

The Confessor's Tongue for October 11, A. D. 2020

18th Sunday after Pentecost; Fathers of the 7th Council

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 Election

Early voting begins October 13 in Denton. To be sure your vote counts, you are advised to vote in person, or to drop you absentee ballot of at a collection site.

The Commandments of Christ

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

Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee. (John 5:14)

Such are the words our Lord addressed to the paralytic who long lay at the Pool of Bethesda in Jerusalem awaiting the stirring of the water for healing. Ailing with his infirmity for thirty-eight years, he took up his bed and walked at Jesus' command. After the Pharisees reproved him for carrying his bed on the Sabbath as Jesus had commanded him, he was found by Jesus in the temple who gave the command to him: "sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee."

From these words, the Fathers perceive that the man's infirmity was related to his sin. This may readily be understood in the context of the covenant God made with Israel at Mt. Sinai. Under the Old Covenant, sickness was, at least in part, a curse brought on the people for breaking the covenant and was intended to get their attention and lead them to repentance and to turn away from their self-destructive ways. At the Exodus, God promised this to the Hebrews: "If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the Lord thy God, and wilt do that which is right in his sight, and wilt give ear to his commandments, and keep all his statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians: for I am the Lord that healeth thee" (Exodus 15:26) If they will diligently hear and obey, then, they will be blessed with health, but in both Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28, God warns them about the diseases that will come upon them if they break the covenant. "I will bring on you seven times more plagues, according to your sins" (Lev 26:21); "The Lord will send on you poverty, hunger, and consumption..." (Deut 28:20), "the Lord will strike you with perplexity, fever, shivering, irritation, murder, blight, and mildew" (Deut 28:22). Gehazi, Elisha's servant, was stricken with leprosy for his greed and dishonesty, King Uzziah for his pride and presumption to offer incense in the temple. Sin has consequences, and often those are physical.

Sickness was never part of God's original intent for man. Sickness came with the corruption of sin. In this sense, sin is the source of all illness. God's intent is to heal mankind, both physically and spiritually. His promise to Israel at the Exodus shows this, as does Jesus's ministry of healing. In Revelation, John witnesses the tree of life which bears twelve types of

fruit and the leaves of which are "for the healing of the nations" (22:2). God wants to make man fully well.

Even if sin is at the root of all illness, not every infirmity is the consequence of personal sin. Later in John's Gospel, the disciples ask about the man born blind who it was that sinned that he should be born so, "this man or his parents". Jesus tells them that the blindness was not due to sin of parent or child but that God's glory might be made manifest in him. Not every sickness comes as punishment and correction for personal sin.

But there are sins which bring trouble, chastisement, and consequences, all of which are designed to bring the sinner to repentance. The lame man's affliction was due to his sin. For this man, having long suffered for his sin before finding healing, it was most appropriate for Jesus to warn him: "sin no more". To sin again would have been to jeopardize what Christ had given him and invite a "worse thing" to come upon him. Indeed, the judgments of God against His people in the Old Covenant grow progressively worse if the people will not repent (Deut. 28, Lev. 26). To sin, to be corrected by sickness, to be forgiven, and to be healed should produce deep gratitude and a watchful enjoyment of one's restored state. To be careless about sin then is foolish ingratitude. If get yourself into a foolish bind once, someone will gladly help you get out, even if help involves expense and inconvenience. If you get into the same bind again due to carelessness, will that someone be so eager to help again?

Hence, Christ gives the command, "sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee." This command readily applies to us, who suffer many afflictions of soul and body (personally and nationally) due to our sins. By sinning no more in true repentance, the cause of much sickness and misfortune is removed from our lives.

The Power in Guarding the Tongue

When Abba Macarius was praying in his cell on one occasion, he heard a voice from God, which said, "Macarius, thou hast not yet attained to the state of excellence of two women who are in such and such a city." The old man rose up in the morning, and took in his hand a palm stick, and he began to set out on the road to that city. Now, therefore, when he had arrived at the city, and learned the place of the abode of the two women, he knocked at the door, and there went forth one of the women and brought him into the house.

And when he had been sitting down for a little, the other woman came in, and he called them to him, and they came nigh and sat down before him. Then the old man said to them, "On your account I have made this long journey, and have performed all this

labor, and with great difficulty have come from the desert; tell me, then, what are thy works?"

