ketevan's body in linens scented with myrrh and incense and buried it in a Catholic monastery.

Some time later the holy relics of Great-martyr Ketevan were delivered to her son, Teimuraz, King of Kakheti.

Teimuraz wept bitterly for his mother and sons and buried the relics with great honor in the Alaverdi Cathedral of Saint George.

Practical Spiritual Counsel on Judging, etc.

St. Sergius of Kasimov

If you have a sinful habit of judging and condemning your neighbor, then here you are, the Great Fast has arrived, lay down a good beginning and pitch out this habit. But if out of weakness you forget, if you condemn someone, then give yourself the rule to make three prostrations that day with the prayer: "O Lord, save and have mercy on ___ (say the name of the person you judged), and by his prayers have mercy on me, a sinner." Do this always, whenever you judge someone. If you fulfill this, the Lord will see your fervor and will deliver you for good from this sinful habit. And if you don't judge anyone, then God, too, will never judge you, and so you will receive salvation.

Act exactly the same way with everything else. Has an unchaste thought visited your heart? Make three prostrations with the words, "O Lord, forgive me the prodigal," and consider yourself a prodigal. For you know the Lord considers even an unchaste glance to be an unclean action. Have you deceived someone? Go and apologize to him, admit your falsehood, and ask forgiveness. Have you taken something belonging to someone else? Go and return it to him; but if this is impossible, then give double its value to a person in need. Have you offended someone? God and make peace with him. Meanwhile, the spirit of pride will whisper, "How is this possible? It's disgraceful! what will people think of me?" Answer it: "You can't fool God; He knows and sees everything. I wasn't ashamed to sin; I won't be embarrassed to repent also. Help me, O Lord!"

And—may God have mercy—if you fall into any major sin, then bring to God special repentance, confess your sin to your spiritual father as soon as possible, ask him for the kindness of giving you a penance, and carry it out willingly, with great joy, knowing that in this lies your salvation: you have both repented and also wish to bring forth fruit worthy of repentance. Without fail, begin to act in this way and pray constantly: "O Lord our God! Even thou I have done nothing good in Thy sight, grant me henceforth to make a good beginning."

From "A Spiritual Testament"

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!