

The Confessor's Tongue for December 5, A. D. 2021

24th Sunday After Pentecost: St. Sabbas the Sanctified

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.

How to Be as Children to Be the Sons of God St. Nicholas of Zicha (+1956)

"Verily I say unto you; except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven" (Mt. 18:3).

Thus speaks the Lord, and His word is holy and true. What sort of primacy do children have over adults? They have a threefold primacy: in faith, in obedience, and in purity. Children question their parents about everything, and believe whatever reply their parents give. A child is obedient to his parents and easily subjects his will to theirs. A child is pure and, although he quickly becomes angry, he quickly forgives. The Lord demands these three things of all men: faith, obedience, and purity. He seeks that men should believe in Him unconditionally, that they should be pure in their bearing towards another, not remember evil and not returning evil for evil.

Faith, obedience, and purity are the chief characteristics of a child's soul. Added to these are also passionlessness and joy. A child is not greedy, nor lascivious, nor ambitious; he has an eye untroubled by vice and a joy undisturbed by cares.

O my brethren! Who can make us children again? None but the one Christ. He is able to make us children once more, and to aid our rebirth by His example, His wisdom, and the power of His Holy Spirit.

O Lord Jesus, perfect in obedience and purity, the eternal Child of the heavenly Father: help us to be as infants by faith in Thee, by obedience to Thee, and by purity towards one another. To Thee be glory and praise for ever. Amen.

The Choir & the Congregation

Orthodox worship is a work of the people, but it requires trained personnel to lead it. Such is the ministry of the choir: to lead the congregation in hymning their Creator and Savior. As beautiful, harmonious singing can work powerfully on the souls of both those who execute it and hear it, a church choir must strive to be the best it can be not only to offer praise worthy of God but to draw those who hear its beauty to God who is supreme Beauty.

Singer is a ministry in the Church. A singer sings in the choir with the blessing of the priest and the permission of the choir director, offering his God-given voice and ear to serve God's people. To discharge this well requires training and work: not only the personal work of learning to use one's voice, to read music, and to hit the right notes, but also the communal work of learning to sing with the other singers under the director's direction. It also requires humility, for a singer must humble himself to follow the director and to blend his voice with the rest of the singers for the best overall sound rather than trying to show it off. A dozen egos will sing harmoniously together only with the sacrifice of time and effort to hone their skills and the ascetic labor of cutting off self-will, vainglory, and cultivating humility. Good chemistry in choir comes through

frequent rehearsal and each member's diligent cultivation of his spiritual life. Only one or two egos out of control suffice to mar a choir.

For the reasons above, only members of the choir may normally sing in the area set aside for the choir. Every person present in the nave is invited to sing in the nave as the gifts of each permit, but only those with sufficient gifts and who have submitted to the training and discipline of singing as a choir may sing at the stands. Sometimes when choir members are few at the stands, others think they can "help out" by coming over to sing, but unless invited by the priest or director to do so, they should not. Two voices trained to sing together will generally sound better than two trained and two untrained together.

Over the years, our choir has done well under Deacon Anthony's direction, but it has plenty of room for improvement. We continue to take steps to improve the quality of our choir's singing here at St. Maximus that we may offer to the Lord a more beautiful and intelligible hymn of praise.

Much of the beauty of our worship depends on the choir, but not all. We, the people in the nave, we too, are responsible to do our part to make it beautiful. We do this by making our joyful noise to the Lord, but not without restraint or awareness. The choir is there to lead us: when we sing, we must listen to it and do our best to follow, matching pace and pitch. We are to sing in such a way that we blend with others around us rather than causing our voice to stand out in a distinctive way, not singing so loudly we (or others around us) cannot hear the choir or so that others are annoyed if our joyful noise is not on pitch or in harmony. Self-awareness is essential here. (This also means we teach our children, too, to blend their voices rather than to belt, regardless of how cute we may think it to be.) Singing in this way glorifies God and uplifts our neighbor—and will have power to touch the hearts of our visitors. As the choir works to improve its part, may the rest of us also work to improve our part to the glory of God and the higher lifting up of our hearts to Him. *Fr. Justin*

An Orthodox Confession Which Leads the Inward Man to Humility *From "The Way of a Pilgrim"*

Turning my eyes carefully upon myself and watching the course of my inward state, I have verified by experience that I do not love God, that I have no religious belief, and that I am filled with pride and sensuality. All this I actually find in myself as a result of detailed examination of my feelings and conduct, thus:

