

The Confessor's Tongue for February 13, A. D. 2022

Sunday of the Publican & the Pharisee; St. Martinian, Simeon the Myrrhgusher
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 13: St. Simeon the Myrrhgusher

Saint Simeon the Myrrh-Gusher, King of Serbia Stephen Nemanya was the Great Zhupan of Serbia, and lived during the twelfth century. The saint toiled much for his fatherland: he united a large portion of the Serbian lands, and strove for the political independence of his country from the Byzantine Empire. In his zeal for the Orthodox Church, he defended his nation against heresy and false teaching.

At the age of eighty, Stephen went to Mt. Athos, where his son Saint Savva (January 12), was glorified by the holiness of his life. Together they restored the desolate Hilandar monastery, to which monks from various lands began to gather.

Saint Simeon was a great ascetic and wise guide for the monks. He died on February 13, 1200, and his relics began to exude myrrh. Saint Savva transported his father's relics back to Serbia, and placed them in a church of the Most Holy Theotokos at the River Studenitsa. Saint Simeon had richly adorned this church while he was still ruler of Serbia.

The Sayings of St. Anthony the Great 6

Abba Pambo asked Abba Anthony, "What ought I to do?" and the old man said to him, 'Do not trust in your own righteousness, do not worry about the past, but control your tongue and your stomach.'

Saying 6 in *The Sayings of Desert Fathers*

Commentary: The unspoken, assumed goal in the question is "What should I do to be saved? to make progress in the spiritual life? to enter into union with Christ who through the incarnation entered into union with me?"

Trusting in one's own righteousness is a pitfall of those who have made some progress, and it is deadly to spiritual life. A man comes to trust in his moral goodness ("I'm not like those sinners"), in his generosity ("I tithe every month"), his faithful prayer ("I read all the morning and evening prayers every day"), his fasting ("I don't break the fast like some"), etc. It leads to comparing himself with others, considering himself better than others, to pride, vainglory, and judging of others. We must keep our eyes on Christ and the saints so we don't think that we have achieved some great righteousness in comparison with others around us. 'A haughty spirit goes before a fall', and judging others deprives us of God's grace. If there is any good in us, it is by Christ's grace and the power of the Holy Spirit in us, not of ourselves. Understanding that we have received the virtues and gifts that we have, we shall not glory in them as though we had not received them, that is, as though they were the product of our own efforts.

Memory of the past can overshadow our present life, either by bringing us to despair over old failures or to vaunt in past success. The past is gone. The

future is not yet. We have only the present moment in which to live. There we live day-by-day trusting in God for everything. St. Paul says that he forgets what is behind and reaches for what is ahead to win the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Assuming we have thoroughly repented of our past sins and confessed them, we should not dwell on them or let the enemy bring us into despair over them. Instead, we keep our eyes on Christ who delivers us from the past and gives us a beginning of good.

Two things difficult to control must be brought into submission to Christ: our tongues and our stomachs. The Apostle James says that if a man can control his tongue, he is perfect, able to control the whole body as well. Our tongues are to be used to glory God and give thanks to Him, and to speak truth to edify and build up one another, as well as to enable us to carry out the necessary daily business of living. We readily use the tongue for amusement, for building ourselves up, for tearing others down, for criticizing, cursing, blaming, judging. How much evil is brought into being in our world through the careless use of our tongues! How much harm we do to others merely to gratify our own egos or to advance our selfish interests! We lead others into sin when we criticize, judge, and gossip about others. The Spirit is grieved and quenched in us and God's grace is lost through the misuse of the tongue.

"All man's labor is for his mouth, and yet the appetite is not filled," says Solomon (Ecclesiastes 6:7). Our need to eat drives us to work. But we can let our need for food become all-consuming and make satisfying the needs of our belly and body the goal of our life, whether consciously or, what is more likely, unconsciously. St. Paul writes about those who "are enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things" (Philippians 3:18-19). We make a god of our belly by living to eat and to satisfy the desire of the body for pleasure and comfort beyond what it truly needs. Man properly ordered is governed by his mind illumined by the light of Christ; the illumined mind guides both the will and emotions of the soul and the body. In disordered man, the desires of the body dictate to the will and mind, and man is governed by his god, the belly.

Though it is common for Christians monks to be accused of being obsessed with sexual matters, in fact, their greater concern was food: how to eat what is necessary to take care of the body so it can be a good servant, but not so much that the body usurps its place as servant of the soul and comes to subject the soul to its pleasures. Indeed, as we make progress in our life in Christ, we become increasingly aware that sexual intemperance has its root in intemperance of the tongue and belly. St. John Cassian in his

Conferences goes so far as to assert that because Jesus conquered Satan's temptation to misuse food, He was not subsequently tempted sexually.

