

The Confessor's Tongue for May 16, A. D. 2021

Sunday of the Myrrhbearers; St. Theodore the Sanctified, St. Brendan the Navigator
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.

Homily 8 of St. Isaac the Syrian

*On What Helps a Man to Approach God in His Heart
On What is the Cause that Leads a Man to Humility*

St. Isaac delivers a powerful word to us imparting essential understanding to us about the nature of life in Christ and the place of temptations and struggles in it. This word encourages us and gives us hope. Fr. J.

Blessed is the man who knows his own weakness, because this knowledge becomes to him the foundation, the root, and the beginning of all goodness. For whenever a man learns and truly perceives his own weakness, at that moment he contracts his soul on every side from the laxity that dims knowledge, and he treasures up watchfulness in himself. But no one can perceive his own infirmity if he is not allowed to be tempted a little, either by things that oppress his body or his soul. For then, comparing his own weakness with God's help, he will straightway understand the greatness of the latter. And again, whenever he looks over the multitude of his devisings, and his wakefulness, his abstinences, the sheltering, and the hedging about of his soul by which he hopes to find assurance for her, and yet sees that he has not obtained it, or again, if his heart has no calm because of his fear and trembling; then at that moment let him understand, and let him know that this fear of his heart shows and reflects that he is altogether in need of some other help. For the heart testifies inwardly, and reflects the lack of something by the fear which strikes and wrestles within it. And because of this, it is confounded, since it is not able to abide in a state of surety; for God's help, he says, is the help that saves. When a man knows that he is in need of Divine help, he makes many prayers. And by as much as he multiplies them, his heart is humbled, for there is no man who will not be humbled when he is making supplication and entreaty. 'A heart that is broken and humbled, God will not despise.' Therefore, as long as the heart is not humbled, it cannot case from wandering; for humility collects the heart.

But when a man becomes humble, at once mercy encircles him, and then his heart is aware of Divine help, because it finds a certain power and assurance moving in itself. And when a man perceives the coming of Divine help, and that it is this which aids him, then at once his heart is filled with faith, and he understands from this that prayer is the refuge of help, a source of salvation, a treasury of assurance, a haven that rescues from the tempest, a light to those who are in darkness, a staff of the infirm, a shelter in time of temptations, a medicine at the height of sickness, a shield of deliverance in war, an arrow sharpened against the face of his enemies, and, to speak simply: the entire multitude of these good things is found to have its entrance through prayer. From this time forward he revels in the prayer of

faith, his heart glistens with clear assurance, and does not continue in its former blindness and the mere speech of the tongue. When he thus perceives these things, he will acquire prayer in his soul, like some treasure. And from his great gladness the form of prayer is turned into shouts of thanksgiving. This is the very thing pronounced by one who has defined the form proper to each of our actions: 'Prayer is joy that sends up thanksgiving.' Here he speaks of the prayer that is achieved through the knowledge of God, that is, prayer that has been sent from God. For at that moment a man does not pray with labor and weariness (as in the rest of his prayer, which is prayed before the experiencing of this grace), and because his heart is full of joy and wonder, it continually wells up motions of confession and gratitude while he silently bows the knee. Nay, from his vehement inner ardor, since he is very greatly moved by astonishment at this comprehension of God's graces, he suddenly raises his voice in praise and glorification of Him, and sends up thanksgiving; and he moves his tongue while being held with great awe.

If any man has reached this in truth and not in fancy, and has made many observations of this reality in himself, and has come to know its many differences by reason of his great experience, he knows what I say, for there is nothing here contrary to the truth. And from this time forward let him cease from pondering vanities, and let him remain with God by means of unbroken prayer, while being in anxiety and trepidation lest he be deprived of the magnitude of God's succor.

All these good things are born to a man from the recognition of his own weakness. For out of his craving for God's help, he presses on toward God by the petitions of his prayer. And to the extent that he draws near to God in his intention, God also draws near to him through His gifts, and will not take His grace away from him, on account of his great humility; for just like the widow before the judge, he cries out to be avenged of his adversary. But for this very reason the compassionate God defers in granting a man's requests, even so that this may become a cause for him to draw near Him, and for his need's sake to stay close to Him Who is the brimming fount of succor. Some of his petitions God grants him promptly (I mean those without which no one can be saved), but some He withholds from him. And on certain occasions He restrains and dispels from him the scorching assault of the enemy, while on others, He permits him to be tempted, that this trial may become to him a cause for drawing near to God (as I said before), and also that he may be instructed, and have the experience of temptations. And such is the word of Scripture: 'The Lord left many nations, without driving them out; neither delivered He them into the hands of Joshua, the son of Nun, to chastise

