

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

22nd Sunday After Pentecost; St. John Chrysostom

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.

Prayer to One's Guardian Angel

This prayer is found in the canon to the guardian angel, one of the three canons prayed before Holy Communion. It may be used separately. We do well to pray to our guardian angel daily in this wise. It may be read. It may be sung to troparion tone 2, for which purpose it is marked.

In fervent love I cry to thee, O Guardian of my soul, / my all-holy Angel: / protect me and keep me always from the entrapment of the evil one. / Direct me to the heavenly life, / enlightening, illumining, and strengthening me.

Prayer for Deliverance from the Antichrist

St. Anatoly the Younger of Optina (+1922)

We do well to pray this prayer in our times, seeing the evil in our world and the power of the demonic temptations around us, and knowing that the spirit of antichrist has been at work in the world to destroy souls from the time of the apostles. Pray it for yourself, your natural family, your church family.

Deliver me, O Lord, from the deceptions of the God-hating and evil antichrist, whose coming is at hand, and shelter me from his snares in the secret desert of Thy salvation. Grant me, O Lord, strength and courage to firmly confess Thy Most Holy Name, that I may not abandon Thee because of fear of the devil, and that I may not deny Thee, my Saviour and Redeemer, nor Thy Holy Church. Grant me, O Lord, tears and lamentation for my sins, and spare me, O Lord, in the hour of Thy Dread Judgement. Amen.

On Creation & Providence

Metropolitan Hierotheos Vlachos

The Old Testament says literally, "*The Lord had closed her womb*" [Hannah, Samuel's mother] and a little further on, "*The Lord had closed her womb and did not give her a child.*"

These excerpts show the uncreated providence of God, Who personally directs the world. There exists within creation, not simply 'natural laws,' but what are called 'inner spiritual principles (*logoi*)'. St. Maximus the Confessor speaks about "*The inner principles (logoi) of things*". The inner principles of things are the same as the uncreated energy of God.

It should be stated that in patristic theology there are two basic doctrines concerning the creation and preservation of the world. One is that the world was created from nothing. This teaching is contrary to the Platonic view, that the world we see is the result of the fall from the real world, which is the world of ideas. The Fathers teach that the world came from nothing, from non-existent matter. Their other doctrine is that the world, which was created from nothing, is personally directed by God, without the intervention of created things and laws. When

something is repeated in creation, this is not due to the existence of a created law, but is the result of the reliability of the uncreated providence of God, who wills always to act in this way.

We clearly see here that God "*closed her womb*", so this is not simply a natural occurrence, something physical. God closes the womb and God opens the womb. This is not just a natural law but the governing and providential energy of God.

In St. John Chrysostom's commentary on this passage, he refers to something that happened in his ear: husbands used to blame their wives if they did not conceive. He says that many people "*are so unreasonable as to accuse the women*". It is characteristic that he uses the word "Unreasonable" here, because in reality this is not the work of nature but the work of God. Those who blame women when they do not conceive are unaware that "*bearing children has its origin above, in God's providence, and neither woman's nature, nor living together, nor anything else is sufficient to bring it about*". A woman's ability to conceive is an act of divine providence. This has to be said from two points of view. On the one hand, there should be no indignation if she does not conceive, and, on the other hand, when God allows the conception of a child, it is a sin for people to do everything to prevent its conception. The problem is not ethical but purely theological. No one can oppose when God permits and blesses the birth of children.

An objection could be raised to this passage from St. John Chrysostom. It could be said that there are some cases of childlessness that are due to physical causes, such as damage to bodily organs. We do not deny this, and we do not forbid science to work towards curing these physical ailments, as far as this is possible and within limits, so as not to violate the human being's personality. However, we should believe firstly, that if there happens to be an infirmity, God permits it, and, secondly, God also acts through medical science when it keeps within certain limits and fulfills certain conditions. . . .

Another point that needs to be stressed is that children are a blessing and gift from God to humankind. This is how parents should deal with them. When someone gives us a present, we do not make it into an absolute. We remember the one who gave it to us—our memory refers back to the giver. The same should happen in this case. We should not make gods of children or idolize them, but should regard them as God's gifts to us. This will free us from many forms of unhealthy psychological dependence, which torment parents no less than children themselves. We should stand before them with awe and respect, as gifts of God.

