

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

21st Sunday After Pentecost; St. Paul the Confessor

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.

November 6: St. Paul the Confessor

He was born in Thessalonica, and was the successor of St. Alexander. He was a "champion of Orthodoxy, like the Apostle Paul adorned with piety, with courage of soul and endurance in tribulation". For his zealous refutation of "the evil opinions of the Arians" he "endured persecution and tribulation" and four times was removed from the patriarchal throne by Emperor Constantius, who was an Arian. Finally, St. Paul was banished to a prison in Cucusa, Armenia where he died as a martyr "for the Trinity without beginning and one in essence". The Arians killed him, strangling him during the service with his omophorion in the year 350. In the year 381 his uncorrupted relics were transferred to Constantinople and in 1236 to Venice where they remain until today

Preparing for the Nativity Fast

The Nativity Fast, the 40-day period of preparation for the Nativity of our Lord, begins Tuesday, November 15 and lasts until the Liturgy the morning of the Nativity of Our Lord, December 25. The Fast is a time of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving given to us by the Holy Spirit in the Church for our spiritual benefit: for repentance, healing, cleansing, growth, and, ultimately—for knowing Christ more intimately and being filled afresh with His Spirit. The Fast is a time to lay aside the lesser things choking our lives that we may recalibrate our spiritual life to pursue the greater things God has for us.

The Fast is a wholistic effort of the whole man consisting of three main elements: prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. Now, before the Fast is upon us, is the time to prepare for our own fasting so that we know how we shall be fasting ahead of time. The Nativity Fast can be difficult for us as the surrounding world throws parties in the time leading up the Nativity, and then, when we are celebrating the twelve days of Christmas, the world has already turned away from the Feast to diet, weary already from its excesses. So we do well to plan ahead. If you have not done this before, or want to make substantial changes in your practice, or have any questions at all, please consult with your priest or confessor.

Prayer: During the Fast, we seek to advance our prayer life, keeping our rule of prayer more strictly and adding to it if we can. An easy way to increase it is to add Psalms and prostrations. We may use the Lenten Prayer of St. Ephrem if we desire. We should strive to develop a more constant awareness of God throughout the day by the use of the Jesus Prayer or other such short prayers. Prayer also includes the corporate prayer of the Church in her services. We should attend services more frequently, as the services provide support for our overall efforts.

Almsgiving: Almsgiving helps give our prayer wings. It is an act of love to give up some of the resources God has given us to benefit others who are in need. We offer several outlets for almsgiving: the almsbox and our own "food pantry" for those in need, and the collections of items needed by local ministries. One may also give to the needy or to worthy charities such as International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC) on one's own. The important thing is that we give alms, which is giving for those in need above and beyond our normal tithes and offerings.

Fasting: In many people's mind, this is what is meant by the Fast, but this is but one part. We abstain from meat, dairy products, fish, wine, and olive oil (see wall calendar for when fish, wine, and oil are permitted) and marital relations (see priest if you have questions) so that we can give ourselves to prayer and have extra means for almsgiving. We eat less: when we get up from the table, we still have "room" in our stomachs. The money we save by eating less and more simply we give as alms (above and beyond our usual tithes and offerings); here fasting has its practical social benefit. We also seek to minimize influences in our lives that draw us away from Christ or cause our hearts to grow cold or indifferent to Him. Hence, for the season we may cut back on or cut out altogether TV, movies, secular music, parties, social media, the internet, and other entertainment and replace it with prayer, Church services, works of mercy, and spiritual reading. This is a good time to unplug ourselves from as much electronic media as we can and concentrate on personal face to face relations with friends and especially family members.

Each person is strongly encouraged to choose a spiritual book for daily reading during the Fast in addition to our daily reading of Scripture, etc. These include works such as Dorotheos of Gaza, *Discourses and Sayings*, John Cassian's *Conferences*, anything by St. Theophan the Recluse, *Unseen Warfare*, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, St. John of Kronstadt's *My Life in Christ*, St. Maximus 400 *Chapters on Love*, various lives of saints such as the Optina Elders, St. Seraphim, St. Silouan, St. Nectarios, St. Elizabeth of Moscow, St. Paisios, *Wounded by Love* about St. Porphyrios, etc. It is wise to consult with your priest or confessor if you are not sure what to read. Put our Library and Bookstore to good use!

