

The Confessor's Tongue for October 10, A. D. 2021

16th Sunday After Pentecost: Fathers of the 7th Council; St. Ambrose of Optina
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.

St. Symeon the New Theologian On Faults Often Considered Trifling

There will be those who, like myself, have been insubordinate and disobedient toward God's commandments who vainly calculate and say, "But I have not committed fornication! Swearing is nothing. I have not committed adultery! But what sin is it to have stolen a penny or a piece of bread?" And again, "I should attain bliss, if I do not commit the foul and sacrilegious vice of homosexuality. But what sin is there in being insulting or jealous, in being flippant or frivolous?" Then again there are those who in their folly think highly of themselves for being pure from the practice of sins of the flesh, and think that they are like angels of God, but take no account of the virtues and passions of the soul. They have nothing but contempt for all the rest of the Lord's commandments and do not force themselves to fulfill them. They refuse to do anything that is strenuous or to undergo any suffering for a commandment of God, and live carelessly.

What benefit, brethren, is there from abstaining from fornication and other impure acts of the body and yet seek after glory and strive for money? The one corrupts the body, and the other corrupts the soul. Moreover, glory from men and love for it makes us to be unbelievers, according to the word of the Lord when He says, "How can you believe, who receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?" What good is it to be innocent of homosexual acts, but to waste away with envy, hatred, and jealousy toward your neighbor? Hatred toward one's brother makes him who feels it into a murderer, for the apostle says, "anyone who hates his brother is a murderer." According to the sacred canons, a sodomite and a murderer are subject to the same penalty, and if they fail to repent they will be subject to eternal condemnation.

From St. Ambrose of Optina (+1891)

For whatever you are guilty of before God and man, offer repentance and humble yourself, do not dare to condemn or judge anyone, but in every unpleasant situation, strive to lay the blame on yourself and not others, either for your sins or that you caused this sorrow—through carelessness and inexperience.

It is better to be a disciple of a disciple than to live according to your own will. IN the writings of the holy fathers, they talk about this. It is not shameful to obey the advice of your spiritual father, but rather salvific and indispensable; and he who does not listen to good advice will be punished.

From St. Symeon the New Theologian

We should look upon all the faithful as one person and consider that Christ is in each one of them.

We should have such love for them that we are ready to sacrifice our very lives for them.

For it is incumbent upon us neither to say, nor think of any person as evil, but we must look upon everyone as good. If you see a brother afflicted with a passion, do not hate him.

Hate the passion that makes war upon him. And if you see him being terrorized by the habits and desires of previous sins, have compassion on him. Maybe you, too, will be afflicted by temptations, since you are also made from matter that easily turns from good to evil. Love towards your brother prepares you to love God even more. The secret, therefore, of love towards God is love towards your brother.

For if you don't love your brother whom you can see, how is it possible to love God, Whom you do not see?

For he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God Who he has not seen (1 John 4:20).

Model for Life: St. Symeon the New Theologian Protopresbyter George Papavarnavas

The venerable Symeon the New Theologian was born in 949 in Galatia of Paphlagonia (Asia Minor). He studied in Constantinople and subsequently entered the imperial court as a dignitary. However, because he sought higher things, he was not satisfied with worldly positions. He had the blessing to connect with Elder Symeon the Pious, under whose guidance he lived in spiritual asceticism. And while he was still a layman he obtained his first experience of the uncreated Light. At the age of 27 he entered as a novice in the Monastery of Studion and later in the Monastery of Saint Mamas, where he became a monk and was ordained a priest. After spending three years in the Monastery he was elected abbot, yet because he wanted to enforce the monastic rules of Basil the Great he was met with vociferous opposition from the monks and resigned.

While he enjoyed great honor in the overall environment of Constantinople, he was opposed by the former Metropolitan of Nicomedia and the then Chancellor, Stephen. The cause of Stephen's jealousy was his intolerance to the reputation of Symeon as a theologian. And because he could not criticize him for any other reason, he used the fact that Symeon, on his own initiative, celebrated in his Monastery the memory of his late spiritual father Symeon the Pious. The result was the exile of the Venerable One to the deserted area of Marmara. There he found the ruined Church of Saint Marina, which he renovated with his own personal effort, and then built a Monastery, which gathered many monks. His reputation spread and many important people in Constantinople visited him seeking spiritual guidance. Ultimately he was

vindicated, but he remained in the place of his exile until his venerable repose.

