

The Confessor's Tongue for February 6, A. D. 2022

33rd Sunday After Pentecost; Zacchaeus; St. Photius of Constantinople

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.

February 6: St. Photius

Saint Photius, Patriarch of Constantinople, "the Church's far-gleaming beacon," lived during the ninth century, and came from a family of zealous Christians. His father Sergius died as a martyr in defense of holy icons. Saint Photius received an excellent education and, since his family was related to the imperial house, he occupied the position of first state secretary in the Senate. His contemporaries said of him: "He so distinguished himself with knowledge in almost all the secular sciences, that it rightfully might be possible to take into account the glory of his age and compare it with the ancients."

Michael, the young successor to the throne, and Saint Cyril, the future Enlightener of the Slavs, were taught by him. His deep Christian piety protected Saint Photius from being seduced by the charms of court life. With all his soul, he yearned for monasticism.

In 857 Bardas, who ruled with Emperor Michael, deposed Patriarch Ignatius (October 23) from the See of Constantinople. The bishops, knowing the piety and extensive knowledge of Photius, informed the emperor that he was a man worthy to occupy the archpastoral throne. Saint Photius accepted the proposal with humility. He passed through all the clerical ranks in six days. On the day of the Nativity of Christ, he was consecrated bishop and elevated to the patriarchal throne.

Soon, however, discord arose within the Church, stirred up by the removal of Patriarch Ignatius from office. The Synod of 861 was called to end the unrest, at which the deposition of Ignatius and the installation of Photius as patriarch were confirmed.

Pope Nicholas I, whose envoys were present at this council, hoped that by recognizing Photius as patriarch he could subordinate him to his power. When the new patriarch proved unsubmitive, Nicholas anathematized Photius at a Roman council.

Until the end of his life Saint Photius was a firm opponent of papal intrigues and designs upon the Orthodox Church of the East. In 864, Bulgaria voluntarily converted to Christianity. The Bulgarian prince Boris was baptized by Patriarch Photius himself. Later, Saint Photius sent an archbishop and priests to baptize the Bulgarian people. In 865, Saints Cyril and Methodius were sent to preach Christ in the Slavonic language. However, the partisans of the Pope incited the Bulgarians against the Orthodox missionaries.

The calamitous situation in Bulgaria developed because an invasion by the Germans forced them to seek help in the West, and the Bulgarian prince requested the Pope to send his bishops. When they arrived in Bulgaria, the papal legates began to substitute Latin teachings and customs in place of

Orthodox belief and practice. Saint Photius, as a firm defender of truth and denouncer of falsehood, wrote an encyclical informing the Eastern bishops of the Pope's actions, indicating that the departure of the Roman Church from Orthodoxy was not only in ritual, but also in its confession of faith. A council was convened, censuring the arrogance of the West.

In 867, Basil the Macedonian seized the imperial throne, after murdering the emperor Michael. Saint Photius denounced the murderer and would not permit him to partake of the Holy Mysteries of Christ. Therefore, he was removed from the patriarchal throne and locked in a monastery under guard, and Patriarch Ignatius was restored to his position.

The Synod of 869 met to investigate the conduct of Saint Photius. This council took place with the participation of papal legates, who demanded that the participants sign a document (Libellus) condemning Photius and recognizing the primacy of the Pope. The Eastern bishops would not agree to this, and argued with the legates. Summoned to the council, Saint Photius met all the accusations of the legates with a dignified silence. Only when the judges asked him whether he wished to repent did he reply, "Why do you consider yourselves judges?" After long disputes, the opponents of Photius were victorious. Although their judgment was baseless, they anathematized Patriarch Photius and the bishops defending him. The saint was sent to prison for seven years, and by his own testimony, he thanked the Lord for patiently enduring His judges.

During this time the Latin clergy were expelled from Bulgaria, and Patriarch Ignatius sent his bishops there. In 879, two years after the death of Patriarch Ignatius, another council was summoned (many consider it the Eighth Ecumenical Council), and again Saint Photius was acknowledged as the lawful archpastor of the Church of Constantinople. Pope John VIII, who knew Photius personally, declared through his envoys that the former papal decisions about Photius were annulled. The council acknowledged the unalterable character of the Nicene-Constantinople Creed, rejecting the Latin distortion ("filioque"), and acknowledging the independence and equality of both thrones and both churches (Western and Eastern). The council decided to abolish Latin usages and rituals in the Bulgarian church introduced by the Roman clergy, who ended their activities there.

Under Emperor Basil's successor, Leo, Saint Photius again endured false denunciations, and was accused of speaking against the emperor. Again deposed from his See in 886, the saint completed the course of his life in 891. He was buried at the monastery of Eremia.