Controlling the tongue and belly will take us far on the path of salvation; allowing them free reign will keep us from making progress and will lead us to destruction. *Fr. Justin Frederick*

The All-Night Vigil: "Lord, I Have Cried"

Following the Little Litany and its exclamation, the vespers Psalms (140, 141, 130, 117) are sung, which are best known by the opening line, "Lord, I have cried unto Thee, hear me!" Here, the second great theme of Vespers is announced. The Vigil began with the theme of creation and its glory, which was emphasized by the open Royal Doors, the lights, and the Priest wearing his phelonion. Now the service turns to the theme of repentance. The lighting has been decreased since the opening Psalm, the Royal Doors have been closed, and the Priest has removed his phelonion further to depict for us the darkness of our fallen state in the fallen world. And in our fallen state, our only hope is cry out to the Lord.

The first two verses of the set of Psalms are sung in the appointed tone, then the reader takes over, chanting the rest. (Sometimes, however, the verses between the first two and the last verse before hymns are inserted are omitted in the interest of time.) Towards the end, stichera, or composed verses from the Octoechos, Menaion, Triodion or Pentecostarion are inserted between verses of Psalms and sung. These stichera express the meaning of that particular day in the Church calendar. The greater the feast, the more stichera are sung. The tone of the first stichera sung determines the tone in which the first verses of "Lord I have cried" are sung. At the Resurrectional Vigil, ten stichera are sung. Usually seven are from the Octoechos (the book of the 8 tones) on the theme of the resurrection, and the remaining three are from the Menaion (the book containing all the daily services for the saints) for the saint of the day.

As the opening Psalm verses are sung, the Deacon (or Priest if he serves alone) takes the censer and performs a great censuring of the temple. The meaning of this censuring is expressed by the words "Let my prayer arise as incense before Thee." The true prayers of believers are likened to incense in God's nostrils (Revelation 8:3-4). In our darkened state, we cry out to God, and He hears us, and our prayers are pleasing to Him. Father Alexander Schmemmann expresses the contrast between the opening theme of Creation and the second theme of Repentance at the Vigil:

'Because we have first seen the beauty of the world, we can now see the ugliness, realize what we have lost, understand how our whole life (and not only some trespasses) has become sin, and can repent for it. The lights are now extinguished. The Royal Doors are closed. The celebrant has put off his vestments. It is the naked and suffering man outside of Paradise, who, in full awareness of his exile, of his betrayal, of his darkness, says to God: "Out of the depths have I cried

unto Thee, O Lord." In the face of the glory of creation, there must be a tremendous sadness. God has give us another day; and we can just see how we have destroyed this gift of His.'

At the "Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit" of Lord, I have cried, the priest, having already vested himself in the phelonion, prepares for the entrance. The Royal Doors are opened as the lights are turned up. (Traditionally, the people offered unlit candles at the start of the service which were then lit by a candlelighter in preparation for the entrance and "Gladsome Light.") At "Now and ever..." the clergy and servers make the entrance. The Deacon carries the censer "on high" (upraised), the servers bear candles, and the Priest follows, quietly ['mystically'] praying the prayer of the entrance. The Deacon censures, and the Priest blesses the entrance and then they stand in their places waiting for the conclusion of the singing of the last sticheron.

The last hymn sung at "Lord, I have cried" is a special Theotokion (a hymn in honor of the Theotokos) called the Dogmaticon. The Dogmaticon expresses the Dogma of the Word of God's incarnation through the Theotokos, which is the heart of the Christian faith. The "theandric principle," that Christ is both God (Theos) and man (anthropos)—defined at the Fourth Ecumenical Council at Chalcedon in 451—is now expressed and proclaimed in a hymn. Each of the eight tones has its own Dogmaticon to hymn majestically the Mystery of the Incarnation of Christ and the role of the Ever-Virgin Mary as the Mother of God, or Theotokos. Many of the faithful know these Dogmatica by heart. For example, the Dogmaticon for tone 8 reads:

The King of Heaven, because of His love for man, appeared on earth and dwelt with men. He took flesh from the pure Virgin; and after assuming it, he came forth from her. The Son is one: in two natures, yet one person. Proclaiming Him as perfect God and perfect man, we confess Christ our God! Entreat Him, O unwedded mother, to have mercy on our souls.

Consider the teaching of this hymn. Christ is the King of Heaven, his proper place. Because of His love for man, he humbled himself to come earth and be Emmanuel, "God with us." He took on His humanity in the Virgin Mary's womb and was then born into the world as every other human child. He is one person, not two, but possesses two complete natures, one human, one divine (the teaching of the Fourth Ecumenical Council at Chalcedon). As Christians, we confess Jesus Christ to be the God-man, perfect God and perfect man in one person. He is not a mere prophet or good teacher, but the eternal God made man for us. We ask His mother to pray to Him for us. Here is the essence of the Christian faith contained in one short hymn.