the sons of Israel by them, and that the tribes of the sons of Israel might be taught and learn war.' For the righteous man who has no consciousness of his own weakness walks on a razor's edge, and is never far from falling, nor from the ravaging lion—I mean the demon of pride. And again, a man who has no consciousness of his own weakness falls short of humility; and he who falls short of this, also falls short of perfection; and he who falls short of perfection is forever held by dread, because his city is not founded on pillars of iron, neither upon lintels of brass, that is, humility. No man can acquire humility save by humility's own means whereby the heart is made contrite and the deliberations of conceit are brought to nought. This is why the enemy often finds himself a slight cause whereby he can deflect a man from the path. Without humility, the work of man cannot be perfected, and the charter of his liberty does not yet bear the seal of the Spirit, but rather, until now he is a slave, and his work does not rise above fear. For a man cannot correct his work without humility, and he is no instructed except through temptations, and without wisdom he does not acquire humility.

Therefore the Lord looses upon the saints the causes of humility, of a contrite heart, and of ardent, undistracted prayer, so that those who love Him might draw nigh Him through humility. Often He jolts them with the passions of their nature, and the intrusions of shameful and polluted thoughts; and often, too, by rebukes, insults, and the buffetings of men; but sometimes with diseases and bodily ailments; and at other times with poverty and the utter lack of necessities. And sometimes with the torment of excessive fear which He permits to fall upon them in the open warfare of the demons so as to trouble them strongly; but at times with dire variations, one more oppressive, grievous, and difficult than the next.

All these things occur so that they may have causes to be humbled, and that they do not become immersed in the sleep of negligence, either as regards those things from which the ascetic is wont to fall ill, or as regards the fear of things to come. Therefore temptations are necessarily profitable to men.

But I do not say this with the intent that a man should voluntarily allow himself to be made lax by shameful thoughts, that this may become to him a pretext of humility in his remembrance of them, nor do I mean that he should be assiduous to enter into further temptations, but rather than in cultivating good, he must be sober at all times, and watch over his soul, and reflect that he is a created being, and therefore very liable to sudden change. For every created being is in need of God's power for assistance, and by his need of another's assistance every man reveals his natural weakness. But the man who knows his own weakness must of necessity humble himself, so that his need may be supplied by Him who has the power to give it. And if he had known it from the beginning, and had looked upon his weakness, he would not have grown negligent; and if he had not

grown negligent, he would not have slumbered, and been given over to the hands of those who afflict him in order to wake him up.

Therefore, whoever is walking upon the path of God must give thanks to Him for all the things that come upon him, and revile and blame his own soul, and know that he would not have been delivered over by his Provider except for the sake of negligence, in order that his mind might be awakened, or else because he has become puffed up. But he should not be overly disturbed on this account, nor quit the arena and the fight, nor leave himself free of self-reproach, lest his evil grow twofold. For with God, who abundantly pours forth righteousness, there is no injustice. Far be it! Unto Him be glory unto the ages. Amen.

Understanding the Spirit of the Age

The spirit of the age in which we live is a spirit opposed to God. We must oppose it and keep it from creeping into our lives and into the Church by knowing, holding fast, and living the Faith, but also by better understanding the current set of lies by which the enemy would lead us into darkness and deprive us of our spiritual inheritance.

I submit to you three excellent resources by which you may arm yourselves.

Fr. Seraphim Rose's *Nihilism: The Root of the Revolution of the Modern Age* traces the destruction of the old Christian order in the West through liberalism, realism, vitalism, to pure nihilism, which can be variously defined. It insists "there is no truth." "All truth is empirical. All truth is relative." "There is no answer to the question: 'why?'" We see and hear these sentiments all around us.

After God: Morality & Bioethics in a Secular Age, published in 2017, was the last work of Tristram Englehardt, a Catholic Bioethicist who became Orthodox in 1991 when he realized how the West had departed from the Christian Faith delivered by the Apostles. His scholarly work shows how there can be no authoritative ethical system based on reason alone. Man needs a "God's eye view" on which to base ethics. He thoroughly describes the contemporary moral landscape while showing why only Orthodoxy can remedy the current malaise.

Dr. Mark Tarpley delivered two lectures at the recent Orthodox Education Conference: "Modernity's Vision for Education and Why We should be Concerned" and "Don't Be Caught Unaware: Why Post-Modernity Is More Influential Than We Think." I consider what he had to say so important that I have asked him to come to deliver those talks for our parish. The date and time will be determined soon.

Upcoming Events 2021

31 May: Memorial Day Picnic, noon
15 August: 20-year Anniversary Celebration

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!