All regular communicants must make a Confession during the Fast. Those who do not commune regularly should use the Fast to prepare for Confession and Communion. We cannot expect to have spiritual health if we do not make the spiritual and physical effort involved to commune at least a three or four times a year.

If we seek to commune regularly, we must make *at least* a monthly Confession. Frequent Communion is a privilege which assumes that we are examining ourselves in confession regularly, keeping fast days, and trying to live an active Christian life throughout the week. If we won't, don't or can't do this, we should commune less frequently and carefully prepare for it each time by a Confession along with prayer and fasting. If you have any questions about how to keep the fast in your particular circumstances, please consult your Confessor or Priest.

The Commandments of Christ

"If ye love Me, keep My commandments." (John 14:15)

Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 5:17-20

Most of Christ's commands concern what we do or say, but this one addresses our thinking. It makes sense when we realize that every sin begins with a thought—a lie. By giving this command governing certain thoughts, Christ seeks to protect us for serious sins that result from accepting the thought.

"Don't think that I came to destroy or abolish the law or the prophets." Why does Christ give us this command about what we think? Why is it important for us not to think this?

Throughout the history of the Church going back to the New Testament itself, there have been those who have fallen into heresy by not observing this command of Christ.

Marcion was a Christian from Pontus on the Black Sea, a wealthy shipowner whose father was a bishop. He came to Rome in 140, gave a large gift to the Church there, and became an active member. But in 144, he was excommunicated for his teachings, and his money was returned. What happened? Marcion despised the Old Testament and its Jewishness. He felt there was an irreconcilable conflict between what he perceived as the God of the Old Testament Law and the God of love of the New Testament. He felt that only St. Paul understood this contrast between law and grace. Hence, he developed his own canon, disposing of the entire Old Testament, all the epistles except ten of Paul's, and all the Gospels but Luke's, which he edited to rid it of Jewish references. He died in 160, but his heretical teaching spread widely and troubled the Church for some time to come.

Marcion failed to keep Christ's command that we not think He came to abolish the law or the prophets. Many others have made this same mistake. Thus even

today there are Christians who do not read the Old Testament and will consider nothing to be of God unless it is explicitly written in the New.

Yet it is the same God who gave us both. Indeed, the one, holy, catholic Church is built on the foundation not only of the Apostles but also the Prophets. Both testaments are necessary to the Church; both are received by her as Spirit-inspired Scripture. Both are useful for teaching, reproof, and instruction in the Faith. Christ makes this clear in the rest of the Sermon on the Mount, where He does not destroy the Law but strengthens and deepens it. He reveals its deeper meaning to His followers and gives them the Holy Spirit to enable a higher standard of righteousness than the mere external form achieved by the Scribes and Pharisees!

The ritual law of the Old Testament is not abolished, but is fulfilled in Christ, our great High Priest who has accomplished with His once-for-all sacrifice what millions of animal sacrifices offered by the sons of Aaron could not accomplish. They were given as a type and shadow of the fullness to come, and once the fulfillment came, they were abolished in dramatic fashion: they ceased for good with the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem at the hands of the Romans in A.D. 70.

St. Augustine speaks to this in his work "Against Faustus the Manichaen":

Those first sacraments, which were observed and celebrated in obedience to the law, were by way of prior announcement of Christ who was to come. And when Christ, by his coming, had fulfilled them, they were taken away, and they were taken away because they were fulfilled; for He came not to destroy the law but to fulfill it. And no that justice of faith has been revealed and the yoke of slavery, which had suitably been given to a hard and carnal people, has been taken away from the sons of God called to liberty, other sacraments have been instituted, greater in strength, more beneficial in their use, easier of performance, and fewer in number."

The moral law of the Old Testament is also not abolished, but is strengthened and spiritualized by Christ's law of love. He himself demonstrates this in Matthew 5. Not only is murder forbidden, but the anger that leads us to disparage a brother and which can lead to murder. Not only is adultery forbidden, but lustful looks and thoughts. Not only are we to keep our sworn oaths, but also our simply given word, displacing the need for oaths at all. Not only are we to love our neighbor, but also our enemy. Thus, instead of rejecting the Law of the Old Covenant, we are to understand and live its deeper meaning in Christ.

Fr. Justin Frederick

Upcoming Events 2022

13 November, Sunday: 3:00 p.m. Thanksgiving Meal
15 November – 24 December Nativity Fast
20 December, 6:30 p.m. Holy Unction

GLORY BE TO GOD FOR ALL THINGS!