Why, in spite of many years of prayer, did God not hear Hannah's entreaty that He give her a child? In answer to this question, St. John Chrysostom says

that it was because God wanted to make known the woman's 'philosophy'. By 'philosophy' he means her way of life and her faith. Despite her sorrow and her grief, God did not put an end to her despondency, "bringing about something else much greater". God did not close Hannah's womb because He hated her or because He turned away from her, "but in order to open to us the doors of the philosophy possessed by that woman, so that we might behold her abundant faith and know that He makes her ore radiant because of it."

God has a particular plan and a saving purpose. He wanted to make Hannah an example for man people. He wanted to manifest her faith and her patience, and to show people the result and fruit of faith in God and prayer. The result is that she did not bear an ordinary human being but the great and gentle Prophet Samuel. Instead of being childless, God made her the mother of a Prophet. Had she had children like Peninnah, she and her children would have remained unknown. However, as she gave birth do Samuel, after such a severe trial, she is known throughout the world.

This shows that we out to submit to God's providence. If we suffer various trial in our life, we ought not to be overwhelmed by despair. We should turn to God with great faith, and, as St. John Chrysostom says, "wait for God's providence".

From the book The Seer, pp. 22-25

The Commandments of Christ

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

And he cometh, and findeth them sleeping, and saith unto Peter, Simon, sleepest thou? couldest not thou watch one hour? Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation. The spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak. Mark 14:37-38

Christ commands His disciples to be alert, to be watchful, to be sober-minded because their adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. The Christian is to resist the prowling enemy and make him flee, but he will not be able to offer effective resistance if he is not alert to recognize the enemy's presence. Should he fall asleep like the Peter James and John, the battle is over.

Christian life is unrelenting spiritual warfare with the spiritual forces of wickedness. When an army is in the field, it always posts sentries to keep watch lest the enemy attempt a surprise attack. So important was keeping watch that sentries who fell asleep on duty could be punished with death for endangering the whole army. The watchfulness of the Christian preserves him from the enemy's attempts to surprise him with a sneak attack and catch him unawares at a great disadvantage.

In dealing with human enemies, the mind and its alertness is a man's most important weapon. A well-known teacher of self-defense with a pistol, Jeff Cooper, developed the following color codes for levels of alertness to help his students be mentally prepared

for self-defense. Here they are as described by William Levinson:

Condition White means a person is daydreaming, talking on a cell phone, or is otherwise unaware of what is going on around him. Criminals love to catch victims in Condition White because the usual result of a surprise attack is total paralysis. Many carjacking victims are shot not because they resist, but because they freeze so thoroughly that they cannot even obey the robber's order to surrender the vehicle.

It is noteworthy, by the way, that the Nazis were able to murder upward of 10 million people at a relatively low cost to their own lives (the Warsaw Ghetto uprising was one of the few exceptions) by keeping them collectively in Condition White. Jews and other victims were not told they were being taken to extermination camps; they were told they were being "relocated."

Humans, and possibly domestic livestock, are the only animals that live even part of their lives in Condition White. All wild animals live their entire lives in Condition Yellow, and law enforcement experts suggest that law-abiding people should do so as well.

Condition Yellow is a prudent level of vigilance, and this vigilance stops many potentially deadly confrontations before they even begin. This is because there is not much difference between the decision processes that criminals and predatory animals use. If a carnivore wins a fight, he gets a meal. If a criminal wins a fight, he gets the victim's property, or the enjoyment of a sexual assault. In either case, however, the attacker cannot risk anything but the most trivial injuries. If the predatory animal is hurt badly in a fight, the meal it just killed will be its last, because it will be unable to catch another. No rational criminal wants to get hurt, either, and even a non-fatal gunshot wound will almost certainly lead to an arrest. No rational criminal will therefore attack somebody who is in Condition Yellow; he does not know for sure that even a smaller and physically weaker victim won't do him some damage.

Pearl Harbor was obviously not caught in Condition White on December 7, 1941. A military base is always at no less than Condition Yellow because there are always sentries and lookouts, and Pearl Harbor also had a rudimentary radar system. The Japanese attack succeeded because the base did not go to Condition Orange when the radar operators saw things of whose identity they were uncertain.

Condition Orange means the identification of a potential threat -- a situation that "makes you uncomfortable." There is probably a good reason for this; our instincts, like those of all other animals, evolved to prevent us from becoming meals. Condition Orange is what police instructor Massaad Ayoob calls "bare fear," as opposed to "reasonable fear." You are justified in taking countermeasures to avoid the situation in question. You are emphatically not justified in even drawing a gun, much less aiming it at somebody, in Condition Orange.

