

The Confessor's Tongue for May 30, A. D. 2021

Sunday of the Samaritan Woman; Ven. Isaac of the Dalmata; St. Emelia

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.

On the Word of God

St. Nikolai of Zicha

The Word of God is food for the soul. The Word of God is both power and light for the soul. He who reads the Word of God gives food, power and light to his soul. He who can, should read the Word of God in Holy Scripture, and he who cannot should listen to him who reads Holy Scripture. All the saints emphasized the benefit of reading Holy Scripture. St. Seraphim of Sarov says: "The soul should be provided with the Word of God. For the Word of God, as Gregory the Theologian says, is the bread of angels, which feeds the soul that is hungry for God. But, above all, one should read the New Testament and the Psalter. From this proceeds illumination of the mind. It is very beneficial to read the Word of God in solitude and to read the entire Bible with understanding. The Lord gives His mercy to a man for endeavoring to do this, more than for other good deeds, and fills him with the gift of understanding. When a man provides his soul with the Word of God, then he is filled with the understanding of good and evil."

Reading the Scriptures

Here are some suggestions for reading the Scriptures, the Word of God, regularly.

1. Read what is given on the church wall calendar each day. Those are the lessons appointed to be read at Liturgy on that day. It is not much, but it is better than nothing.
2. Like the Optina Elders, starting with Matthew and going through to John, read one chapter from the Gospels each day; and starting with Acts and reading through to Revelation, read two chapters from the Epistles each day. That will take you through the entire New Testament in 90 days, four times a year. Imagine what that would do for your spiritual life if you stayed with it!
3. Read the chapter of Proverbs corresponding to the day of the month. There are 31 chapters. Keep reading for a year or so, take a break, and come back to it. The reading and contemplating of Proverbs will save us from much grief in youth (and later)—if we will give heed.
4. Try to read through the Old Testament once a year. This may be done if we read three chapters a day—excluding the Psalms (the reading of which we do well to make part of our prayer rule). One can go about it various ways: straight through, chronologically, by genre; or one may simply make a checklist with all the OT books listed and check them off as one reads them.
5. Try reading a short book like James or Ephesians aloud daily for a week or a month—and then memorize it.

6. Identify key verses and whole chapters and memorize them. Read them aloud to yourself repeatedly for a week or two, then start to memorize. Hiding God's Word in your heart in this way will bear much good fruit.

7. Use the fathers to help you understand. St. John Chrysostom, St. Theophylact, St. Cyril of Alexandria, and St. Ambrose of Milan are among those who wrote extensive commentaries on the Scriptures.

The Sacrifice of Praise

"Not for thy sacrifices will I reprove thee: for thy whole – burnt offerings are before me continually....Shall I eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of goats? Sacrifice to God the sacrifice of praise; and render thy supplications to the Most High. And call upon me in the day of tribulation; and I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me....the sacrifice of praise shall glorify Me..." Psm 49

Under the law of Moses, God's chosen people the Hebrews offered sacrifices of animals—blood, fat, flesh—as well as wheat, wine, and oil. The worship of God required bringing the correct sacrifices at the right times.

The sacrificial system was, however, but a type, a shadow, a foreshadowing of something deeper which was to come fully only with Christ. It provided training and preparation for true worship in spirit and in truth. This is indicated more than once in the Old Testament. The Psalm itself declares that rather than the flesh of bulls and blood of goats of which God has no need, God desires the sacrifice of praise and the offering of supplications.

We Christians have been freed from the Law's prescribed sacrifices of animals, yet we are not free from bringing sacrifices and offerings to God. Our corporate worship, our coming together as the Church, is the primary time and place for making these sacrifices and offerings. In our worship, we hear the great deeds of God recounted to us, those done by Christ and those done through His saints, in whom God is wondrous. We recall all the benefits He offers us, and we reflect on who He is.

Our response is our worship, which involves offering the sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving. Praise involves acknowledging God's attributes and honoring him for who He is and what He has done. Thanksgiving is our acknowledgment of His mercy towards us, an expression of our appreciation for the benefits He confers upon us. The word 'eucharist', in fact, comes from the Greek verb 'to give thanks.'

Moreover, we offer supplications to God in our worship, for ourselves, for others, for the Church, and for the world. Lifting our requests to God honors Him, for it implicitly declares that we believe He can and will do something about our requests. Not to offer supplications is to say that we do not think God can or will do anything in response.

