

The Confessor's Tongue for November 21, A. D. 2021

22nd Sunday After Pentecost: Entrance of Theotokos into the Temple

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.

21 November:

Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple

When the Most Holy Virgin became three years old, her parents, true to their vow to the Lord to dedicate their child to Him, solemnly led their Most-pure Daughter into the Jerusalem Temple "to be brought up in divine grace" "before the Lord." Though at that time the Most Holy Virgin, as expressed in church hymns, was yet "three years old in the body" she was already "many years in the spirit" although still "a child in the flesh, she was already perfect in soul". She looked at the temple of the Lord as at a paradisiacal dwelling of the glory of God, as at the most cultivated haven, for which Her soul thirsted more than the home of her parents, is why she entered into the temple majestically and rejoicing. The Holy Virgin was put on the first step of the temple and to the surprise of everyone, with no one supporting her, being encouraged by the spirit of love for God, climbed firmly up the fifteen steps of the temple.

At this time, on the outside in front of the Jerusalem temple there were about were ninety apartments. In these apartments there were rooms for various persons: separately the maidens who lived there during the time they were dedicated to the services to God; separately widows lived there, promising God to keep the premises clean until their death; separately men, called supervisors, in the image of unmarried monks resided there. There were also other apartments for the comfort of pilgrims and strangers who came from a distance for worship in the temple. All of them served the Lord in the temple and had their livelihood from the church estates. The Most Holy Child Mary was lodged at the Jerusalem temple in the apartments where the maidens lived.

The Holy Young Child, living in the temple, spent all her time in prayer, reading the Word of God and thinking about God. She occupied half her time with her own needlework, especially loving to prepare clothes dedicated to serving in the temple; which she fulfilled while growing up, and occupied the other half with works of charity at the temple, serving the needy, the crippled and the infirm which tradition says, to whom she also gave all her food, herself eating only the "most glorious bread from heaven", brought to her by the angels", and "conversing with them". Living at the temple and devoting all her time to pious occupations, the Most Holy Virgin was continually used to being before the all-seeing, omniscient Lord God and His almighty will in soul and body, in mind and heart, in thought and desire, having formed in herself a living and firm faith in the word of the Lord, a fervent love for the Lord and for neighbor, an all-perfect fidelity to the will of God, the

deepest humility and meekness, inscrutable patience and obedience to the word of the Lord. "

In the early years of her life she lost her parents. After their death, she all the more turned to the One God with all her soul, and with all the desires of a pure heart and singularly sought Him out for joy and consolation.

When the time has come for the Most Holy Virgin, according to the then existing custom, to leave the sacred dwelling of her pious formation and like other maidens to marry, she declared to the high priest and to the priests her vow to remain virgin and with their advice and consent, for the protection of virginity, at that time being 11 years old, was betrothed to her relative, the aged righteous Joseph, and moved from the temple into his house which was in Nazareth.

The example the Saints Joachim and Anna teaches us to fulfill pious vows. And the deeply instructive example of the upbringing of the Most Holy Virgin explains to us our duties to our children that we must as early as possible and to take them to the temple of God more often, to accustom them to the full complement of prayers at home, teaching them in the law of the Lord, particularly in their growth to properly use their time to develop in them love for their neighbor and diligence to inspire obedience in them to the church rules (Ustav), and to waken and strengthen in them the spirit of piety and the fear of God .

We keep the feast for four days until it leavetaking November 25. We may use the Troparion of the feast before meals in place of our usual prayer and the Kontakion after meals in place of our usual giving of thanks.

Entrance of Theotokos, Troparion, tone 4

Today is the prelude of the good will of God, / of the preaching of the salvation of mankind. / The Virgin appeareth in the temple of God, / in anticipation proclaiming Christ to all. / Let us rejoice and sing to her: / Rejoice, O Fulfillment // of the Creator's dispensation.

Entrance of Theotokos, Kontakion, tone 4

The all-pure Temple of the Savior, / the precious Bridal Chamber and Virgin, / the sacred treasure of the glory of God, / is led today into the house of the Lord, / and with her she bringeth the grace of the divine Spirit. / Of her God's angels sing in praise: // "She is indeed the heavenly Tabernacle."

On The Gift of the Enemy

Fr. Justin Frederick

A striking hymn is found in the Octoechos, the "Book of the Eight Tones", from which the Church takes material for her services throughout the year outside of the Great Fast and Paschal Season. The following text is sung at "Lord, I Have Cried" at Friday Vespers in tone 4:

Thou who art compassionate
hast given me the enemy for my profit,
as a gift to scourge and teach me;
for his wickedness serveth as a test,
which, without being good, leadeth me to the good:
therefore it is now in thanksgiving that I cry:
Save me, O Lord, before I perish utterly.