His memory was established to be celebrated festively on October 12th, because the day of his repose (March 12th) coincides with the period of Great Lent. Of his writings, there exist 92 discourses and 282 practical and theological chapters, as well as theological hymns. The Church has awarded him the honorary title of "New Theologian".

Below we will taste a few drops of spiritual water from the living well of his inspired teachings, specifically from his discourse "Alphabetical Chapters":

"There is no greater sin than to approach God without fear, respect and reverence."

"He who prays or chants casually and disdainfully to Him who even the Seraphim fear, obviously is ignorant of Him. For this reason even if God wanted to have mercy on him, he could not."

"It is better therefore to not chant at all to God, than to chant only with the mouth."

"Just as the nous sees and the nous hears, in the same way the nous should chant through the mouth."

"Therefore the nous should chant to God through the mouth. Because, however, it is impossible and impractical for the nous to chant unless it has previously accepted illumination and the energy of the Holy Spirit, we must take care of this before everything else."

"We must first correct the nous, for it to be focused when it prays, when it reads and when it is taught. Otherwise, everything else is futile and progress will never come to the soul."

"For the extent to which the nous is corrected, everyone is also given the measure of the knowledge and awareness of themselves and God."

The nous is the eye of the soul. When the nous is illumined, then man can see the glory of God, can truly know Him, and can acquire self-knowledge. In this state, his prayer is pure and heard by God. The nous is illumined when one struggles to apply the commandments of God in their life, and to live the ascetic, prayerful, and sacramental life.

"Children, youth and elders are invited to the temple of the Lord and during the services are bored, but in the theaters and the dances and at the games they rejoice, running to them eagerly. So what great strength is needed by human nature to change and eliminate what is against nature which he considers according to nature, and to acquire the ethos which is according to nature but appears to be against nature? Therefore, unless they are altered by the grace of Jesus, they cannot move to be according to nature."

Many times we have heard the view, especially from so-called nature worshippers, that the natural life is life in nature, and therefore the natural man is one who loves nature. Others consider the life of sin to be the natural life, and even refer to sinful acts as natural things, and consequently those who sin without a conscience and without repentance are perfectly normal people. However, in accordance with

the teaching of the Orthodox Church, as expressed by Saint Symeon the New Theologian, as well as other Fathers, the natural man is the one who by the Grace of God and their personal struggle transforms their passions and is regenerated spiritually. That is, they reach the state which the First-Created Adam and Eve were in while in Paradise, or even higher since they have been united with Christ.

Before their fall into sin, Adam and Eve were natural people, since they were fulfilling the purpose for their creation. They had an illuminated nous, could see God and speak with Him. They had true love between them and loved all of creation. Therefore, a person within the Church has the ability to be united with God, and when he succeeds in this by the Grace of God and their own personal struggle, then "he will observe the Grace of the Holy Spirit residing within him and energizing the virtues."

According to Saint Symeon, "the person who lacks the Grace of the Holy Spirit is dead to God, and unable to have citizenship in the heavens", while those who are energized by the Holy Spirit are spiritual people, full of vitality, with fullness and meaning of life. Source : /Ekklesiastiki Paremvasi/, "Οσιος Συμεών ο

The Life of St. Ambrose of Optina

Alexander Michailovich Grenkov was born Nov. 23, 1812 in the Russian province of Tambov. His parents raised him strictly and with fervent piety. Since he was of a priestly family, it was no surprise when he entered the Tambov theological seminary in 1830. He did well in his studies and was ranked among the top students.

About a year before graduation Alexander became seriously ill. He promised that if God healed him, he would become a monk. Although his prayer was answered, Alexander seemed to forget his promise.

After graduation from the seminary he took a position as tutor to the children of a certain landowner and remained with this family for a year and a half. After this he became a teacher at the local parochial school.

One day in 1839 Alexander and a friend visited the famous hermit Father Hilarion to ask him what they should do with their lives. Alexander was surprised when he was told to go to the monastery of Optina Pustin, where they had great need of him. In September of that same year, however, he seemed to be prepared to continue with his teaching career.

One night he was invited to spend a pleasant evening with some friends. His conversation was witty and brilliant, and all his jokes and puns were on the mark. Although his hosts were amused and impressed by him, Alexander was disgusted by his own frivolity. Perhaps his unfulfilled promise to become a monk weighed on his conscience.