The Orthodox Church venerates Saint Photius as a “pillar and foundation of the Church,” an “inspired guide of the Orthodox,” and a wise theologian. He left behind several works, exposing the errors of the Latins, refuting soul-destroying heresies, explicating Holy Scripture, and exploring many aspects of the Faith.

It is against our will that we were placed under this yoke. . . . We have suffered violence. . . we have been detained against our wishes. . . we have receive votes against our will, we have been made bishop in spite of our tears, our complaints, our affection and despair. This was not done in secret, for all know the great violence to which I was subjected. . . . I have lost a sweet and tranquil life. . . . I have lost m precious leisure and my communication, so pure and delightful, with my friends. It was a communication without grief, double dealing, and recrimination. No one hated me then, and I accused and hated no one, neither at home nor abroad. . . . All were good to me. *St. Photius on being made Patriarch*

The Sayings of St. Anthony the Great 5

Abba Anthony said, “Whoever has not experienced temptation cannot enter into the kingdom of Heaven.” He even added, “Without temptation, no one can be saved.”
Saying 5 in *The Sayings of Desert Fathers*

Commentary: We don’t usually think of temptation as something that assists us on the path of salvation. How can it be? Why do we need temptation and trials to be saved?

The word ‘temptation’, *peirasmos*, refers both to a temptation or enticement to sin and to tests and trials, which may tempt us to sin by complaining, doubting, grumbling against God, growing angry, taking matters into our own hands.

The Apostle James tells us how Christians are to respond to temptations: “My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let have patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.” The Christian suffering temptations can and must rejoice in them because he understands they are a sign that God loves him, has hope for his transformation, and is not finished with him yet. God loves us too much to leave us in our sinful, enfeebled state. He desires to raise us out of the mire of sin and fill us with His life and power. He accomplishes this in part through trials and temptations.

Thus, we are to accept temptations joyfully, knowing that God uses them to perfect us. Moreover, we know from St. Paul that God does not allow us to be tempted beyond what we can bear, always makes of way of escape for us, and that His grace is sufficient for us to patiently endure whatever He permits us to face face. Consider the following words from the Desert Fathers on the subject:

‘Abba Poemen said of Abba John the Dwarf that he had prayed God to take his passions away from him so he might be free from care. He went and told

an old man this: “I find myself in peace, without an enemy.” The old man said to him, “Go, beseech God to stir up warfare so that you may regain the affliction and humility that you used to have, for it is by warfare that the soul makes progress.” So he besought God, and when warfare came, he no longer prayed that it might be taken away, but said, “Lord, give me strength for the fight.”

We must give thanks for the temptations and trials, knowing that God is using them to strengthen our faith and prepare us for His Kingdom. But some are in the habit of grumbling, cursing, complaining, and getting angry in the face of trials and temptations. This reveals a lack of faith in God’s promises and a fixation on getting one’s own way in life for one’s own ends rather than submitting to God’s will for salvation. Here is where the cross taken up at baptism goes to work, to crucify our old man with his passions and desires that the new man made after the image of Christ may be formed in his place. By embracing trials with faith and thanksgiving, we take up our cross and cooperate with God (instead of resisting Him) in His work of conforming us to Christ.

The following words of Abba Poemen should comfort and aid us in temptation: Abba Poemen was asked for whom the saying “Do not be anxious about tomorrow” (Matt 6:34) is suitable. The old man said, “It is said for the man who is tempted and has not much strength, so that he should not be worried, saying to himself, ‘How long must I suffer this temptation?’ He should rather say every day to himself, ‘Today.’”

Looking at temptations in the long term overwhelms us and leads us to despair, especially when we have succumbed to those temptations and sinned again and again. Rather we must learn to see only today’s struggle, for today is the only time in which we live, and the only time God gives grace and bread. Today and every day we ask for “our daily bread” which includes the grace we need for today’s battles. Yesterday is past, and we can do nothing to change it. Regardless of what happened yesterday, today we have the power to make a beginning of good, as St. Arsenius the Great always prayed: “Lord, even though I’ve done nothing good before Thee, grant by Thy grace that I may make a beginning of good.” Tomorrow has yet to come, and Christ told us not to worry about it. God does not give us grace today to bear tomorrow’s struggle (or next year’s) ahead of time; He gives grace only for today when we actually need it. Worrying about tomorrow and allowing our mind be filled with ‘what ifs’ is a recipe for spiritual defeat.

Whatever our struggle, if we face it only ‘today’, day by day, and each day seek to make a beginning of good, we shall have success against the necessary temptations and trials sent to us to test and refine our faith.