1. I do not love God. For if I loved God I should be continually thinking about Him with heartfelt joy. Every thought of God would give me gladness and delight. On the contrary, I much more often and much more eagerly think about earthly things, and thinking about God is labor and dryness. If I loved God, then talking with Him in prayer would be my nourishment and delight and would draw me to unbroken communion with Him. But,

on the contrary, I not only find no delight in prayer, but even find it an effort. I struggle with reluctance, I am enfeebled by sloth, and am ready to occupy myself eagerly with any unimportant trifle, if only it shortens prayer and keeps me from it. My time slips away unnoticed in futile occupations, but when I am occupied with God, when I put myself into His presence every hour seems like a year. If one person loves another, he thinks of him throughout the day without ceasing, he pictures him to himself, he cares for him, and in all circumstances his beloved friend is never out of his thoughts. But I, throughout the day, scarcely set aside even a single hour in which to sink deep down into meditation upon God, to inflame my heart with love of Him, while I eagerly give up twenty-three hours as fervent offerings to the idols of my passions. I am forward in talk about frivolous matters and things which degrade the spirit; that gives me pleasure. But in the consideration of God I am dry, bored and lazy. Even if I am unwillingly drawn by others into spiritual conversation, I try to shift the subject quickly to one which pleases my desires. I am tirelessly curious about novelties, about civic affairs and political events; I eagerly seek the satisfaction of my love of knowledge in science and art, and in ways of getting things I want to possess. But the study of the Law of God, the knowledge of God and of religion, make little impression on me, and satisfy no hunger of my soul. I regard these things not only as a non-essential occupation for a Christian, but in a casual way as a sort of side-issue with which I should perhaps occupy my spare time, at odd moments. To put it shortly, if love for God is recognized by the keeping of His commandments (If ye love Me, keep My commandments, says our Lord Jesus Christ), and I not only do not keep them, but even make little attempt to do so, then in absolute truth the conclusion follows that I do not love God. That is what Basil the Great says: 'The proof that a man does not love God and His Christ lies in the fact that he does not keep His commandments'.

2. I do not love my neighbor either. For not only am I unable to make up my mind to lay down my life for his sake (according to the Gospel), but I do not even sacrifice my happiness, well-being and peace for the good of my neighbor. If I did love him as myself, as the Gospel bids, his misfortunes would distress me also, his happiness would bring delight to me too. But, on the contrary, I listen to curious, unhappy stories about my neighbor and I am not distressed; I remain quite undisturbed or what is still worse, I find a sort of pleasure in them. Bad conduct on the part of my brother I do not cover up with love, but proclaim abroad with ensure. His well-being, honor and happiness do not delight me as my own, and, as if they were something quite alien to me, give me no feeling of gladness. What is more, they subtly arouse in me feelings of envy or contempt.

3. I have no religious belief. Neither in immortality nor in the Gospel. If I were firmly persuaded and believed without doubt that beyond the grave lies eternal life and recompense for the deeds of this life, I should be continually thinking of this. The very idea of immortality would terrify me and I should lead this life as a foreigner who gets ready to enter his native land. On

the contrary, I do not even think about eternity, and I regard the end of this earthly life as the limit of my existence. The secret thought nestles within me: Who knows what happens at death? If I say I believe in immortality, then I am speaking about my mind only, and my heart is far removed from a firm conviction about it. That is openly witnessed to by my conduct and my constant care to satisfy the life of the senses. Were the Holy Gospel taken into my heart in faith, as the Word of God, I should be continually occupied with it, I should study it, find delight in it and with deep devotion fix my attention upon it. Wisdom, mercy, love, are hidden in it; it would lead me to happiness, I should find gladness in the study of the Law of God day and night. In it I should find nourishment like my daily bread and my heart would be drawn to the keeping of its laws. Nothing on earth would be strong enough to turn me away from it. On the contrary, if now and again I read or hear the Word of God, yet even so it is only from necessity or from a general love of knowledge, and approaching it without any very close attention, I find it dull and uninteresting. I usually come to the end of the reading without any profit, only too ready to change over to secular reading in which I take more pleasure and find new and interesting subjects.

4. I am full of pride and sensual self-love. All my actions confirm this. Seeing something good in myself, I want to bring it into view, or to pride myself upon it before other people or inwardly to admire myself for it. Although I display an outward humility, yet I ascribe it all to my own strength and regard myself as superior to others, or at least no worse than they. If I notice a fault in myself, I try to excuse it, I cover it up by saying, 'I am made like that' or 'I am not to blame'. I get angry with those who do not treat me with respect and consider them unable to appreciate the value of people. I brag about my gifts: my failures in any undertaking I regard as a personal insult. I murmur, and I find pleasure in the unhappiness of my enemies. If I strive after anything good it is for the purpose of winning praise, or spiritual self-indulgence, or earthly consolation. In a word, I continually make an idol of myself and render it uninterrupted service, seeking in all things the pleasures of the senses, and nourishment for my sensual passions and lusts.

Going over all this I see myself as proud, adulterous, unbelieving, without love to God and hating my neighbor. What state could be more sinful? The condition of the spirits of darkness is better than mine. They, although they do not love God, hate men, and live upon pride, yet at least believe and tremble. But I? Can there be a doom more terrible than that which faces me, and what sentence of punishment will be more severe than that upon the careless and foolish life. that I recognize in myself?

Upcoming Events 2021

14 December, Tuesday: Holy Unction, 6:30 p.m.
25 December, Nativity of our Lord
31 December, 10:00 p.m. All-Night Vigil

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!