

The Confessor's Tongue for February 20, A. D. 2022

Sunday of the Prodigal Son; St. Cornelius of Pechory

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.

Set Our Souls Aflame!

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.

Make no mistake! God is a fire, and has come as fire, and has cast fire on the earth. The same Fire goes about looking for kindling to seize upon, for a ready disposition and will, in order to fall upon it and ignite it. And in those in whom it is kindled, it rises up into a great flame and reaches to the heavens, and it allows the one so enflamed neither delay nor rest. Neither, as some people imagine about the dead, does it consume the burning soul unawares—for the soul is not lifeless matter—but with perception and knowledge and, in the beginning, with unbearable pain, since the soul is both feeling and rational. Afterwards, when it has completely cleansed us of the filth of the passions, it becomes food and drink, light and joy without ceasing within us, and, by participation, it makes us light ourselves.

It is like a clay pot that has been set on the fire. At first, it is somewhat blackened by smoke of the burning fuel, but after the fuel has begun to burn fiercely, then it becomes all translucent and like the fire itself, and the smoke can communicate some of its blackness to it. Just so, indeed, does the soul which has begun to burn with divine longing see first of all the murk of the passions within it, billowing out like smoke in the fire of the Holy Spirit. It sees in itself as in a mirror the blackness which accompanies the smoke, and it laments. It senses its evil thoughts like thorns, and its preconceptions, being consumed like dry kindling by the fire and reduced completely to ashes. After these things have been utterly destroyed and the essence alone of the soul remains, quite without passion, then the divine and immaterial fire unites itself essentially to the soul, too, and the latter is immediately kindled and becomes transparent, and shares in it like the clay pot does in the visible fire. So, too, with the body. It too, becomes fire through participation in the divine and ineffable light.

This will never come to pass in us, however, unless we abominate the world and everything in it and unless, in accordance with the Lord's saying, we lose our own souls. That fire is kindled in us in no other way. . . .

So come, let us rise up, as many of us as wish to escape the slavery of the passions, and run to Christ, the true Master, so that we may acquire the title of His servants. Let us also strive to become such men as our discourse has just enumerated. Let us not, therefore, hold our salvation in contempt, nor fool ourselves and make excuses for our sins by saying: "It is impossible for a man of the present generation ever to become such a person." Neither let us philosophize

against our own salvation, nor argue against our very souls. Because it is indeed possible, if we will it so, and so much so that free will alone can carry us up to that height. For where, as St. Basil, says, there is a ready will, there is nothing to hinder.

God wills to make us gods from men, but only with our consent and not involuntarily. So do we then withdraw, shaking off His beneficence? How great a foolishness, madness, and ultimate stupidity, would this not be? So much does God wish that, that coming forth without departing from the bosom of the blessed Father, He descended and came down for this reason to the earth. Thus, if we, too, should wish it, there is nothing that can hinder us in any way. Only let us set out by way of ardent repentance to Him, and He, having drawn nigh to us and having touched our hearts with His spotless finger, will kindle the lamps of our souls, and will never suffer them to be quenched unto the consummation of the age, for eternity and beyond. . . . *from the Seventh Ethical Discourse*

February 20: St. Cornelius of Pechory

The Hieromartyr Cornelius of the Pskov Caves was born in the year 1501 at Pskov into the noble family of Stephen and Maria. In order to give their son an education, his parents sent him to the Pskov Mirozh monastery, where he worked under the guidance of an Elder. He made candles, chopped wood, studied his letters, transcribed and adorned books, and also painted icons. Having finished his studies, Cornelius returned to his parental home with the resolve to become a monk.

Once, the government clerk Misiur Munekhin took Cornelius with him to the Pskov Caves monastery in the woods. The solemnity of services in the cave church produced such a strong impression on Cornelius that he left his parental home forever and received monastic tonsure at the Pskov Caves monastery.

In 1529, at the age of twenty-eight, Saint Cornelius was made igumen [abbot] and became head of the monastery. While he was igumen, the Pskov Caves monastery reached its prime. The number of brethren increased from 15 to 200 men. This number of monks was not surpassed under any subsequent head of the monastery.

The activity of Saint Cornelius extended far beyond the bounds of the monastery. He spread Orthodoxy among the Esti [Aesti] and Saeti people living around the monastery, he built churches, hospices, homes for orphans and those in need. During a terrible plague in the Pskov region Saint Cornelius walked through the plague-infested villages to give Communion to the living and to sing burial services for the dead.

During the Livonian war Saint Cornelius preached Christianity in the occupied cities, built churches, and

distributed generous aid from the monastery storerooms to the Esti and Livonians suffering from the war. At the monastery he selflessly doctored and fed the injured and the maimed, preserved the dead in the caves, and inscribed their names in the monastery Synodikon for eternal remembrance.