If Condition Orange is the rustling in the woods that tells you a wolf might nearby, **Condition Red** means you can see the wolf approaching. If Condition Orange is seeing a suspicious group of young men on the street, Condition Red means they are coming towards you with no good intention. This is the condition that the law calls reasonable fear, and under which you may be justified in drawing a firearm. It is at this point that you decide, "If he does so-and-so [which is a direct threat to your life or that of another person], I will have to use a weapon, or a potentially lethal martial arts technique."

Cooper's color codes for levels of alertness can be readily translated into spiritual terms assist us in our daily spiritual combat with our prowling enemy. For example, one reason we fall so readily into the same sins repeatedly is that we let ourselves dwell spiritually in Condition White. We forget Christian life is warfare to the last breath. We forget that our enemy never sleeps. We forget he is always waiting, looking for an opportunity to catch us by surprise. We tend think that, because we have spiritually worked hard for a season, we may now "take a break", relax, or have a spiritual vacation. But due to the nature of our spiritual life, Christ calls us, at the very least, to live spiritually in Condition Yellow. He commands us to "watch and pray" lest we enter into temptation. And it is his disciple who thrice denied Him who tells us, "Be sober, be vigilant, for your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." There can be no success against the enemy in spiritual life without watchfulness in spiritual Condition Yellow. Like the criminals he inspires, he loves to catch us in Condition White.

Watching by itself, however, will not save us from our enemy. It make keep us from being surprised by the enemy's presence and attack, it does not win the battle. To win the battle, we must join prayer to watching, and this we shall consider next week. *Fr. Justin Frederick*

Treatment of Big Donors

From the Life of St. Moses of Optina

Father Archimandrite Moses always received every benefaction, every offering given out of love for the monastery, no matter how small, with sincere gratitude, especially in times of need. On the other hand, he was never overwhelmed by even the most sizeable contribution. Once, a family who had conferred many benefactions upon Optina Hermitage visited the monastery and stayed at a monastery guesthouse. They were displeased by some arrangement of the guestmaster and went to Abbot Moses to complain. "Look, Batiushka, we always eagerly welcome your fund collectors, we try to help them any way we can, we assist the monastery with love as much as we are able—and your guestmaster refused to do such and such for us!" "We had thought that you confer benefactions upon us for God's sake,"

relied the divinely-wise Elder, "and that you await rewards from the Lord for your good deeds. But if you expect a reward from us sinners, better not confer benefactions on us, because we the humble and heedless ones cannot reward you in any way." The visitors not only were satisfied with this explanation, but also were comforted by the Elder's frankness and later themselves recalled with pleasure and gratitude how they had received such lofty spiritual edification for their souls—instead of the apologies and catering to their self-esteem which

On Coldness in Prayer

St. Theophan the Recluse

May the grace of God be with you! You write, "My prayer is somehow going poorly." That prayer is going poorly is not the fault of the prayer, but of the one who is praying. Try to pray as you should, and the prayer will go well. If someone writes carelessly, people reprimand and threaten him, and he begins writing meticulously. Reprimand yourself, if you will, and threaten yourself with Divine judgment, and you will begin praying properly. We conscientiously correct human affairs, because people would see and reproach us. We conduct the affairs of God haphazardly, however, because the Lord is silent and does not reproach us immediately, presenting His children, as many as are benefitted by Him, the opportunity to serve Him. Oh, how bitter it will be when we will have to plead guilt in this to the Lord Himself!

Where has your prayer gone? It was going well, you know, and you were already feeling its beneficial action in your heart. I will tell you where it has gone. You prayed once or twice diligently and with warmth, and received such quick help from St. Sergius as a consequence of your prayer, that you therefore thought your prayer was already established, and there was thus nothing more to worry about concerning it, that it would go along well on its own. By permitting this kind of thinking, you began reciting the prayers carelessly and hurriedly, and ceased guarding the thoughts. Because of this, your attention became dispersed, your thoughts were scattered in different directions, and there was no prayer in the prayer. This happened a couple of times, and then prayer totally vanished. Acquire prayer from the beginning again, and ask for it from the Lord Himself.

If you are not successful in prayer, do not expect success in anything else. It is the root of everything.

