

# The Confessor's Tongue for April 11, A. D. 2021

4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of the Fast; St. John of the Ladder

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.

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## Fourth Sunday of Lent

On this Sunday, the Church commemorates St. John of the Ladder, who wrote the classic work *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*. He labored as a monk on Mt. Sinai his whole life and reposed in the Lord in the year 603. He left us his extensive experience contained in his book for our edification. So highly has the Church valued his book, that the *Typicon* appoints it to be read at the Third, Sixth, and Ninth Hours during the weekdays of the Great Fast.

Below are a few selections from this work.

Our God and King is good, transcendently good and all-good...Of the rational beings created by Him and honoured with the dignity of free-will, some are His friends, others are His true servants, some are worthless, some are completely estranged from God, and others, though feeble creatures, are His opponents. By "friends" of God, we simple people mean, properly speaking, those noetic and incorporeal beings which surround God. By "true servants" of God, we mean all those who tirelessly and unremittingly do and have done His will. By "worthless servants", we mean those who think of themselves as having been granted baptism, but have not faithfully kept the vows they made to God. By those "estranged" from God and alienated, we mean those who are unbelievers or heretics. Finally, the "enemies" of God are those who have not only evaded and rejected the Lord's commandment themselves, but who also wage bitter war on those who are fulfilling it. *Step 1.1*

In the very beginning of our renunciation, it is certainly with labour and grief that we practice the virtues. but when we have made progress in them, we no longer feel sorrow, or we feel little sorrow. But as soon as our mortal mind is consumed and mastered by our zeal, we practice them with all joy and eagerness, with love and with divine fire. *Step 1.16*

Let us charge into the good fight with joy and love without being afraid of our enemies. Though unseen themselves, they can look at the face of our soul, and if they see it altered by fear, they take up arms against us all the more fiercely. For the cunning creature have observed that we are scared. So let us take up arms against them courageously. No one will fight with a resolute fighter. *Step 1.22*

If anyone thinks he is without attachment to some object, but is grieved at its loss, then he is completely deceiving himself. *Step 2.11*

Run from places of sin as from the plague. For when fruit is not present, we have no frequent desire to eat it. *Step 3.9*

It is better to grieve our parents than the lord. For He has created and saved us, but they have often ruined their loved ones and delivered them up to their doom. *Step 3.12*

The fathers have laid down that psalmody is a weapon, that prayer is a wall, and honest tears are a bath; but blessed obedience in their judgment is confession of faith, without which no one subject to passions will see the Lord. *Step 4.8*

Repentance is the renewal of baptism.

Repentance is a contract with God for a second life. A penitent is a buyer of humility. Repentance is constant distrust of bodily comfort. Repentance is self-condemning relection, and carefree self-care. Repentance is the daughter of hope and the renunciation of despair. A penitent is an undisgraced convict. Repentance is reconciliation with the Lord by the practice of good deeds contrary to the sins. Repentance is purification of conscience. Repentance is the voluntary endurance of all afflictions. A penitent is the inflicter of his own punishments. Repentance is a mighty persecution of the stomach, and a striking of the soul into vigorous awareness.

*Step. 5.1*

Nothing equals or excels God's mercies.

Therefore, he who despairs is committing suicide. A sign of true repentance is the acknowledgment that we deserve all the afflictions, visible and invisible, that come upon us, and even grater ones. Moses, after seeing God in the bush, returned again to Egypt, that is, to darkness and to the brick-making of Pharaoh, who was symbolical of the spiritual Pharaoh. But he went back again to the bush, and not only to the bush, but also up the mountain. Whoever has known divine vision will never despair of himself. Job become a beggar, but he became twice as rich again. *Step 5.38*

Let us rest assured that the remembrance of death, like all other blessings, is a gift from God; since how is it that often, when we are at the very tombs, we are left tearless and hard; and frequently, when we have no such sight, we are full of compunction? *Step 6.20*

Tears often lead frivolous people to pride, and that is why they are not given to some. And such people, seeking tears in vain, consider themselves unfortunate, and condemn themselves to sighing, lamentation, sorrow of soul, deep grief, and utter dismay. All of which, though profitably regarded by them as nothing, can safely take the place of tears. *Step 7.43*

## The Value of the Jesus Prayer

The prayer "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me the sinner", consists of two basic points: the dogmatic one— acknowledgement of the Divinity of Christ—and the suppliant one—supplication for our salvation. That is, the confession of faith in Christ is connected with the confession of our inability to be saved of our own accord. This says everything, and the whole struggle of the Christian is based on these two

points: faith in Christ and awareness of our sinfulness. The "Jesus Prayer", therefore, expresses all the effort of the faithful in a few words and summarizes all the dogmatic teaching of our Orthodox Church.