And they said unto him, "Believe us, O father; neither of us hath ever been absent from, or kept herself from her husband's couch up to this day; what work, then, wouldst thou see in us?"

Then the old man made apologies to them and entreated them to reveal to him and to show him their spiritual labor, and therefore they said unto him, "According to worldly considerations we are strangers one to the other, for we are not kinsfolk, but it fell out that the two of us married two men who are brethren. And behold, up to this present we have lived in this house for twelve years, and we have never wanted to quarrel with each other, and neither of us hath spoken one abominable word of abuse to her companion. Now we made up our minds together to leave our husbands and to join the army of virgins, but, although we entreated our husbands earnestly to allow us to do so, they would not undertake to send us away. And as we were unable to do that which we wished, we made a promise between ourselves and God that, until death, no worldly word should go forth from our mouths."

Now when Macarius heard this, he said, "Truly, virginity by itself is nothing, nor marriage, nor life as a monk, nor life in the world; for God seeketh the love of a man, and giveth the Spirit unto him."

On Ritual Observances

St. Theophan the Recluse

The holy apostles at their council abolished all the ritual observances of the Old Testament and freed Christians from that yoke, which had burdened their fathers and grandfathers.

For this cause, some clever folk lodge a question: "Why do we [Orthodox] have so many diverse, complicated ritual observances?" Then, not knowing who to answer this, they come to the rash conclusion that this is a return to Judaism.

But you know when the apostles set this law, they had in mind only the service of the Old Testament and not all in general, and when they wrote a letter to the church in Antioch, they mentioned only that they were not laying on the members the same yoke of the law which lay upon the Jews and not that they were forbidding the institution of ritual observances in the spirit of the new faith. As thought demands words, and intention—deeds, so the spirit of faith demands external ceremony. This ritual observance began to be conducted from the first days after the descent of the Holy Spirit, who laid the foundations of the Church of God. In its main and essential characteristics, it was founded by the Apostles themselves: from them was the form of the accomplishment of the mysteries, from them the prayer meetings and their order, from them the beginning of ecclesial ritual, from them the command to set aside places and times for divine service, from them fasts and prayers at home, from them the *podvigs* of general abstinence and the various

forms of pious Christian habit. Those who desire it may find directives for all this in the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles. From this comes the conclusion: the holy apostles abolished one ceremony and established another. How is it possible to see Judaism in this?

Faith cannot be left bare. It is repugnant to our nature and to the nature of the faith itself. Can anyone really complain that our spiritual faith is excessively burdened with external ceremonies? Take a look, and you will see that it is not excessive. Indeed, is it not needed in every situation to have but one ceremony? This is what we have. Every ceremony on the one hand satisfies the needs of the believing heart and, on the other, exists in full harmony with the spirit of faith. If one looks at our church ceremonies in their totality, then it appears they are many; but lay them out according to the diverse needs of believers, and you will see that they are very few and are all very simple.

It may be some will still say, "Why are they locked in immovable form? In the time of the Apostles much was done spontaneously: the spirit searched and either prayer or song or a word of edification was born, but now all is prepared ahead of

As thought demands words, and intention—deeds, so the spirit of faith demands external ceremony.

time, and how!" Well, is not all this the same? Then the spirit searched and gave prayer, but now, understand, how you should with already established prayer enter into this very same spirit. The matter is in the spirit. If someone remains in the mere words of prayer and external actions, he departs from the apostolic ceremony, and he who each time in the external ceremony will enter into the spirit, beings to do the same things done in apostolic times. To leave the whole external ritual to the arbitrariness of movements of spirit of well-known persons or of every believer scarcely anyone will consider reasonable. Is it not better to submit to an existing order, praying to the Lord, and let Him order all in His Church as pleases His holy will? The goal of the Church's ritual is the building up of the spirit and how much of what is holy is built up in our grand rite! It turns out ritual does not distract from the purpose but rather enables its attainment. Have reason and all will be well. *translated by Fr. Justin Frederick*

Upcoming Events 2019

11 October: Octoberfest, 4 p.m. at church
30 October: All Saints Party, 5:30 p.m. at church
8 November: Parish Thanksgiving meal

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!