Does anyone think of Satan as a gift given by God for our profit? The Church does. Though his desire is only “to kill, to steal, and to destroy”, Christ has bound him, and he now rages at us—but as a pit bull on a leash. Growl and rage and strain against his leash as he may in his desire to bite us, the dog may not harm us unless we walk up to him and put ourselves in range of his teeth. In similar fashion, God uses the enemy’s destructive desire to test us, to scourge and correct us when needed, and as a foe for us to wrestle with so that the strength of our faith may be developed in battle.

The Lord as a good, wise father, chastens those whom he loves that they may become legitimate, disciplined, virtuous sons worthy of their father. Chastening is an unpleasant correction given in response to sins we have committed. It is designed to humble us, to impress an important lesson on our souls, and to discourage us from sinning again. Sin separates us from God, darkens our soul, dulls our spiritual perceptivity, cools our zeal, hardens our heart, and kills the life in us. We cannot want it to have any place in us if we understand our true interests, but, in our weakness, we are easily seduced by it. God in his love uses the devil’s desire to do us harm to provide chastening, but, rather than giving him free rein to do what he likes, God limits him. God does not let the diabolical pit bull off his leash, but He may allow him to come close enough to bark in our ear and to bite us if we hold out our hand to pet him. If we do not like this experience of his hateful rage against us, we will stay away from the sin that gives him access to us.

God also uses the enemy to teach us. By fighting against this foe, we learn, often through many failures, how to resist his lies, identify the provocative thoughts he insinuates in our minds and reject them, and stand firmly against him. Untested faith has no value, but a faith that has been tested and ultimately prevails is of great worth. Thus God uses the devil as a sort of trainer or sparring partner who has limited power to hurt us while training us to use our free will and our spiritual weapons to choose God and what is good and to reject evil.

None of this makes the devil good, though God uses him for good. He remains evil, full of hatred for God and for man made in God’s image. Ironically, through Christ’s victory over the devil through His death, descent into Hades, and resurrection, the devil has against his will become a means of bringing us into the good things of God.

Hence the Church cries out in thanksgiving, while calling on the Lord to save us before we perish. For

ultimately the battle is real and is a matter of life and death. Though the devil is bound, he still can do harm if we give him power in our lives by believing his lies. If we do not repent when we fall, the fruit of those lies is death. So every Christian must recognize his dependence on Christ for victory against the foe.

During the four fasts of the Church year, we consciously enter the arena to do battle against the enemy in the areas of our life in which we have given him influence and access. May God grant us a profitable fast, a good contest, and victory in battle.

St. John Cassian on End and Goal

As we go through the Nativity Fast, it helps us to know why we fast and at what we are aiming, not just during the fast itself, but in our whole life on earth as Christians.

Here, in Conference One of St. John Cassian’s Conferences, Cassian and his friend Germanus consult the eminent desert father Moses, seeking spiritual wisdom and guidance. They implore him for a word of edification. Here is the part of his response which is most pertinent to us.

In short, our ultimate goal or end is entering the Kingdom of God, but to achieve this end (telos), we have as our mark or immediate goal (skopos) in this life the attainment of purity of heart.

All the arts and sciences, said he, have some goal (*skopos*) or mark; an end (*telos*) or aim of their own, on which the diligent pursuer of each art has his eye, and so endures all sorts of toils and dangers and losses, cheerfully and with equanimity, e.g., the farmer, shunning neither at one time the scorching heat of the sun, nor at another the frost and cold, cleaves the earth unweariedly, and again and again subjects the clods of his field to his ploughshare, while he keeps before him his goal; viz., by diligent labour to break it up small like fine sand, and to clear it of all briars, and free it from all weeds, as he believes that in no other way can he gain his ultimate end, which is to secure a good harvest, and a large crop; on which he can either live himself free from care, or can increase his possessions. Again, when his barn is well stocked he is quite ready to empty it, and with incessant labour to commit the seed to the crumbling furrow, thinking nothing of the present lessening of his stores in view of the future harvest. Those men too who are engaged in mercantile pursuits, have no dread of the uncertainties and chances of the ocean, and **fear** no risks, while an eager hope urges them forward to their aim of gain. Moreover those who are inflamed with the ambition of military life, while they look forward to their aim of honours and power take no notice of danger and destruction in their wanderings, and are not crushed by present losses and **wars**, while they are eager to obtain the end of some **honour** held out to them.