As we better come to know God and more deeply

realize what He has done and continues to do for us, we come to see the sheer folly and ingratitude in not regularly offering the sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving to the Lord. He has given us life in this world. Through Baptism He has made us members of Christ's body and adopted us as His children and given us the inestimable privilege of naming Him "our Father." How can we neglect making the regular sacrifice of praise to Him in response? How can we begrudge a few hours out of the 168 in our week to acknowledge our Creator?

Attending the Vigil and the Liturgy and attentively participating is to make these offerings of praise, thanksgiving, and supplication to the Lord. We cannot neglect this duty and expect to experience the fullness of life in Christ.

Yet there is one thing more God desires of us beyond the offering of our lips. Most of all, He desires us, that we offer ourselves to him each week as we present ourselves to Him and stand before Him at the Divine Liturgy. He looks for us to surrender ourselves to Him, to offer ourselves to Him as living sacrifices. This has been His goal all along, to bring man back into full relationship with Him.

Our worship in the Church thus involves more than coming and being present at services. It calls us to attend, to be engaged, and to respond to God by offering to Him from our heart our praise, our thanks, our supplications, and, ultimately, ourselves. We must make this offering of ourselves again and again, because no sooner do we make it than we often pull ourselves away in fear and worry. We forget who we are in Christ and go back to serving created things rather than the Creator. Our worship reminds us who we are and calls us back to God, so that by the end of our lives we may truly have offered ourselves wholly to God as living sacrifices. *Fr. Justin Frederick*

Homily on the Mystery of Ordination

St. Nikolai Velimirovich

"And when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them" (Acts 6:6).

By laying their hands on the chosen faithful, the apostles consecrated bishops, priests and deacons. It is apparent from this that the Christian Faith is not only a teaching but also a power. It is not enough merely to know; it is also necessary to have power. It is not enough merely to be chosen by men; one must also be confirmed by God. If power were not necessary for the priestly vocation, neither would the laying on of hands be necessary; only teaching passed from mouth to ear would be needed. The laying on of hands, therefore, signifies the transferring of authority and the descent of power on the chosen one. The power is in the grace of God, Who strengthens man, sanctifies and illumines him. Truly, the grace of God is that which teaches, leads, shepherds, and through the Mysteries [Sacraments] strengthens the flock of Christ. A priest is the vessel

of this inexpressible, awesome and all sufficient power of grace. Blessed is that priest who understands what a precious treasury he has become! Blessed is he if the fear of God does not leave him day and night until his last breath! There is no greater honor on earth, no greater responsibility than the calling of the priesthood. By the laying on of hands by the bishop, the priest has come into contact with the heavenly and eternal source of grace and with the authority of the apostles. By this, the priest has become a companion in grace and a concelebrant with all the Orthodox priests from apostolic times until today, with the great hierarchs, with the countless number of saints, confessors, miracle-workers, ascetics and martyrs. He is gently adorned by their dignity, but he bears the burden of their merit, their example, and their reproach.

O my brethren, great and most great is the ministry of a shepherd of Christ's rational flock. He is responsible to pray to God for all, and all the faithful are required to pray to God for him.

O Lord, Supreme Hierarch, sustain the Orthodox priests in strength, in wisdom, in purity, in zeal, in meekness and in every apostolic virtue by the grace of Your Holy Spirit.

To Thee be glory and praise forever. Amen.

From St. Joseph of Optina

God will judge our repentance not according to our labors but according to our humility. On that day, God will judge us not according to how many psalms we read, not for the prayers we did not say (or prayer rules we did not perform), but because we did not repent! There is great joy with the angels in heaven over one repentant sinner. Let us pray: "Lord, have mercy. Lord, grant me humility and meekness." Or: "By the judgements which Thou discernest, save me, O Lord!" And according to His mercy, the Lord will have mercy and will save all of us by His Grace.

On Correcting the Faults of Others

St. John of Kronstadt

If you wish to correct the faults of anyone, do not think of trying to do so solely by your own means: you would only do harm by your vices, for instance, by pride and the irritability arising from it; *but cast thy burden upon the Lord*, and pray with all your heart that God Himself will enlighten the mind and heart of that man. If he sees that your prayer breathes love, and that it really comes from the depths of your heart, he will undoubtedly fulfill it, and you will soon see, from the change that has taken place in him for whom you prayed, that it is the work of the most high God.

Upcoming Events 2021

- 31 May: Memorial Day Picnic, noon
- 19 June: Baptisms
- 26 June: 2:00 p.m. Tarpley Lectures on Modernism and Postmodernism.
- 26 July: 20-year Anniversary Celebration

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!