We acquire this double knowledge through the Jesus Prayer. St. Maximus points out that the passion of pride consists of *two ignorances*: the ignorance of the Divine power and the ignorance of human weakness. And this doubt ignorance creates a "confused mind". Proud, therefore, is the man of ignorance, whereas, on the contrary, humble is the man of *double knowledge*. The latter knows his own weakness and the power of Christ. So, we acknowledge and confess the power of Christ (Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God) as well as our own weakness (have mercy on me the sinner) through the Jesus Prayer. We acquire in this way the blessed state of humility. Where there is humility, there also is the grace of Christ, and this grace is the Kingdom of Heaven.

Can you see, then, the worth of the Jesus Prayer? Can you see that we can obtain the Kingdom of God by its power? *Unknown Author*

### **From the Psalter: Psalm 117:8,9**

We read the following in Psalm 117 (118), a Psalm much quoted in the New Testament and from which "The Lord is God" at Matins is taken:

It is good to trust in the Lord  
Rather than to trust in man;  
It is good to hope in the Lord  
Rather than to hope in rulers.

Some translations read "better" in place of "good" and "than" in place of "rather". This is a bold assertion that runs contrary to much human practice.

The Psalm provides support the assertion that it is better to trust in God than in man. The Lord's mercy endures forever (v. 1, 2, 3, 4, 29). The Psalmist testified that he called upon the Lord in his affliction, and the Lord heard him (v. 5). He calls the Lord his "helper," and, because of this, he need not fear what man will do to him (v. 6). Even though the nations surrounded him, the name of the Lord kept them back from doing him harm (v. 10, 11, 12). He gives thanks to the Lord, for the Lord heard him and has become his salvation.

To trust in the Lord more than we trust in man is initially difficult for us. Even if we do not unduly trust others, we are prone to trust ourselves. We try to control every situation, solve every problem, forestall every threat. Thinking our safety and well-being and that of those we love depends entirely on us, we are filled with fear and worry in the face of a troubled world. What should we do? How can we protect ourselves? How shall we live? These questions vex us deeply when we trust in man (ourselves). To hope in the Lord rather than in rulers goes completely against the stream of modern society. Governments know the power of fear to control people, so they deliberately cultivate fear of one threat or another and offer

themselves as the only protector from the threat. They cultivate trust and dependance of their subjects on themselves. Thus, while, people increasingly look to human government for salvation from their problems, the Christian is called to hope in the Lord.

The Lord is our salvation. The Lord is worthy of our trust. In the Lord we may confidently hope. We should write the words of this Psalm in our hearts and live by them. Thus we shall take every fear and worry to God in prayer before all else, commending "ourselves, each other, and all our lives unto Christ our God", entrusting our lives to Him and submitting to His providence. He is the One who will keep back the nations that have encompassed us and will deliver us from our enemies.

### **Three Degrees of Eating**

*St. Gregory Palamas*

There are three degrees of eating: self-control, sufficiency, and satiety. Self-control is to be hungry after having eaten. Sufficiency is to be neither hungry nor to be weighed down. Satiety is to be slightly weighed down. To eat again after reaching the point of satiety is to open the door of gluttony, through which unchastity comes in. Attentive to these distinctions, choose what is best for you according to your powers, not overstepping the limits. For according to St. Paul, only the perfect can be both hungry and full, and at the same time be strong in all things (Philippians 4:12).

### **God is Our Ally in the Struggle**

*St. Symeon the New Theologian*

When God endowed us with free will, giving commandments to teach us instead how we must oppose our adversaries, He left it to the free choice of each either to oppose and vanquish the enemy, or to relax and be miserably defeated by him. Nor does He leave us entirely to ourselves—for He knows the weakness of human nature—but rather is present Himself with us and, indeed, allies Himself with those who choose to struggle, and mysteriously imbues us with strength, and Himself, not we, accomplishes the victory over the adversary....

God, . . . who is mighty and invincible, becomes, as we just said, an ally of those who willingly choose to do battle with the enemy, and he establishes them as victors over the cunning of the devil. He does not, however, compel to this war any who do not so choose, in order that He not destroy the power of choice which is proper to our reasoning nature,

### **Upcoming Events 2021**

24 April: Work Day 11-3.  
26-30 April: Great & Holy Week  
2 May: Holy Pascha, Picnic

**GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!**