And our profession [as monks and as Christians in general] too has its own goal (*skopos*) and end (*telos*), for which we undergo all sorts of toils not merely without weariness but actually with delight; on account of which the want of food in **fasting** is no

trial to us, the weariness of our vigils becomes a delight; reading and constant meditation on the Scriptures does not pall upon us; and further incessant toil, and self-denial, and the privation of all things, and the horrors also of this vast desert have no terrors for us. And doubtless for this it was that you yourselves despised the love of kinsfolk, and scorned your fatherland, and the delights of this world, and passed through so many countries, in order that you might come to us, plain and simple folk as we are, living in this wretched state in the desert. Wherefore, said he, answer and tell me what is the goal (*skopos*) and end, which incite you to endure all these things so cheerfully.

And when he insisted on eliciting an opinion from us on this question, we replied that we endured all this for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.

To which he replied: Good, you have spoken cleverly of the (ultimate) end (*telos*). But what should be our (immediate) goal (*skopos*) or mark, by constantly sticking close to which we can gain our end, you ought first to know.

And when we frankly confessed our ignorance, he proceeded: The first thing, as I said, in all the arts and sciences is to have some goal (*skopos*), i.e., a mark for the mind, and constant mental purpose, for unless a man keeps this before him with all diligence and persistence, he will never succeed in arriving at the ultimate aim (*telos*) and the gain which he desires. For, as I said, the farmer who has for his aim to live free from care and with plenty, while his crops are springing has this as his immediate object and goal; viz., to keep his field clear from all brambles, and weeds, and does not fancy that he can otherwise ensure wealth and a peaceful end, unless he first secures by some plan of work and hope that which he is anxious to obtain. The business man too does not lay aside the desire of procuring wares, by means of which he may more profitably amass riches, because he would desire gain to no purpose, unless he chose the road which leads to it: and those men who are anxious to be decorated with the honours of this world, first make up their minds to what duties and conditions they must devote themselves, that in the regular course of hope they may succeed in gaining the honours they desire.

And so the end (*telos*) of our way of life is indeed the kingdom of God. But what is the (immediate) goal (*skopos*) you must earnestly ask, for if it is not in the same way discovered by us, we shall strive and wear ourselves out to no purpose, because a man who is travelling in a wrong direction, has all the trouble and gets none of the good of his journey. And when we stood gaping at this remark, the old man proceeded: The end of our profession indeed, as I said, is the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven: but the immediate aim or goal, is purity of heart, without which no one can gain that end: fixing our gaze then steadily on this goal, as if on a definite mark, let us direct our course as straight towards it as possible, and if our thoughts wander somewhat from this, let us

revert to our gaze upon it, and check them accurately as by a sure standard, which will always bring back all our efforts to this one mark, and will show at once if our mind has wandered ever so little from the direction marked out for it.

As those, whose business it is to use weapons of war, whenever they want to show their skill in their art before a king of this world, try to shoot their arrows or darts into certain small targets which have the prizes painted on them; for they know that they cannot in any other way than by the line of their aim secure the end and the prize they hope for, which they will only then enjoy when they have been able to hit the mark set before them; but if it happens to be withdrawn from their sight, however much in their want of skill their aim may vainly deviate from the straight path, yet they cannot perceive that they have strayed from the direction of the intended straight line because they have no distinct mark to prove the skillfulness of their aim, or to show up its badness: and therefore while they shoot their missiles idly into space, they cannot see how they have gone wrong or how utterly at fault they are, since no mark is their accuser, showing how far they have gone astray from the right direction; nor can an unsteady look help them to correct and restore the straight line enjoined on them.

So then the end indeed which we have set before us is, as the Apostle says, eternal life, as he declares, having indeed your fruit unto holiness, and the end eternal life; Romans 6:22 but the immediate goal is purity of heart, which he not unfairly terms sanctification, without which the afore-mentioned end cannot be gained; as if he had said in other words, having your immediate goal in purity of heart, but the end life eternal. Of which goal the same blessed Apostle teaches us, and significantly uses the very term, i.e., σκοπός, saying as follows, Forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those that are before, I press toward the mark, for the prize of the high calling of the Lord: Philippians 3:13-14 which is more clearly put in Greek κατὰ σκοπὸν διώκω, i.e., I press toward the mark, as if he said, With this aim, with which I forget those things that are behind, i.e., the faults of earlier life, I strive to reach as the end the heavenly prize. Whatever then can help to guide us to this object; viz., purity of heart, we must follow with all our might, but whatever hinders us from it, we must shun as a dangerous and hurtful thing. For, for this we do and endure all things, for this we make light of our kinsfolk, our country, honours, riches, the delights of this world, and all kinds of pleasures, namely in order that we may retain a lasting purity of heart.

And so when this object is set before us, we shall always direct our actions and thoughts straight towards the attainment of it; for if it be not constantly fixed before our eyes, it will not only make all our toils vain and useless, and force them to be endured to no purpose and without any reward, but it will also excite all kinds of thoughts opposed to one

another. For the **mind**, which has no fixed point to which it may return, and on which it may chiefly fasten, is sure to rove about from hour to hour and minute to minute in all sorts of wandering thoughts, and from those things which come to it from outside, to be constantly changed into that state which first offers itself to it.

