

The Confessor's Tongue for August 8, A. D. 2021

St. Emelian the Confessor; Ven. Zosima and Savvaty of Solovki

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.

Book Review

The Struggle for Virtue: Asceticism in a Modern Secular Society
Archbishop Averky. Jordanville, 2014

Archbishop Averky (1906-1976), the fourth abbot of Holy Trinity Monastery in Jordanville, NY (1960-76), delivered the thirteen lectures contained in this volume in Western Europe shortly after the end of World War Two. Though seventy years old, they remain relevant, vibrant and fresh, speaking clearly and persuasively to the modern ear about Christian asceticism and its place in our lives.

The introduction clearly defines Christian asceticism in contrast to the world's distorted notions thereof as the constant practice of good deeds inseparably bound to spiritual life and the rooting out of evil deeds and evil dispositions. The "good deeds" are delineated by the commandments of Christ in the Gospel. As all Christians contend with evil dispositions and habits that tyrannize and enslave the soul, ascetic struggle to uproot them is essential for all Christians. As the Archbishop puts it, "Asceticism is something so closely bound up with the spiritual life that without it spiritual life is simply *inconceivable*."

The twelve lectures that follow elaborate on particular areas of ascetic struggle. The topics include "The Importance of Spiritual Discernment", "Gospel Love and Humanistic Altruism", "Acquiring Gospel Love", "The Christian Understanding of Freedom", "Resisting Evil", "Waging the Unseen Warfare," "Christian Struggle", "The Holy Fathers on Combating the Passions", and "Pastoral Asceticism".

Three additional topics bear further elaboration. In chapter one, Archbishop Averky deals with "Self-Asserting Pride and Christian Humility." He traces the origin of human self-asserting pride to Adam and Eve questioning God and putting their faith in the words of the serpent. Since then, "We can find its footprints throughout the entire history of mankind." It led to the first murder and to the flood. It led to the Tower of Babel, and is the root of national pride, which continues to afflict the world. It led to the schism between East and West, as Rome, unable to absorb the spirit of Christian humility, sought to rule the whole Christian world in the spirit of pagan pride. In the Reformation, that same spirit manifested as man asserted his own authority to interpret the Scriptures. Since then, things have not improved. We can see the fruit today, expressed in Archbishop Averky's works: "Human pride run rampant led to each person's life losing all value and literally hanging on a string; the precious fruits of age-old culture were ruthlessly destroyed; and over it all hangs the specter of destruction of not only all of mankind, but even of our entire planet." Christian humility is the only remedy.

"Reawakening Our Conscience" presents a provocative reflection on conscience as well as powerful prescriptions for guarding our conscience. Deluded by the notion of 'moral progress', modern man has lost the concept of evil and pays little heed to the voice of conscience. The conscience is an inherent part of every human being. But it is a sensitive, fragile instrument, which becomes hardened and numbed through willful sin. The Christian must work to guard his conscience, to respond to its promptings, and to repent with tears when he violates its voice. "Even minor things are significant."

A great struggle we all face is not allowing harmful impressions into our souls, which the Archbishop discusses in "Guarding the Heart Amidst the Distractions of Life." Even more so than in Archbishop Averky's time, these harmful impressions are all around us to distract us and lead us into temptation. A distracted person is not able to be vigilant, to watch and pray to avoid entering temptation. The frenzied life of modern man makes vigilance difficult. Distractedness paralyzes spiritual development. Yet the prescription against distractedness is hard: forbid oneself idle activity, fulfill one's duties attentively, avoid foolish jokes and idle talk, all fantasy and daydreaming. "In a word, it is necessary to take yourself in hand, not to allow the senses to eagerly seize upon any and all manner of external impressions, but rather to occupy yourself diligently, honestly, and conscientiously with your own responsibilities, public and private, without excessive bustle and fretfulness."

The Struggle for Virtue is a little book of some 160 pages of text plus notes and index. Yet its message is of vital importance for us, which, if taken to heart and acted upon, will have a monumental effect on our lives.

Fr. Justin Frederick

The Short Prayer Rule of St. Seraphim

From the Optina Monastery Prayerbook 2003

In extreme cases, if there is no possibility of reading the morning or evening prayers, the short rule of St. Seraphim of Sarov is used.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Meet it is in truth to bless thee, O Theotokos, who art every blessed and all-blameless and the Mother of our God, more honorable than the Cherubim, and more glorious without compare than the Seraphim, who without corruption gavest birth to God the Word, verily, Theotokos, we magnify thee.

Our Father who art in heaven... (*thrice*)

Rejoice O Virgin Theotokos, Mary full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, for thou hast borne the Savior of our souls. (*thrice*)

Nicene Creed: "I believe in one God..."

O Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner. (*thrice*)

O Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, through the prayers of Thine immaculate Mother, our venerable and God-bearing fathers, and all the saints, save us. Amen.

Elder Ephiphaios (+1989)

When someone is free [i.e. unmarried], he has rights and obligations. When he gets married, he has few rights and very many obligations. When, however, he obtains children also, he has not rights but only obligations.

The finding of a suitable person for marriage is a matter for the knees [prayer].

"What should we ask for, Elder, in our prayer before Confession?" "Ask for recollect of sins, boldness to confess them, and repentance."

If you wish to make progress in spiritual life, do not keep secrets from your Elder!

Whoever fears God does not fear anything else.

There do not exist many or few, nor small nor great problems. The only problem is the absence of Christ from our life.

All the events of our life we must see under the prism of eternity. Then, we can discern their real dimensions.

The Christian Understanding of Sin

Sin is primarily a metaphysical phenomenon whose roots lie in the mystic depths of man's spiritual nature. The essence of sin consists not in the infringement of ethical standards, but in a falling away from the eternal Divine life for which man was created and to which, by his very nature, he is called.

Sin is committed, first of all, in the secret depths of the human spirit, but its consequences involve the individual as a whole. A sin will reflect on a man's psychological and physical condition, on his outward appearance, on his personal destiny. Sin will, inevitably, pass beyond the boundaries of the sinner's individual life to burden all humanity and thus affect the fate of the whole world. The sin of our forefather Adam was not the only sin of cosmic significance. Every sin, manifest or secret, committed by each one of us, affects the rest of the universe.

The earthly-minded man when he commits sin is not conscious of its effect on himself as is the spiritual man. The carnal man does not remark any change in himself after committing a sin because he is always in a state of spiritual death and has never known the eternal life of the spirit. The spiritual man, on the contrary, does see a change in himself every time his will inclines to sin—he senses a lessening of grace.

Prayers After Communion

The prayers before and after Holy Communion teach us much about the Mystery, how we should approach it, and what we should expect from it. We'll offer commentary on some of the prayers to help us be more aware of what we are doing when we partake.

O Thou who dost willingly give Thy flesh to me as food, who art a fire burning the unworthy, let me not be consumed, O my Maker; rather, enter Thou into all my members, into all my joints, reins, heart. Burn Thou the thorns of all mine iniquities; purify my soul; sanctify my reasoning. Strengthen my knees and my bones. Enlighten the simplicity of my five senses. Nail the whole of me together with the fear of Thee. Ever shelter, guard, and keep me from every soul-corrupting deed and word. Make me clean, purify me, and attune me. Beautify me, give me understanding, enlighten me. Show me to be the habitation of Thy one Spirit and no longer the habitation of sin, that having become Thy dwelling-place through the entry of communion, I may flee, as from fire, every evil deed and every passion. As intercessors, I bring all the sanctified, the leaders of the Bodiless Hosts, Thy Forerunner, the wise Apostles, and with them, Thine immaculate, pure Mother, whose entreaties, O Tenderhearted One, do thou receive, O my Christ, and make Thy worshipper a child of light. For Thou art, O Good One, the only Sanctification and Brightness of our souls, and unto Thee, as God and Master, do we all fitly send up glory day by day.

Third Prayer of Thanksgiving, by St. Simeon Metaphrastes

This third prayer of thanksgiving after receiving Holy Communion contains no explicit thanksgiving, but at the outset it names a reason for giving thanks: God is willing to give us heavenly food though we do not deserve it. We see God's goodness and generosity and this elicits our gratitude. The prayer then notes the danger of Holy Communion: God is a fire that burns the unworthy. Acknowledging our unworthiness and the danger that presents us, we pray that we may not be consumed or harmed by the Divine Fire, but that God will enter into all the members of our body and soul, burn up all the thorns of sin, and sanctify and purify us. We continue on, enumerated desired and expected benefits from Holy Communion: strengthening, enlightenment, integration rather than scatteredness; protection from all that corrupts the soul. We ask cleansing and being attuned to God. We ask beautification, understanding, and that we may appear in fact to be a dwelling place of God's Spirit and not of sin. We ask that, as a consequence of God's presence in us, we may flee from all sin and passion. We acknowledge our intercession: St. John the Baptist, the Apostles, the Angels, and the Theotokos. We ask that God through their prayers would make us children of light.

Behold, the power of Holy Communion! This prayer teaches us what it can do for us, what it will do for us if we will carefully prepare ourselves and come to partake regularly in the fear of God, with faith and love. *Fr. Justin*

Upcoming Events 2021

10 August, Tuesday, 6:30 p.m. Holy Unction
19 September, Sunday: Annual Meeting
3 October, Sunday: 20-year Anniversary Celebration at St. Maximus and the Big White Barn in Decatur.

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!