As a final encouragement, St. James says, “Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried [or proved], he shall receive the crown of life,

which the Lord hath promised to them that love him." Only the fire of temptation and trial reveals the quality of our faith, proves that it is genuine and strong. The Patriarchs Job and Abraham passed through the fire of temptation to have their faith revealed as pure. The Apostles did, the Saints did, and every Christian must. But having passed through it and having our faith refined by it and proven to be pure and true, we receive the crown of life from the Lord. *Fr. Justin Frederick*

The All-Night Vigil: The Kathisma

After the Great Litany, comes the first kathisma from the Psalter, Psalms 1-8. one of the twenty parts into which the Psalter is divided. Each kathisma is further subdivided into three "stases" each (stasis, singular). The name comes from the Greek verb "to sit," and one may sit during the reading of the kathisma Psalms. (Note that the word Akathist comes from the same Greek root, but means "without sitting.")

Usually one kathisma is read at each daily Vespers except on Sunday evening (or the evening after a vigil), and two kathismata are read at each Matins service. Thus is the whole Psalter prescribed to be read in the Church each week throughout the year, except Great Lent, when it is appointed to be read through twice a week.)

Normally, the kathisma is chanted by the reader, but on festive occasions, such as the Resurrectional Vigil each Saturday evening, the vespersal kathisma is sung. Though the full first kathisma is appointed, typically only six selected verses from the first stasis are sung, commonly known as "Blessed is the man".

From the beginning, the Psalter has been the Church's principal hymnal. It was so important, that a canon was established specifying that no one who did not know the whole Psalter by heart could be appointed bishop. Though it is not enforced today, the canon underlines the centrality of the Psalter to the prayer and worship of the early Church. Many hymns have been composed since then to supplement the Psalms, but the Psalter remains the foundation for both the prayer and worship of the Church.

The characteristic opening words of the first kathisma, "Blessed is the man, that walketh not in the counsel of the impious..." refer preeminently to Christ, the Godman, who is the exemplar for us of what it is to be a human being made in God's image.

When the kathisma, whether chanted or sung, is concluded, it is followed by a Little Litany. The Little Litany occurs frequently in the services of the Church. It comprises the first and last petitions of the Great Litany. Some may find its frequency repetitious or redundant, but, in fact, it is not so. Man is called to pray "without ceasing," and so the services of the Church train him to pray "again and again." Moreover, in Church man often struggles to give his full attention to God, to worship, and to prayer. He may come into the service from the world with a cold

heart; it takes him time to thaw out and warm up. The recurrence of the Little Litany serves to call the faithful back to prayer and to give each one present another opportunity to enter into the prayer of the Church if he missed it the first time. Even, and especially, in Church, we need God to "help us, save us, have mercy on us, and keep us" by His grace. Offering fitting prayer and worship to God is beyond us in our own strength, and we need His help to pray as we should and to be saved from the multitude of distracting thoughts that crowd our minds in church.

On Lukewarmness, cont.

Archimandrite Athanasios Mitilinaios

I know your works. I know your works that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of my mouth. Revelation 3:15-16

We need to take constant spiritual self-inventory. Am I warm? Do I feel the burning of the Holy Spirit within me? Are the spiritual members of my existence upright? Do I have spiritual impulses and inclinations? Do I get excited and do I feel God's presence in different areas of my life? Do I weep and mourn for the bad things that exist within the Church? Is the flame of missionary work burning with me like it was burning within the bishop of Philadelphia who received praise from the Lord? Am I a person of faith and boldness and not a child who draws back as Saint Paul says? *But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and keep their souls* (Hebrews 10:39). Do I love the Lord deeply enough to consider everything else rubbish for His love?

Or is it possible that I am cold? As Saint Arethas says, is it possible that I am altogether cut-off from the energy of the Holy Spirit? Is it possible that I have become a mobile refrigerator of faith and love? Is it possible that I have reached the point of being cruel, harsh, emotionless, merciless, uncaring, antisocial, individualistic, hardened, unlove, tearless, having a heart of stone? And worse yet, is it possible that I took a few categories from those things that refer to being hot and a few categories from those things that refer to being cold and mixed them together, thus having the hot qualities become lukewarm and finally ending up being neither cold nor hot, but lukewarm? Of course, this means that I will end up being nothing.

The Lord uses five adjectives, one after the other, to classify this state. *Do you not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked?* My friends, let's consciously name ourselves wretched, so that we can be happy some day. Let's acknowledge how miserable we are all by ourselves and how poor we are, so the Lord will not have to say to us what He says in the verses of the parable, *If they invite you to a banquet, go and sit at the last place all the way in the back because you will tell yourself, I am insignificant. I am unimportant* (Luke 14:9, 10).

