

The Confessor's Tongue for January 10, A. D. 2020

31st Sunday after Pentecost; Ss Gregory of Nyssa & Theophan the Recluse

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.

^{Le} **Fr. Epiphanius Theodoropoulos (+1989)**

A Petition for Prayer

When you would tell Fr. Epiphanius: "Father, matters on such-and-such a problem have reached an impasse. I am now at the limits of my endurance," he would answer: "Prayer, my child, much prayer! God can either lift your cross, or give you strength to carry it unto the end. And don't forget. The impasse of men is par excellence the field of God's action. It is the opportunity of God."

"Do you consider it easy for me to pray in the state in which I am now?" a spiritual child of his once retorted. He received the answer: "Pray also to be able to pray!"

Never Neglect Prayer

A working couple once asked him, "Elder, when at night we return very tired to our home, we don't have the desire for prayer."

"How do you have the desire to eat? Just as you don't neglect food, no matter how tired you are, all the more so—and even more so—you should never neglect the food of the soul: communicating with God.

"Don't ever neglect prayer. At the table, in the morning, in the evening, at night. Especially, don't neglect Compline [typically used for evening prayer among Greeks] for any reason, no matter how occupied and tired you are. It is a matter of self-sacrifice and mainly of love. When a certain person, beloved of you, calls you up very late at night, how is it that despite your tiredness, you hook yourselves to the receiver and furthermore, sometimes one and two hours, without being impatient, but, on the contrary, you rejoice?"

From *The Hermitess Photini* (+1928)

Indeed, man has a high calling because he was created in the image and likeness of God. That is, he came from God and will go back to God again to partake of His divine glory and blessedness. Since God is the source of blessedness, he who communicates with God also becomes blessed. Eternal life, blessedness, the Kingdom of Heaven, joy, paradise, gladness, delight: this is what God is. 'I am the resurrection and the life,' said the Savior. Everyone who communicates with God has blessedness. Whereas hell, which the Savior calls outer darkness, gnashing of teeth, torture, fire, abyss, etc., is nothing but the deprivation of divine grace and a departure from God—not spatially but morally. Wherever there is no light, there will definitely be darkness. What is darkness? Absence of light. This is also how it is with the blessedness of heaven. God is the Ultimate Good. The more man approaches God through the virtues, the more blessed and happy he becomes.

Sin, though, is the ultimate evil. The more a person distances himself from God—not physically, as we said, but spiritually through sin—the more unhappy he becomes. Who is gnashing his teeth? He who is unhappy, due to sin. Who is burning in the unquenchable fire of torture? He who perceives that he himself is the cause of his plight! So where is the seat of eternal fire? In the heart of the sinner. The Savior implies this in the parable of Lazarus and the rich man. Thus hell is essentially the complete deprivation of divine grace. What is illness? Lack of health. What is sorrow? Lack of joy. The demons used to be bright, good angels, as the Holy Scriptures say. But by sinning, they lost divine grace and became dark, evil, miserable. Since they lost the divine illumination that enlightens and gladdens, they were darkened, and, so to speak, they got drunk with ignorance so that, just as a drunk person under the influence wants to drink even more, likewise those who are drunk with sin always desire evil. They think that by doing evil they will find rest, but this is in vain. They will always be unhappy, because the evil distance them even more from the light until it throws them into the utmost misery, which the Savior calls 'the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.'

So distancing oneself from God is the most terrible punishment. That becomes clear from observing the workers of sin in the world, who are always in fear; they always have inner disturbance and anxiety. The purpose of man is to work at the virtues through which he partakes of divine glory and becomes like God, not by nature, but by grace.

From Elder Barsanuphius of Optina Music, Vigil, Prayer

St. Barsanuphius of Optina

In its aspiration for the New Jerusalem, the city of the Lord, the soul at times finds consolation in music. In the world, I loved serious music, like Beethoven and Schubert. I once went to a concert. A friend of mine met me and asked: "Where are you coming from, and why are you so happy and exultant?"

"I've been to a concert. What marvellous music! What delight it leads to soul to!"

"Well, there are even higher delights, different ones. If you would only go off in that direction, it would lead you into another realm, to the realm of the delight of prayer."

And he was not lying to me. I loved to attend church, especially the All-night Vigil in our Resurrection Cathedral. I loved the semi-darkness, the gentle twinkling light of the lampadas. It was exceptionally nice to pray there.