In the year 1560, on the Feast of the Dormition of the Mother of God, Saint Cornelius sent a prosphora and holy water as blessing for the Russian armies besieging the city of Thellin. On that very day the Germans surrendered the city.

In 1570 when a See was established in Livonian Yuriev, a certain Igumen Cornelius was appointed as Bishop of Yuriev and Velyansk (i.e., Thellin). Some have identified him with Saint Cornelius, but this does not correspond with actual events.

Saint Cornelius was a great lover of books, and at the monastery there was quite a collection of books. In 1531 his work entitled, "An Account of the Origin of the Pechersk Monastery" appeared. In the mid-sixteenth century the Pskov Caves monastery took over the tradition of writing chronicles from the Spaso-Eleaszar monastery.

At the start of the chronicles were accounts of the first two Pskov chronicles from 1547 to 1567. Besides this, Igumen Cornelius left behind a great monastery Synodikon for remembering the deceased brothers and benefactors of the monastery, and from the year 1588 he began to maintain the "Stern Book" ["Kormovaya kniga": since the rear of a ship is called the stern, the sense of the title is "looking back in remembrance"]. He also compiled a "Description of the Monastery" and a "Description of the Miracles of the Pechersk Icon of the Mother of God."

Saint Cornelius expanded and beautified the monastery, he further enlarged the monastery caves, he moved the wooden church of the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste beyond the monastery enclosure to the monastery gate, and on its site he built a church in the name of the Annunciation of the Most Holy Theotokos in the year 1541. In 1559, he constructed a church dedicated to the Protection of the Most Holy Theotokos.

The Caves monastery, on the frontier of the Russian state, was not only a beacon of Orthodoxy, but also a bulwark against the external enemies of Russia.

In 1558-1565, Saint Cornelius built a massive stone wall around the monastery, and over the holy gates, he built a stone church dedicated to Saint Nicholas, entrusting the protection of the monastery to him. In the church was a sculpted wooden icon of "Nicholas the Warrior."

In the chronicle compiled by the hierodeacon Pitirim, the martyr death of Saint Cornelius was recorded: "This blessed Igumen Cornelius ... was igumen forty-one years and two months. Not only as a monk, but also by his fasting and holy life, he was an image of salvation ... in these times there was much unrest in the Russian land. Finally, the earthly Tsar (Ivan the Terrible) sent him from this corruptible life

to the Heavenly King in the eternal habitations, on February 20, 1570, in his 69th year." (This information is on a ceramic plate, from the ceramics covering the mouth of the tomb of Saint Cornelius).

In the ancient manuscripts of the Trinity-Sergiev Lavra it was written that Igumen Cornelius came out from the monastery gates with a cross to meet the Tsar. Ivan the Terrible, angered by a false slander, beheaded him with his own hands, but then immediately repented of his deed, and carried the body to the monastery. The pathway made scarlet by the blood of Saint Cornelius, along which the Tsar carried his body to the Dormition church, became known as the "Bloody Path." Evidence of the Tsar's repentance was the generous recompense he made to the Pskov Caves monastery after the death of Saint Cornelius. The name of the igumen Cornelius was inscribed in the Tsar's Synodikon.

The body of Saint Cornelius was set into the wall of "the cave formed by God," where it remained for 120 years without corruption. In the year 1690, Metropolitan Marcellus of Pskov and Izborsk, had the relics transferred from the cave to the Dormition cathedral church and placed in a new crypt in the wall.

On December 17, 1872 the relics of Saint Cornelius were transferred from the former tomb into a copper-silver reliquary. They were placed into a new reliquary in 1892. It is presumed that the service to the martyr was composed for the Uncovering of the Relics in the year 1690.

The Sayings of St. Anthony the Great 7

Abba Anthony said, "I saw the snares that the enemy spreads out over the world, and I said, groaning, 'What can get through such snares?' Then I heard a voice saying to me, 'Humility.'"

Saying 7 in *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*

Commentary: The snares the enemy lays out by which to catch and destroy souls are many and powerful. Looking at our own world, how shall we escape gluttony, with so many varied foods to suit every taste in such great quantity available around the clock? How shall we escape lust and fornication in a when sensual images assail us from all sides, modesty and virginity are lost virtues, and sexual encounters are nearly free for the asking? How shall we escape greed, stinginess, and envy in a society that glories in conspicuous consumption? How shall we avoid telling and being enslaved by lies in a world of image over substance, manipulation, deliberate deception? How shall we avoid error when even the notion Truth is denied and all opinions and positions are treated as being of equal value? How shall we avoid sloth in a culture of entertainment, whose constantly expressed desire is "don't work too hard" and "take it easy"? How shall we be motivated to undertake the hard work of repentance when there are so many means of escape available to us to numb the pain of guilt and feelings of inadequacy? And if we by some means

escape the common pitfalls and sins of our age, how shall we avoid judging those who do not and taking pride in our own righteousness?