The next morning he quit his job and arrived at Optina in October of 1839. After a trial period he decided to remain in the monastery and dedicate his life to God. He received the monastic tonsure in 1842,

and was given the name Ambrose in honor of Saint Ambrose of Milan (December 7). Ambrose knew the famous spiritual directors Elder Leonid and Elder Macarius. He was the cell attendant of Elder Macarius, who undoubtedly influenced the young monk's spiritual development.

Ordained as a priest in 1845, Father Ambrose's reverence and piety in celebrating the divine services were noticed by the other monks. His health began to decline shortly afterward, and he had to ask to be relieved of all duties. In 1846 he was so ill that the Mystery of Holy Unction was administered to him. He bore his illness without complaint and slowly regained his strength. By 1848 he was able to walk with the aid of a cane.

Father Ambrose began to help Elder Macarius with his correspondence and in preparing the Russian edition of Saint John Climacus's *LADDER OF DIVINE ASCENT*, which was published by the monastery.

When Father Macarius had to go to Moscow in 1852, he designated Father Ambrose to take his place until his return. Father Ambrose never gave his personal opinions when he was asked for advice, but always referred people to the writings of the Fathers. If someone did not understand the text he was given to read, Father Ambrose would explain it in simple terms.

Father Macarius died in 1860 without naming anyone to succeed him as Elder. By divine providence, all the other possible candidates either died or were appointed as abbots of other monasteries. This left Father Ambrose as the undisputed spiritual director of the monastery. In his role as Elder, Father Ambrose had to receive many people each day to hear confessions and give advice. He used to say, "The Lord has arranged it so that I would have to talk to people all my life. Now I would be happy to remain silent, but I cannot."

An average day in Saint Ambrose's life began at 4 A.M. when his cell attendant came into his cell to read the morning Rule of prayer for him. After this he would wash and have some tea, then he would dictate replies to the many letters he received every day. Visitors would be lining up even as he was having breakfast. Sometimes he would take a break after two hours, but more often he would continue seeing people until noon when he had his lunch.

After lunch he would go out into the next room and greet more visitors. People would call out questions and he would give an appropriate response. He took a short rest at 3 P.M. then talked to people until the evening. At 8 P.M. he had dinner then received more visitors until 11 P.M. At that hour the evening Rule of prayer was read, and Father Ambrose begged forgiveness of the brethren whom he may have offended by thought, word, or deed. After three or four hours of sleep it would all begin again. This routine would fatigue a strong man. It is remarkable that Saint Ambrose, who was often in poor health, was able to keep it up for so many years.

From all over Russia, people flocked to the venerable Elder. The writer Tolstoy visited him on at least three occasions, and left impressed by the wisdom of the holy monk. Fyodor Dostoevsky came to Optina in 1878 after the death of his son Alyosha and was profoundly affected by his meeting with Saint Ambrose. The novelist used Father Ambrose as a model for Starets Zosima in *The Brothers Karamazov*.

The saint founded Shamordino convent in 1884. This convent, which was near Optina, opened its doors to women who were poor, sickly, or even blind. Most convents were very poor and had to rely on the incomes of women who had a certain personal wealth in order to remain open. Saint Ambrose made it possible for any woman who wished to become a nun to follow this path of salvation.

Shamordino began to decline after the death of the first abbess, Mother Sophia. Saint Ambrose went there in June 1890 to straighten out the convent's affairs. He was unable to return to Optina due to illness, then winter made it impossible for him to travel. Father Ambrose continued to see visitors at Shamordino, even though his health continued to deteriorate in 1891.

By September, it was clear that he had not long to live. He fell asleep in the Lord at 11:30 A.M. on the morning of October 10 1891. Throngs of people attended his funeral and also his burial at Optina. Fathers Joseph, Anthony, Benedict, and Anatole succeeded him as Elder until the monastery was closed after the Russian Revolution.

The Moscow Patriarchate authorized local veneration of the Optina Elders on June 13, 1996. The work of uncovering the relics of Saints Leonid, Macarius, Hilarion, Ambrose, Anatole I, Barsanuphius and Anatole II began on June 24/July 7, 1998 and was concluded the next day. However, because of the church Feasts (Nativity of Saint John the Baptist, etc.) associated with the actual dates of the uncovering of the relics, Patriarch Alexey II designated June 27/July 10 as the date for commemorating this event. The relics of the holy Elders now rest in the new church of the Vladimir Icon of the Mother of God.