The Dogmaticon illustrates the general didactic character of Orthodox worship. Worship is not divorced from dogma or basic belief. True worship must be 'in spirit', but it also must be 'in truth.' The Church's hymns teach the faith, expressing it in vivid, poetical language set to music. Presented in this way,

the Church's teaching is more easily accessible to the majority of the faithful than it would be in the form of an academic lecture. The striking figures of speech give material for meditation on God and what He has done for our salvation and union with Him, and, as the hymns are sung, they are more easily remembered. Of course, to gain the benefit from the hymns, one has to attend the service to hear them.

On Spiritual Knowledge *St. Symeon the New Theologian*

In anticipation of Archbishop Alexander's upcoming visit and talk on St. Symeon, we offer this to acquaint you better with this great saint.

Spiritual knowledge is like a house built in the midst of a secular and pagan knowledge, in which there is laid up, like a solid and well-secured chest, the knowledge of the inspired Scriptures and the inestimable riches they contain. Those who enter into the house will never at all be able to see those treasure unless this chest is opened for them. But it does not belong to human wisdom ever to be able to open it, so that the riches of the Spirit deposited in it remain unknown to all who are worldly.

A man might pick up the entire chest and carry it on his shoulders without knowing what treasure is contained in it. So a person may read the Scriptures and commit them all to memory and carry them with him as if they were but one psalm, and yet be ignorant of the gift of the Holy Spirit hidden within them. It is not by the chest that its contents are exposed, nor is it by the Scripture that the contents of Scripture become clear? How is this so? Listen!

You see a small chest, firmly secured on every side. By means of its weight and its external beauty you conjecture, or perhaps believe from what you have heard, that it contains a treasure. You pick it up quickly and go off with it. But tell me, what will it profit you if you constantly carry it about closed and locked without opening it? As long as you live, you will never see the treasure it contains; you will not see the sparkling of its precious stones, the luster of its pearls, the flashing gleam of its gold. What will you profit, if you are not found worthy to take even a small part of it to buy some food or clothing? But if, as we have said, you carry the chest about with you entirely sealed, even though it is filled with a great and constantly treasure, will you not be worn out with hunger, thirst, and nakedness? You will not profit at all!

Pay heed to me, brother, and apply this to spiritual things. Think of the chest as the Gospel of Christ and the other divine Scriptures. In them there is enclosed and sealed up eternal life together with the unutterable and eternal blessing which it contains, though unseen by physical eyes. As the Lord's word says, "Search the Scriptures, for in them is eternal life". As for the man who carries the chest about, think of him as one who learns all the Scriptures by heart and always quotes them with his mouth. He

carries them about in the memory of his soul as in a chest containing God's commandments as precious stones where is eternal life. For Christ's words are light and life, as He Himself says, "He who does not obey the Son shall not see life". Together with the commandments, it contains the virtues, like pearls.

To express it differently, just as the illiterate cannot read books like those who are literate, neither can those who have refused to go through the commandments of Christ by practicing them be granted the revelation of the Holy Spirit like those who have brooded over them and fulfilled them and shed their blood for them.

From the commandments spring the virtues, and from them the revelation of the mysteries that are hidden and veiled in the letter. From the fulfillment of the commandments comes the practice of the virtues; through the practice of the virtues the commandments are fulfilled. Thus by means of these the door of knowledge has been opened to us; or, rather, it has been opened, not by them, but by Him who has said, "he who loves Me will keep My commandments, and My Father will love him, and I will reveal Myself to him." When, therefore, God "lives in us and moves among us" and perceptibly reveals himself to us, then we consciously contemplate the contents of the chest, the divine mysteries that are hidden in the divine Scripture. Let no one deceive himself—in no other way it is possible for the chest of knowledge to be opened to us, and for us to enjoy the good things that it contains and partake of them and contemplate them.

But what are these good things of which I speak? They consist in perfect love (that is toward God and our neighbor), contempt of all things that are visible, mortification of the flesh and "its members that are on earth", including evil desire. Just as a dead man has no thought whatever and perceives nothing, so we ourselves shall have no thoughts of evil desire or of passionate sentiment at any time. We shall not feel the tyrannical oppression of the evil one, but be mindful only of the commandments of our Savior Christ. We shall think of immortality, of the incorruption of eternal glory, of the kingdom of heaven, of our adoption as sons through the regeneration of the Holy Spirit. Thereby we become sons by adoption and grace, we are called "heirs of God and fellow-heirs of Christ," and together with these things we acquire "the mind of Christ" and through Him see God and Christ Himself dwelling in us and moving among us in a way that we can know.