And here you are, going to the Vigil now; pray there. Try to pray properly; try to enter into and be immersed within yourselves. You know, in each person there exists a world of unspeakable beauty, in which are hidden many pure delights and ineffable joys. Go within yourself and they will be revealed to you. However, don't expect only delights from prayer; don't despair when you don't feel any joys. In fact, it even happens that you stand and stand in church and it's as if you don't have a heart inside you, but a chunk of wood, and an unplaneable one at that. Well, what of it? Thank the Lord for the chunk of wood. It means that this was what was needed. You see, another soul, having experienced lofty delights, might get a swelled head. A condition like "stony insensibility" humbles him down. We can't demand prayerful bliss from God. From us is demanded prayerful labor, but joys are sent by God when it's pleasing to God and to our benefit. And so, let us pray to Him and rely in everything on His holy will!

The Eight Chief Passions

St. Ignatius Brianchaninov; The Field

St. Ignatius Brianchaninov lists the various sins connected to each of the eight "chief passions" or "deadly thoughts" as they are variously called. This can be of great help to us in searching and understanding our own hearts before God in preparation for Confession.

1. Gluttony: Overeating, drunkenness, breaking or lessening the fast, secret eating, indulgence in eating, and intemperance in food in general. An incorrect or excessive attention to the body and the stomach and its needs, from which we develop self-love and form which come unfaithfulness to God, the Church, the virtues, and other people.

2. Fornication: Carnal lust, impure desires and feelings in the body, impure feelings and desires in the soul and heart, and acceptance of impure thoughts—conversation with them, pleasure in them, cooperation with them, persistence in them, lustful imaginings and bondage to them. Not keeping watch over the senses, especially sight, in which is found brazenness that destroys all virtues. Using foul language and reading sensual books. Natural carnal sins: fornication and adultery. Sins of the flesh contrary to nature: self-stimulation, homosexuality, bestiality, and others like them.

3. Avarice (Greed): Love of money, or a general love for property and riches. The desire to become rich, thinking of ways to get rich, and imagining future riches. Fear of old age, sudden poverty, sickness, or exile. Miserliness. Avarice. Unfaithfulness to God and lack of trust in His providence. Passionate attachment or sickly, excessive love for various perishable things that destroy peace of soul. Preoccupation with earthly matters. Love of presents. Stealing things belonging to others. Usury. Cruelty to the poor and to all who are in need. Thievery and brigandage.

4. Anger: Irascibility, acceptance of angry thoughts; harboring evil thoughts about others and thoughts of revenge, disturbing the heart with anger, and the darkening of the mind through anger. Inappropriate yelling, arguments, fighting, cruel and hurtful words, striking others, pushing others, murder. Remembrance of evils, hatred, fighting, revenge, slander, judging others, and disturbing or offending your neighbor.

5. Sorrow: Causing sorrow to others, sadness, lack of hope in God, doubt in the promises of God, lack of gratitude to God for everything He has given, lack of faith, lack of patience, not blaming oneself, being offended at others, complaining, and rejecting one's cross.

6. Despair (Acedia): Lack of enthusiasm of any good deed, especially prayer (both in church and at home), not praying constantly, ceasing to treading of spiritual books, and lack of attention or hurrying in prayer. Lack of care for the spiritual life. Laziness, too much sleep and lying around or lazing about. Constant moving about from place to place. Frequently leaving one's cell [or place] for walks and visits with friends. Idle talk, jokes, blasphemy. Ceasing prostrations or other physical labors. Forgetting your sins. Forgetting the commandments of Christ. Lack of reverence for holy things. Lack of the fear of God. Harness of heart. Lack of feeling for others. Hopelessness.

7. Vanity: seeking the praise of men. Boasting. The desire for and seeking of earthly glories. Love for beautiful clothes, carriages, servants, or decorations in your cell [or home]. Paying attention to your physical appearance, the way you speak, or other qualities of your body. Inclination to the learning and sciences of this fallen age and seeking to succeed in them solely for earthly gain and glory. Being afraid to confess your sins, hiding your sins before people and your spiritual father. Cunning. Self-justification. Contradiction. Trusting in your own reason. Hypocrisy. Lies. Duplicity. People-pleasing. Envy. Demeaning others. Pretending to act unnaturally for the benefit of others. Lack of conscience. Demonic habits.

8. Pride: Disdain of our neighbors. Preferring ourselves first before all others. Brazenness. Darkening of the mind and heart; nailing them to the earth. Blasphemy. Lack of faith. Delusion. False opinions of oneself. Lack of submission to the Law of God and the Church; following your own fallen will. Reading heretical, impure, or vain books. Lack of submission to the ruling authority. Rude mockery of others. Abandoning the humble emulation of Christ and the path of humility and silence. Loss of simplicity. Loss of love for God and your neighbor. False teachings. Heresy. Godlessness. Ignorance. The death of the soul.

Upcoming Events 2021

21 January: St. Maximus

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!