

# The Confessor's Tongue for October 30, A. D. 2022

20<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost; Martyrs Zenobius & Zenobia

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.

## 'Lift Up the Horn'

In the prayer "O God, Save Thy People," which is prayed at Festal and Resurrectional Matins and at the Litia of Vespers, the priest prays that God will "Exalt the horn of Orthodox Christians." Later, in the Praises of Matins, we hear that God "shall exalt the horn of His people" (Psalm 148:14) And in the irmos of one of the odes of the Nativity canon, we sing "Thou hast raised up our horn, holy art thou, O Lord." This notion of "exalting the horn" is a curious one, its meaning is not obvious, but, since we hear it weekly (at least), we should know what it means—and what it is we are asking God to do for us.

The phrase comes from the Scriptures, particularly the Old Testament, where it occurs in various forms. The Prophet David calls the Lord "the horn of my salvation," my shield, and my high tower (2 Samuel 22:3; Psalm 17:2). When Hannah presented her young son, the future Prophet Samuel, to serve in the house of the Lord, she prayed, "My heart rejoiceth in the Lord, mine horn is exalted in the Lord: my mouth is enlarged over mine enemies; because I rejoice in thy salvation" (I Sam 2:1). The Psalmist warns fools and the wicked in one place (Psalm 74:4-5): "Deal not foolishly...lift not up the horn: lift not up your horn on high: speak not with a stiff neck." In another place, it is said of the good man who gives to the poor, "his righteousness endureth forever; his horn shall be exalted with honor" (Psalm 112:9). What does this exalting or lifting up of the horn mean?

Many animals familiar to the peoples of the ancient Near East, particularly bulls, defend themselves from attackers with their horns. Thus to the Hebrews and other nations, the horn was a symbol of strength and courage. A horn lifted up is one that is vigorous, strong, ready for battle, and ultimately victorious, whereas a low or fallen horn is weak and defeated.

Modern bullfighting vividly illuminates this image. In bullfighting, six-foot staves with barbed ends called *banderillas* are placed in the bull's neck to weaken it so that its head will be low enough at the end of the fight for the kill. If this is not done, the bull is able to hold its head and horns high with its powerful neck muscle, making it next to impossible for the matador to kill it with his sword and presenting the matador with a mortal threat. Thus, when we pray that God will "exalt the horn of Orthodox Christians," we pray for strength and courage to persevere unbowed in our spiritual warfare and for victory over those who attack us, namely, over the demonic powers that seek to overcome and destroy us. Later in Matins at the Praises, we are assured that God will exalt the horn of His people, for He it is who gives us the victory, and consequently, we rejoice in Him. *Priest Justin Frederick*

## The Commandments of Christ

"If ye love Me, keep My commandments." (John 14:15)  
*Ask, and it shall be given you; seek and ye shall find, knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for everyone that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened. Matthew 7:7-9*

Jesus commands us to ask, seek, and knock that we may receive, find, and have the door opened. The tense of these verbs suggests repeated, ongoing action, not a one-time work.

Sometimes, we do not have because we do not ask (James 4:2). Other times, we may ask but we do not receive because we only ask once or twice or give up and stop asking after a short time (Luke 18:1-8). Sometimes we do not gain what we seek because we do not pray fervently (James 5:16). In some cases, we do not get what we want because our motives are wrong (James 4:3)—to consume it upon our lusts—and God would only give us the things that help us attain His kingdom. It may also be that the nature of our problem is such that we must join fasting to our prayer to gain our request (Matthew 17:21).

Despite these possibilities for failure in our requests, seekings, and knockings, Christ promises that we shall receive, find, and have it opened if we ask, seek, and knock—and keep at it, not giving up. If only we believed it! If only we would pray fervently and persistently for our families, our friends, our relatives, our leaders, our enemies, believing Christ's promise, walking in obedience to His command.

We need to understand that our Lord does not distribute His treasures to the sluggard. He does not reveal Himself to the casual inquirer. He will not open to the timid. He wants us, nay commands us, to ask (or we shan't receive), to seek (or we shan't find), to knock (or it won't be opened).

Do you face trouble in your marriage, problems with your children, difficulties from enemies? Pray fervently, keep asking of God, keep seeking His face and His solution to your problem. Show God that you care about the matter. "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." *Fr. Justin Frederick*

## St. Symeon the New Theologian

[The Apostle Paul] proclaims, "Strive for peace with all men, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14). Why did he say, "Strive"? Because it is not possible for us to become holy and to be saints in an hour! We must therefore progress from modest beginnings toward holiness and purity. Even were we to spend a thousand years in this life, we should never perfectly attain to it. Rather, we must always struggle for it every day, as if mere beginners. This again Paul has shown us by saying, "Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect" (Philippians 3:12). *Discourse 5*