Do not do this out of an inferiority complex because then it is egoism; feelings of inferiority stem from egoism. Truly, have the consciousness of *I am nothing*. I am unimportant, wretched, and miserable. Then the friend who invites you will come and tell you: "My friend, come up front. I want you to sit closer to the front and not back there." ON the contrary, the Lord says in this parable of the banquet to those who want to be first; if you go and enthrone yourself in the first position He will tell you: "I am sorry, but this seat is reserved for someone else." So, while everyone will be seated, you will have to get up and start looking for a seat. But, all the places will be taken and you will have no choice. You will have to go and take the seat all the way in the first row, the last position, and, of course, this will be very embarrassing.

This is why we must recognize our wretchedness and our poverty. Let's do this on our own. Let's also acknowledge the blindness of our soul and in so doing we will begin to see the things that cannot be seen by those who claim that they can see. Let's also recognize our nakedness in the area of holiness. Let's not claim that we are saints; then Christ will envelop us with virtues granted to us by His grace. If we fail to do this His threat is close by. *I will vomit you out of my mouth—I will vomit you*. As you may know, if we want to induce vomiting, we drink lukewarm water.

That is why this is such a beautiful epistle. It is so greatly and so *well* aimed. When we drink tea or some other beverage, hot chocolate or coffee, whether it is hot or lukewarm or even cold, we do not feel like vomiting. If we drink water very cold or even very hot, we do not vomit. Now why don't you try lukewarm water? Your stomach will begin to feel funny. You will begin to get nauseated. That's why Christ says *you are lukewarm*. Figuratively speaking, He's saying, "I tried to drink you, but I became nauseated." Christ says: *And I will vomit you*. So, the hot is found in God's love. The cold, those that are cold, have many possibilities of becoming hot. But the one who was hot in the past and suffered a loss of temperature has not hope. He is in a state of hopelessness because, as I told you previously, he lives the psychology of self-sufficiency and self-righteousness or self-assurance. The result is rejection by the Lord.

However, there still seems to be some hope because of God's philanthropy. *I will vomit you*. He does not say *I am vomiting you*, but *I will vomit you* – and it's like He is saying: I am giving you some time yet to make the necessary adjustments. There is something more. *I counsel you to buy from me gold reined by fire, that you may be rich, and white garments to clothe you and to keep the shame of your nakedness from being seen, and anoint your eyes with salve that you may see (Rev. 3:18)*. All these things the Lord says, *I counsel you to buy from me*. All these things are to be found in Christ because Christ is the gold, the precious treasure Who, when someone finds it, then sells *everything* to buy the land, which contains the precious treasure.

Christ is the precious pearl, and when someone finds it, he sells all the other pearls, diamonds, and rubies he owns He sells them all to buy this one and only precious pearl. Christ is the white garment and the wedding gown as well. He says in the parable of the wedding banquet, *Friend, how did you enter here, how did you enter without having a wedding garment?* "I see your bridal chamber, my Saviour, in its full splendor and I do not have a wedding garment to enter therein," which we chant during Holy Week. I do not have a garment, meaning, I see your Kingdom, (the bridal chamber of Christ is the Kingdom), but I do not have a wedding garment. I have not been clothed of You, *As many as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ* (Galatians 3:27).

Come and acquire garment from Me that you may be clothed so people will not see the shame of your nakedness and laugh at your expense. I will give you an example: when you don't have Christ, you get drunk and walk the streets, you may even take your clothes off and people laugh at you. When you don't have Christ and you lack the criterion of modesty and you bow down to the latest expression of fashion, sometimes you look like a clown and people laugh at you behind your back. Let's say you are a senior citizen, but you think and act like a teenager. You dye your hair, use heavy makeup, and you end up looking like a clown. When you have a measure of modestly, when you have Christ, you can walk without being ashamed.

Christ is the Light of the world, and he who has this Light, as St. John the Evangelist says, *will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life* (John 8:12). By this, he means that the eyes of a healthy soul are wide open. So use the eye ointment called Christ, my brothers, and your eyes will be opened. You will be able to see clearly. Christ truly is eye salve for spiritual vision. When you take holy Scripture in your hands, you will then say, what do I see? I see things that I could never have seen before! Yes, it's because of the eye drops, the salve that you used to remove the scales from your eyes. Christ came and He opened your eyes.

After this harsh and strict language of our Lord to the bishop of Laodicea—did you see how harshly he talks to him?—the moderation of the language the follows explains the purpose behind this strictness. *As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore, be zealous and repent* (Revelation 3:19). The Lord's harshness here is moved by His love. St. Andrew of Caesarea says, "What philanthropy! This reproof is mixed with so much goodness!" So the spring of this harshness is love. The Lord is forced to be harsh because of his great love and philanthropy [love of man].

Upcoming Events 2021

26-27 February: Archbishop Alexander visits
6 March Forgiveness Sunday
7-12 March Clean Week
17-23 April Great & Holy Week

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!