Who, if not the Lord, will save us from this wicked and perverse generation?

St. Anthony was granted to see the snares that the enemy spreads, and he groaned in despair of escaping them. How may one escape them? How can we sinners resist the compelling advertising of the enemy?

The answer given to Anthony is not one our world prescribes for troubles: humility. The world celebrates pride, but who sets holidays to celebrate humility? Humility says, "I am weak; of myself, I can do nothing good. Left to myself, I will be overcome and will fall. If I haven't fallen today like my neighbor, I surely will tomorrow. Unless Christ stretches out His hand to catch me, I shall surely sink in the sea like Peter. If there is any good in me, any resistance to sin, any victory over my passions and over the enemy, it is entirely due to God's grace at work in me. Let me cry out to God for help now and always that I not fall into any snare."

Humility places no confidence in man and all its trust and hope in God. God gives grace, not to the proud, but to the humble, to those who recognize their need (James 4:10, I Peter 5:6). "Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up." Man's task is to humble himself; God's task is to lift up. He lifts up those who, recognizing their weakness and susceptibility to sin, persist in crying out to Him for help in every need and in giving glory to Him for every victory.

The man with humility sees his own sins and reproaches himself and does not see the sins of others. As St. Macarius of Optina says, "Let the following be for you signs of humility or pride: the latter scorns everyone, reproaches them, and sees darkness in them, while the former sees only his own faults and does not dare to judge anyone." Such is humility which delivers from demonic snares.

Amma Theodora [one of the Desert Mothers] said that neither asceticism, nor vigils, nor any kind of suffering are able to save, only true humility can do that. There was an anchorite [hermit] who was able to banish demons; and he asked them, "What makes you go away? Is it fasting?" They replied, "We do not eat or drink." "Is it vigils?" They replied, "We do not sleep." "Is it separation from the world?" "We live in deserts." "What power sends you away then?" They said, "Nothing can overcome us, but only humility." "Do you see how humility is victorious over the demons?" Humility is alien and repellent to the proud hosts of hell.

God, on the other hand, is humble. "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto

death, even the death of the cross" (Philippians 2:5-8). Christ, who had every right to glory over man by virtue of His Divinity humbled Himself rather, and in so doing won Himself the name above every name at which every knee will bow. We are to have the same mind of humility in us, and that humility is our only path to victory over the proud hosts of hell.

So powerful is humility, that St. Barsanuphius of Optina says "With only humility, one can be saved, even without any works." In the *Prologue from Ochrid*, there is a story (March 30) that illustrates this point. A monk was lazy, careless, and lacking in his prayer life. But when he lay dying, he was happy. When the brethren, who knew his faults, asked how it was that a monk with so many sins could die joyfully, he replied: "I now see angels who are showing me a page containing my numerous sins. I said to them, 'Our Lord said: *Judge not, and ye shall not be judged*. I have never judged anyone, and I hope in the mercy of God that He will not judge me.' And the angels tore up the paper with my sins." Upon hearing this, the monks were astonished and edified.

Humility allows us to receive the grace of God we need to stand. Only through humility can we escape the enemy's snares *Fr. Justin Frederick*

The All-Night Vigil: Gladsome Light & Prokeimenon

At the conclusion of the Dogmaticon, the Deacon raises the censer yet higher and traces the sign of the cross with it directly before the Royal Doors as he intones, "Wisdom! Stand upright!" Then he and the Priest enter the sanctuary through the Royal Doors and the choir sings the evening hymn "Gladsome Light."

"Gladsome Light", or the lamplighting hymn, is mentioned as early as the third century in Christian documents, but it may be still older. The hymn proclaims Christ's coming as the Light of the world and introduces a third theme to Vespers. Fr. Alexander Schmemmann writes:

Now comes the third theme of Vespers, that of Redemption. Into this world of sin and darkness, light has come: "O Gladsome Light of the holy glory of the immortal Father, heavenly, holy, blessed Jesus Christ!" The world is at its evening because the One bringing the final meaning to the world has come; in the darkness of this world, the light of Christ reveals again the true nature of things. This is not the world it was before Christ came: His coming now belongs to the world. The decisive event of the cosmos has taken place. We know now that the event of Christ must transform everything to do with our lives. It was only because of Christ that we had the heart to glory in the creation at the beginning of Vespers, only because He gave us the eyes to "behold God's gracious hand in all His works."