### The Sayings of St. Anthony the Great 38

*This is the last installment of this series. This is the fifth time it has been serialized in this publication; the first time was in 2006 and it has run about every three or four years since then. Each time it runs, the author revises and expands it. The whole reason for this series is Fr. Thomas Hopko's comment in 2006: "The whole of the spiritual life is found in the 38 sayings of St. Anthony."*

*Abba Anthony said, "If he is able to, a monk ought to tell his elders confidently how many steps he takes and how many drops of water he drinks in his cell, in case he is in error about it." Saying 38 Sayings of the Desert Fathers*

**Commentary:** It is said that if anyone refuses to get spiritual guidance from others and relies on himself to figure things out, "he has chosen a fool" as his spiritual guide. The desert fathers had a deep awareness of the deceptiveness of the human heart: "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (Jeremiah 17:9) Man is very susceptible to delusion, especially in spiritual matters, and the root of delusion is pride and thinking one can manage on one's own without the help of others, especially those who are older and more experienced. Anthony takes the principle of getting counsel and submitting one's will to an experienced guide to a length that seems incredible to us—that a monk knows how many drops of water he drinks and how many steps he takes—so that his elder can correct him if he is in error about these details in his life, for if he is in error but doesn't ask, how shall he know?

In the parish, while we are not under this sort of obedience, we still make mistakes along these lines. We do not follow the counsel giving in Confession, relying on our own wish, will, and wisdom. We make important life decisions without consulting our spiritual father, whom we consult not because he runs our life, but as a check on our own willfulness, self-deception, and ready blindness to spiritual pitfalls along the way we wish to walk. For example, it is not unusual for a couple who want to marry come to the priest only after they are engaged and have set a date. "Can you marry us on June 3 at 3:00?" The wise Christian, rather, engages his confessor from the first inklings of interest, before becoming emotionally entangled or falling into sin. He seeks counsel all along the way to help him realize God's will for himself in the matter and avoid sinful pitfalls.

A self-reliant attitude that disdains counsel is pervasive in our time. Disregard for the aged, for those in authority (consider the slogan "question authority"), for the wise and experienced combined with reliance on oneself is like trying to see without using one's eyes. Read the Proverbs of Solomon and see how many times we are advised to heed the instruction of our father and the teaching of our mother, to find victory from counsel and avoiding failure by relying on our own understanding. There we are also warned of the great harm we invite by

despising the teaching and counsel of our elders. Anthony would have us avoid such harm.

*Fr. Justin Frederick*

### Prayer of the Incense

Every time a censuring is made, the priest makes the sign of the cross over the censer and prays:

*"Incense do we offer unto Thee, O Christ our God, for an odor of spiritual sweetness, which do Thou accept upon Thy most heavenly altar, sending down upon us in return the grace of Thy Holy Spirit."*

Incense is an offering made to God. It costs us.

Incense concretely depicts the rising of our prayers to God and the sweetness He perceives in them.

Incense also evokes the sweet presence of God's Spirit.

Man offers incense, something material, something God has made and given to man in the first place, to God who is Spirit. In return for this small offering, we ask not something material but something immaterial, spiritual, and of immense value: the grace of the Holy Spirit, God's uncreated energies which penetrate, sanctify, and empower us.

In church, every time we offer incense, we should remember the great boon we ask of God: His very presence and power to come upon us. To have this awareness with each censuring will help us humbly to open our hearts to God who gives us so much in exchange for so little from us.

### Preparation for Communion at Optina Monastery

According to the monastery rule, laymen must, for two days before Communion, eat food prepared without oil. There was always a special table for those who were preparing for Communion. During this time [of preparation] one had to attend all church services. The services were set forth as follows: Vespers and the reading of the Canons lasted from 3:30 until 5:30 p.m. Afterwards, at 7:00, there was supper, and at 8:30 there were Evening Prayers in a particular church [the monastery had several churches and chapels]. Then people would go and rest until 12:30 a.m. At this time the bell would sound for Matins. This would last until 4:00 a.m. From 4:00 until 5:00, the Canons were read and the prayers before Holy Communion. We were so exhausted after the night that we were falling asleep. The early Liturgy was at 7:00 a.m.

When blessing those preparing for Communion, Elder Barsanuphius advised them, after Vespers [the night before] not to eat anything before communing the Holy Mysteries. In exceptional cases he would permit someone to have tea. *At this time, most people communed only four times a year.*

*And we think it strict to be asked to attend a two-hour vigil on Saturday night in preparation for Holy Communion! If only we understood what we are doing in Holy Communion, what a grace is given to us, what a privilege we are vouchsafed, we would not come only on Sunday morning and commune week after week neglecting Vigil and perhaps other aspects of preparation for Holy Communion.. What grace we might know, what experience of God we might have, if we prepared ourselves to commune with greater seriousness and care! From Elder Barsanuphius of Optina, by Victor Afanasiev.*

### Upcoming Events 2022

31 October, Monday: All Saints Party, 6:00 p.m.

13 November, Sunday: 3:00 p.m. Thanksgiving Meal

**GLORY BE TO GOD FOR ALL THINGS!**