All these things are granted to those who hear God's commandments and do them; they enjoy them abundantly together with those unutterable and ineffable things that are above these things, through the opening of the chest of which we have spoken, that is, the uncovering of the eyes of our minds and the contemplation of the things that are hidden in Holy Writ. But others, who lack the knowledge and experience of any of the things of which we have spoken, have no taste of their sweetness, of the

immortal life derived from them, since they lean on the mere study of the Scriptures. Nay, rather, this very study will judge and condemn them at their departure from this life even more than those who have not heard the Scriptures at all. Some of these men err through ignorance and pervert all the divine Scriptures as they interpret them in accordance with their passionate desires. They wish to comment themselves as though there were to be saved apart from the exact observance of Christ's commandments, and so they altogether deny the power of the Holy Scriptures.

This is natural, for the things that are sealed up and closed, unseen and unknown by all men, are opened up by the Holy Spirit alone. When they have thus been unveiled they become visible and knowable to us. How then will those who claim that they have never known at all the Holy Spirit's presence, radiance, illumination, and His coming to dwell in them have the power to know or perceive or thing of them in any way? How shall they apprehend such mysteries, who have never at all experienced in themselves the recasting, renewal, transformation, reshaping, regeneration, that He bring about? Those who have not yet been baptized in the Holy Spirit, how can they know the change that comes over those who have been baptized in Him? Those who have not been "born from above" (as the Lord said), those who have been born of God and have become the children of God? Those who have refused to experience this, but by their negligence have missed this glory—for they have received the power to become such—tell me, what knowledge will enable them to understand or in any way imagine what the others have become?

God is Spirit, invisible, immortal, inaccessible, incomprehensible. Those who are born of Him He makes to be such as himself, like the Father who has begotten them. They may be touched and seen in body only; in other respects they are known to God alone and know only Him; or, rather, they wish to be known to God alone and constantly strive to look to Him and are anxious to be seen by Him. To express it differently, just as the illiterate cannot read books like those who are literate, neither can those who have refused to go through the commandments of Christ by practicing them be granted the revelation of the Holy Spirit like those who have brooded over them and fulfilled them and shed their blood for them. The man who takes a sealed and closed book cannot see what is written in it nor can he understand its subject as long as the book remains sealed, even though he may have learned all the wisdom of the world.

Likewise, even he who, as we have said, has learned all the divine Scriptures by heart will never be able to know and perceive the mystical and divine glory and power hidden in them without going through all God's commandments and taking the Paraclete with him. The Paraclete will open to him the words like a book and mystically show him the glory they contain. Indeed, with the eternal life that causes them to spring forth, He will as well reveal the blessings of

God hidden in them, blessing that are veiled and utterly invisible to the despisers and the negligent. This is to be expected, since they have nailed all their sense to the vanity of the world and are passionately attached to the pleasures of life and to physical beauty. But since the vision of their souls is dimmed, they are unable to see and to contemplate the intellectual beauties of God's unutterable blessings.

One whose bodily eyes are weak cannot at all look on a brightly shining sunbeam; if he stares at it he at once loses such sight as he still has. So he whose spiritual eyes are weak and whose senses are subject to passions cannot contemplate the excellence or beauty of a body without passion or harm to himself. Whatever peace of thought he possessed before, whatever calm of evil desire, he loses them as he lingers to reflect on the passion. Consequently, such a person is wholly unable to perceive even his own infirmity. For if he has that that he was sick, it was because he believed that there were others who were healthy, and perhaps he blamed himself for being the cause of his sickness and was concerned for getting rid of it. Now, however, such a person holds that all men are subject to passions and looks on himself as their equal, and claims that it is impossible for him to be better than all others. Why is this? So that this wretched man may with them succumb to passion, since he is unwilling to rid himself of such an evil. Had he been willing, he would have had the strength, for he would have received the ability from God. For as many of us as were baptized into His Name have received from Him the power to divest ourselves of our past inborn corruption like an old garment, and to become sons of God and clothed with Christ.

But far be it from us, brethren, to become like those who take this attitude and think such thoughts, men of earth, and utterly dried up. Rather, may we follow Christ, who has died for us, and has risen, and exalted us to heaven. Let us continually follow in His footsteps, being cleansed by penitence from the defilement of sin and clothed in the birth garment of incorruption that belongs to the Spirit, in the same Christ our God, to whom is due all glory, honor, and adoration, forever and ever. Amen. *St. Symeon the New Theologian: The Discourses, #24*

Upcoming Events 2021

26-27 February: Archbishop Alexander visits; February 26,
Talk on St. Symeon the New Theologian, 2:30 p.m.
6 March Forgiveness Vespers, 5:00 p.m.
7-12 March Clean Week
17-23 April Great & Holy Week

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!