For hence it arises that in the case of some who have despised the greatest possessions of this world, and not only large sums of gold and silver, but also large properties, we have seen them afterwards disturbed and excited over a knife, or pencil, or pin, or pen. Whereas if they kept their gaze steadily fixed out of a pure heart they would certainly never allow such a thing to happen for trifles, while in order that they might not suffer it in the case of great and precious riches they chose rather to renounce them altogether. For often too some guard their books so jealously that they will not allow them to be even slightly moved or touched by any one else, and from this fact they meet with occasions of impatience and death, which give them warning of the need of acquiring the requisite patience and **love**; and when they have given up all their **wealth** for the **love** of **Christ**, yet as they preserve their former disposition in the matter of trifles, and are sometimes quickly upset about them, they become in all points barren and unfruitful, as those who are without the charity of which the Apostle speaks: and this the blessed Apostle foresaw in spirit, and though, says he, I give all my goods to feed the **poor**, and give my body to be burned, but have not charity, it profits me nothing. **1 Corinthians 13:3** And from this it clearly follows that perfection is not arrived at simply by self-denial, and the giving up of all our goods, and the casting away of honours, unless there is that charity, the details of which the Apostle describes, which consists in purity of heart alone. For not to be **envious**, not to be puffed up, not to be **angry**, not to do any wrong, not to seek one's own, not to **rejoice** in iniquity, not to think **evil** etc., what is all this except ever to offer to God a perfect and clean heart, and to keep it free from all disturbances?

Everything should be done and sought after by us for the sake of this. For this we must seek for solitude, for this we **know** that we ought to submit to **fastings**, **vigils**, toils, bodily nakedness, reading, and all other **virtues** that through them we may be enabled to prepare our heart and to keep it unharmed by all **evil passions**, and resting on these steps to mount to the perfection of charity, and with regard to these observances, if by accident we have been employed in some good and useful occupation and have been unable to carry out our customary discipline, we should not be overcome by vexation or **anger**, or passion, with the object of overcoming which, we were going to do that which we have omitted. For the gain from **fasting** will not balance the loss from **anger**, nor is the profit from reading so great as the harm which results from despising a brother. Those things which are of secondary importance, such as **fastings**,

vigils, withdrawal from the world, meditation on Scripture, we ought to practise with a view to our main object, i.e., purity of heart, which is charity, and we ought not on their account to drive away this main **virtue**, for as long as it is still found in us intact and unharmed, we shall not be hurt if any of the things which are of secondary importance are necessarily omitted; since it will not be of the slightest use to have done everything, if this main reason of which we have spoken be removed, for the sake of which everything is to be done.

For on this account one is anxious to secure and provide for one's self the implements for any branch of work, not simply to possess them to no purpose, nor as if one made the profit and advantage, which is looked for from them, to consist in the bare fact of possession but that by using them, one may effectually secure practical **knowledge** and the end of that particular art of which they are auxiliaries. Therefore **fastings**, **vigils**, meditation on the **Scriptures**, self-denial, and the abnegation of all possessions are not perfection, but aids to perfection: because the end of that science does not lie in these, but by means of these we arrive at the end. He then will practise these exercises to no purpose, who is contented with these as if they were the highest good, and has fixed the purpose of his heart simply on them, and does not extend his efforts towards reaching the end, on account of which these should be sought: for he possesses indeed the implements of his art, but is **ignorant** of the end, in which all that is valuable resides. Whatever then can disturb that purity and peace of mind — even though it may seem useful and valuable — should be shunned as really hurtful, for by this rule we shall succeed in escaping harm from mistakes and vagaries, and make straight for the desired end and reach it.

Reading for Edification and Inspiration

Some excellent books about Confessors of the Faith under Communism from Romania, Russia, and Georgia deserve your attention. These accounts will move and inspire you. All are available from St. Herman's Press and through our bookstore

A Little Corner of Paradise: The Life and Teachings of Elder Paisius of Sibla

Eternity in the Moment: The Life and Wisdom of Elder Arsenie Papacioc

Fr. George Calciu: Interviews, Homilies, and Talks Shepherd of Souls: The Life and Teachings of Elder Cleopa On Earth We're Just Learning How To Live, Archpriest Valentin Biryukov (Russia)

Earthly Angel, Heavenly Man: The Life and Teachings of Elder Vitaly of Tbilisi, Georgia

Upcoming Events 2021

25 November: Thanksgiving Day Liturgy, 8:00 a.m.
14 December, Tuesday: Holy Unction, 6:30 p.m.

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!