

# The Confessor's Tongue for November 22, A. D. 2020

24<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost; St. Paisius Velichkovsky

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

*Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations. Luke 16:9*

Christ offers this command in conclusion to what is perhaps His strangest parable—that of the unjust steward. Here it is:

And he said also unto his disciples, There was a certain rich man, which had a steward; and the same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods. And he called him, and said unto him, How is it that I hear this of thee? give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward. Then the steward said within himself, What shall I do? for my lord taketh away from me the stewardship: I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed. I am resolved what to do, that, when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses. So he called every one of his lord's debtors unto him, and said unto the first, How much owest thou unto my lord? And he said, An hundred measures of oil. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and sit down quickly, and write fifty. Then said he to another, And how much owest thou? And he said, An hundred measures of wheat. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and write fourscore. And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely: for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.

In commenting on this parable, Blessed Theophylact instructs the one seeking understanding to focus on the central point of the parable and not try to extract meaning from every detail, for though the parable "indirectly and figurative reveals the nature of certain things, it is not similar in every respect to the things which it describes." The teaching of the parable may be thus expressed: man owns nothing of his own but is a steward of all that God has given him; he should administer what is given to him in such a way that it will benefit him eternally when his stewardship in this life is over and he seeks entrance to everlasting habitations.

"Mammon" is wealth, property, material goods. Christ uses the word four times in the Gospels: once in Matthew ("no man can serve two masters...you cannot serve God and mammon"), and three times in this chapter of Luke, where, in verse 11, He contrasts unrighteous mammon with true riches, and in verse 13 He repeats what He said in Matthew. Important light is thrown on the matter by verse 11: "If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches?" The unrighteous mammon of this world, its wealth, property, material goods, are, then, a test for us to qualify us for use of true riches. Use this world's

wealth well, and you will be entrusted with true riches; use it poorly, and you will not.

The primary way in which we use the mammon of unrighteous well is to meet our real needs and the needs of others with it rather than to spend it on pleasures. This first of all means almsgiving: giving to those in need of the basic necessities of life. What is given as alms is given directly to Christ; the good done to a beggar is done to Christ. Giving alms stores up treasure in heaven. It frees man from attachment to earthly things that he may desire the things of God. Almsgiving also elicits prayer from the beneficiary on the giver's behalf. On the other hand, to use the wealth entrusted to us solely for our own comfort and pleasure once our basic needs for food, clothes, and shelter are met is not to use it wisely, for it increases one's attachment to the world and does nothing to help us enter the kingdom.

The thrust of the parable and the command goes against many of our native notions and the flow of consumer culture where money is seen as a means to comfort, pleasure, and status. If you've earned it, it is yours to spend as you wish; the government programs are there to care for the poor, so you yourself need not bother. The flow of consumerism is so strong that many Americans have freighted themselves with heavy burdens of personal debt arising from desires they would not defer until they had the money. With easy credit, they bought what they desired, which, as desires tend to be unlimited, was more than they could handle on their limited income. Christians in this situation must repent and rethink their whole approach to mammon.

The unjust steward was shrewd. He used his position to benefit his lord's debtors and to obligate them to himself so that when he lost his position, he could collect on the debt of gratitude each debtor owed him. Jesus says the children of this world are more shrewd in their use of worldly things than the children of light, but He would have his own children use the mammon of unrighteousness to their eternal benefit.

## **St. Basil the Great on Anger**

But you are angry at your brother without purpose. For how is it not without purpose when one acts because the other provokes him? And you act like dogs who bite the stones when they cannot reach the one throwing them. The one acted upon is to be given compassion, the one acting is to be hated. Redirect your temper onto the murderer of human beings, the father of lies, the worker of sin; but sympathize also with your brother, because if he continues in sin, with the devil he will be delivered up to eternal fire.

## Choruses from the Rock

T. S. Eliot, 1934

*This poem of T.S. Eliot, inspired by his faith in Christ, speaks much truth to us today. Bishop Maxim quoted it during his visit in 2016, and it has been a favorite of mine ever since. We'll run it here serialized with some comments each week.*

### I

The Eagle soars in the summit of Heaven,  
The Hunter with his dogs pursues his circuit.  
O perpetual revolution of configured stars,  
O perpetual recurrence of determined seasons,  
O world of spring and autumn, birth and dying!  
The endless cycle of idea and action,  
Endless invention, endless experiment,  
Brings knowledge of motion, but not of stillness;  
Knowledge of speech, but not of silence;  
Knowledge of words, and ignorance of the Word.  
All our knowledge brings us nearer to our ignorance,  
All our ignorance brings us nearer to death,  
But nearness to death no nearer to GOD.  
Where is the Life we have lost in living?  
Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?  
Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?  
The cycles of Heaven in twenty centuries  
Bring us farther from **GOD** and nearer to the **Dust**.

I journeyed to London, to the timekept City,  
Where the River flows, with foreign flotations.  
There I was told: we have too many churches,  
And too few chop-houses. There I was told:  
Let the vicars retire. Men do not need the Church  
In the place where they work, but where they spend  
their Sundays.

In the City, we need no bells  
Let them waken the suburbs.  
I journeyed to the suburbs, and there I was told:  
We toil for six days, on the seventh we must motor  
To Hindhead, or Maidenhead.  
If the weather is foul we stay at home and read the  
papers.  
In industrial districts, there I was told  
Of economic laws.  
In the pleasant countryside, there it seemed  
That the country now is only fit for picnics.  
And the Church does not seem to be wanted  
In country or in suburbs; and in the town  
Only for important weddings.  
*Chorus Leader:* Silence! and preserve respectful distance.

For I perceive approaching  
The Rock. Who will perhaps answer our doubtings.  
The Rock. The Watcher. The Stranger.  
He who has seen what has happened.  
And who sees what is to happen.  
The Witness. The Critic. The Stranger.  
The God-shaken, in whom is the truth inborn.  
*Enter the Rock, led by a Boy:*  
*The Rock:* The lot of man is ceaseless labour,  
Or ceaseless idleness, which is still harder,  
Or irregular labour, which is not pleasant.  
I have trodden the winepress alone, and I know  
That it is hard to be really useful, resigning  
The things that men count for happiness, seeking  
The good deeds that lead to obscurity, accepting  
With equal face those that bring ignominy,  
The applause of all or the love of none.  
All men are ready to invest their money  
But most expect dividends.  
I say to you: *Make perfect your will.*  
I say: take no thought of the harvest,  
But only of proper sowing.

The world turns and the world changes,  
But one thing does not change.  
In all of my years, one thing does not change.  
However you disguise it, this thing does not change:  
The perpetual struggle of Good and Evil.  
Forgetful, you neglect your shrines and churches;  
The men you are in these times deride  
What has been done of good, you find explanations  
To satisfy the rational and enlightened mind.  
Second, you neglect and belittle the desert.  
The desert is not remote in southern tropics,  
The desert is not only around the corner,  
The desert is squeezed in the tube-train next to you.  
The desert is in the heart of your brother.  
The good man is the builder, if he build what is good.  
I will show you the things that are now being done,  
And some of the things that were long ago done,  
That you may take heart. Make perfect your will.  
Let me show you the work of the humble. Listen.

*The opening stanza, now nearly ninety years old, well describes our age of information.*

*"The Eagle" is the constellation Aquila visible on the celestial equator in the Northern Hemisphere from July to October.*

*"The Hunter" is the constellation Orion.*

### Upcoming Events 2020

26 November: Thanksgiving Day Liturgy, 8:00 a.m.

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!