Now in the time in which we can thank God for Christ, we begin to understand that everything is transformed in Christ into its true wonder. In the

radiance of His light, the world is not commonplace. The very floor we stand on is a miracle of atoms whizzing about in space. The darkness of sin is clarified, and its burden shouldered. Death is robbed of its finality, trampled down by Christ's death. In a world where everything that seems to be present is immediately past, all is in Christ able to participate in the eternal present of God. This very evening is the real time of our life.

It is difficult for us who live in a world artificially lighted around the clock to appreciate how precious light was to man in earlier times. Night was an effective cover for evil deeds, and no light available then to man could do much to dispel it. It was at this point in the service, after sunset, that the candles were lit and the connection is drawn between the light of the candles and the light of Christ coming into the world to dispel the night of sin and evil. This light is indeed cause for rejoicing!

As the hymn "Gladsome Light" is sung, the clergy (and servers) enter the sanctuary and prepare for the prokeimenon by venerating the altar and going to the high place at the east end of the sanctuary.

Before the prokeimenon is chanted, however, the priest intones, "Peace be to all." Here, standing facing the people, the priest (or bishop) is a living icon of Christ as through him and his words Christ offers His peace to His people. After the Resurrection, Jesus often addressed his disciples with these words. It is not just a greeting, but the impartation of something essential to us. As we live in a world hostile to Christian faith in many ways, especially in temptations and persecutions, we may be tempted to worry and fret. Rather, we are to remember the words Christ spoke to His disciples on the night He was betrayed: "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14:27). Each time the priest gives the peace, we should through him hear Christ Himself speaking peace to us.

The word "prokeimenon" comes from the Greek and means "what is set forth," that is, what is appointed to be read. A prokeimenon (plural "prokeimena") consists of selected verses from the Psalms which are sung before readings from the Holy Scriptures. Prokeimena occur first, at Vespers after "Gladsome Light," second, at Matins on Sundays and feasts before the Gospel, and third, at the Divine Liturgy before the Epistle.

At one time, the whole Psalm from which the prokeimenon is taken was sung, but gradually the Psalm was reduced to the key verse (the refrain) and the first verse, which identified the Psalm. Since many Christians knew the Psalter nearly by heart, they readily recognized the Psalm from which the prokeimenon was taken. Since every Sunday is a major feast of the Resurrection and the prokeimenon for Saturday refers to Sunday, the prokeimenon at Vespers is a "great prokeimon," which simply means that more verses accompany it. The prokeimenon is

Psalm 92 which begins: "The Lord hath become King, with beauty hath He clothed Himself."

Vladyka Dmitri's translation of the prokeimenon is of interest here. The standard OCA translation (and those of other jurisdictions) based on the Revised Standard Version of the Old Testament read "The Lord IS king, He is clothed with majesty". Modern translations read "the Lord reigns." But there is a problem with these translations. The Greek verb in Psalm 92:1 is aorist in tense (past, *ebasileusen*) and the Slavonic verb *воцарися* is also past tense. We find the same verb in the aorist tense in Psalm 96:1, 98:1 (LXX), and Revelation 19:6, made famous in Handel's chorus: "Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth." The Greek verb indicates something that happened in the past, but the aorist is difficult. It does not mean an action completed in the past with enduring results in the present (perfect), or a progressive ongoing action or repeated action in the past (imperfect). The Slavonic verb indicates something that happened and was completed in the past. Literally, it means "to come to the throne". So how are we to understand this?

God as God has reigned over His creation always. If these passages merely assert God's kingship as God, the verbs would not be in the aorist tense. Theologically, there is another aspect to God's kingship to consider. While God cosmically is king from eternity, in another sense, by taking human flesh, clothing himself in human nature and glorifying it, by facing temptation, the devil, and death and prevailing over these mortal enemies of man, he has won the right to be king of mankind. Revelation 19:6 celebrates Christ's putting down all enemies and beginning to reign without opposition at His second coming. Psalm 92:1 then may be taken to speak prophetically about what the Son of God accomplishes by becoming incarnate and trampling down death by death: he becomes the rightful king of mankind by His service and victory. He comes to the throne, much as the rightful heir Aragorn comes to the throne of Gondor in *Lord of the Rings*—but only after winning the right and doing the service to his people of defeating the enemy. He does this in us personally at Baptism and universally at His Second Coming. So the dynamic rendering "the Lord hath become King", "the Lord hath begun to reign", or "the Lord hath come to the throne" captures the meaning better than the static "the Lord reigns," and thus it glorifies Christ for the accomplishments of His incarnation.
To Be Continued

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!