The Optina Elders were glorified by the Moscow Patriarchate for universal veneration on August 7, 2000.

Saint Ambrose was glorified in 1988 by the Patriarchate of Moscow as part of the Millennium celebration of the Baptism of Rus.

From St. Ambrose of Optina

The Kingdom of God is not in words but in deed. One should speak less, keep silence more, not judge anyone, to everyone my respect.

You must pray for those who hate and offend you thus: "Save, O Lord, and have mercy on Thy servant, my beloved sister (name), and for the sake of her holy prayers, have mercy on me, the wretched sinner."

A Narrative on the Manifold Judgments of God
St. Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain

A certain abba of the monastics, with great boldness and with tears, asked God that He reveal to him some of His judgments on men: judgments which they do not recognize, but mistake for extraordinary events. For a long time, God did not show him anything (for men can never fully know and understand the mysteries of God), but the ascetic did not cease from that prayer day and night. One day, God, wishing to satisfy fully the monk's prayer, put into his heart the thought that he visit an ascetic elder who lived a many-days' journey away.

As the ascetic began his journey, God sent an angel in the form of a young monk, who met the elder and greeted him, "Bless, Father." The elder answered, "May God give you forgiveness, child." And the angel said to the elder, "Where do you go, Abba?" The elder said, "I go to see such-and-such, an ascetic." The angel exclaimed, "I also go there; let us two go in company."

They walked on together until a pious man took them into his home, and, at dinner, he brought a silver platter to the table. When they were about to depart the next morning, the angel took the platter, tossed it into the air, and it disappeared. The elder was troubled at seeing this, but he said nothing.

The second day, they journeyed until they raised the dust in another village, where a very pious Christian was friendly and hospitable to the travellers. He had an only son, whom he brought for the monks to pray over and bless. But when they were to continue their journey, the angel suddenly grasped the child by the neck and strangled him. The elder, seeing this, was shaken and astonished, but he stood silent.

And walking on, the third day they rested in another place, but because they found no one to receive them, they sat in a courtyard. The courtyard had a wall that was leaning over and about to fall. The angle loosened the stones by pounding and tore it down; then he rebuilt it from the foundation.

At this, the elder could bear it no longer and cried out: "I adjure you by the Most High God, tell me the truth! What are these things you have done? These works are not human works." The angel asked, "What did I do?" The elder said, "Yesterday and the day before, those lovers of Christ received us and were hospitable to us; you took the silver platter of the one, tossed it into the air, and it disappeared; you strangled the son of the other; we come here, and they did not give us any consolation or hospitality, but you took hold and built and benefited them."

The angel said to him: "Hearken, Abba, and I shall reveal the truth of these matters. The first one who received us is a God-loving and righteous man, and he manages and governs his property according to God. But that silver platter was an inheritance from an iniquitous person, and, so that he would not lose the wages of the righteous, God ordered that I destroy it, so his hospitality would be pure and without guile. And the other one who was hospitable

to us is pious and a man of excellent virtues, but if his son had lived, he would have become an instrument of Satan and done many things to bring the works of his father to oblivion. Because of this, God appointed that he die while he was still young, so that his soul and his father's be saved."

"You have done well in all these things," the elder responded, "but what have you to say about here?"

The angel answered, "Know, Abba, about this also. The householder of this courtyard is a wicked man and iniquitous. He would do wickedness to many, but he cannot because of his poverty. His grandfather, when he built the wall, hid much money in it. If I had allowed it to continue falling over, that malicious man whose domain it is would have tumbled it down in order to rebuild it. Thus he would find the treasure and use it for his wicked desires and the harm of men. God has a time when He will reveal it to a man who will use it for good works.

"These are some of the judgments of God, which you sought to learn. Therefore, go to your cell and be not concerned about the things of the world, as to how and why they are done, because the judgments of God are a great abyss. As the prophet said, 'His ways are unsearchable and beyond understanding,' and man cannot know all things with exactness. Therefore, Abba, believe that God is just and does not do any iniquity, but that all He permits to be done is righteously done."

Having heard these things from the angel, the ascetic glorified God and returned to his cell and no longer made inquiries into anything. *copyright ©*
George Rallis, 1982

Upcoming Events 2021

31 October, Sunday: Oktoberfest & All Saints Party
14 November: Parish Thanksgiving Meal

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!