You will learn from this that you must never consider any spiritual activity to be established, especially prayer; always go about it as if you were going to carry it out for the first time. First zeal is given to something that is done for the first time. If when undertaking prayer, you go about it as if you have never prayed properly yet, and only now do you want to do so for the first time, you will always carry out your prayer with first zeal. And it will go well.

I suppose you began carrying out your prayer rule hurriedly—and haphazardly—just so you would finish it. Make it a rule for yourself from now on, that you will never prayer haphazardly. Nothing offends the Lord more than this. It is better to recite a few of the set prayers with the fear of God and reverence than to recite all of them haphazardly. It is better even to fall down on your knees and recite one of the prayers or even use your own words than to do the other thing. You began praying that other way, and there are no results. Scold yourself thoroughly for such carelessness. Know that no one who prays attentively and diligently ever departs from prayer without having received its action. Oh, what good we deprive ourselves of when we permit ourselves to pray carelessly!

How does haste come about in prayer? It is not clear. We spend hours on other tasks, and it never seems long; but hardly have we begun our prayer than it seems we have been praying for who knows how long. We hurry ourselves along in order to finish sooner. There is no benefit from the prayer.

What should be done then? Some people do the following, so as not to be subject to this self-deception: They set aside a quarter of an hour for prayer, or half an hour, whatever is more convenient for them, and thus adjust their prayer time so that when the clock strikes, whether on the half hour or hour, they will know when it is time to end. While they are at prayer, they do not worry about reading a certain number of prayers, but only that they rise up to the Lord in a worthy manner for the entire set time. Others do this: Once they have established a prayer time for themselves, they find out how many times they can go around the prayer rope during that period, moving the beads in an unhurried manner. Then when they are at prayer, they move the beads unhurriedly for the set number of times, and during that period they pray to the Lord in their mind, speaking to Him in their own words or reciting set prayers, or bowing with reverence to His boundless majesty without either of those. There are others who get so accustomed to praying that the times they spend at prayer are moments of delight for them. It rarely happens that they stand at prayer for the set time only; instead, they double and triple it. Select whichever method pleases you most. Maintain it without fail. We cannot get along without a precise prayer rule for you. Those who are zealous about prayer do not need any rules.

I have already written you about memorizing the prayers and reciting them by heart when you are at prayer, without opening your prayer book. This is nothing to boast about! When you are at prayer, recite the prayer or psalm from memory, and embrace each word, not just with thought, but with feeling. If during this your own prayerful cries arise from some word of the psalm or prayer, do not cut them off, but let them come. You see, you will not worry about reciting a certain number of prayers, but only being at prayer for the allotted time, which will make itself

known either by beads on the prayer rope or by the clock.

Rush through the recitation of prayers and nothing will happen. Recite one psalm or one prayer for the whole time. Someone was saying that often he will recite a single prayer, the *Our Father*, for the entire allotted time. This is because he considers each word in the entire prayer. Another person said that when someone explained to him that one could pray in this way, he stood in reverential prayer for the entire Matins, reciting *Have mercy on me, O God*, and did not manage to complete the entire psalm.

Get accustomed to praying in this manner if you will, and God granting, you will soon cultivate prayer within yourself. Then you will no longer need any rules. Labor, for nothing will come from you otherwise. If you are not successful in prayer, do not expect success in anything else. It is the root of everything. May the Lord bless you. From *The Spiritual Life and How To Be Attuned to It, Letter 71*.

From St. Synclitica in the Desert Fathers

3. She also said, “just as the most bitter medicine drives out poisonous creatures, so prayer joined to fasting drives evil thoughts away.”

13. She also said, “It is good not to get angry, but if this should happen, the Apostle does not allow you a whole day for this passion, for he says, ‘Let not the sun go down.’ Will you wait till all your time is ended? Why hate the man who has grieved you? It is not he who has done the wrong, but the devil. Hate sickness but not the sick person.”

21. She also said, “Just as a treasure that is exposed loses its value, so a virtue which is known vanishes, just as wax melts when it is near fire, so the soul is destroyed by praise and loses all the results of its labor.”

26. She also said, “Just as one cannot build a ship unless one has some nails, so it is impossible to be saved without humility.”

27. She also said, “There is grief that is useful and there is grief that is destructive. The first sort consists in weeping over one’s faults and weeping over the weakness of one’s neighbors, in order not to destroy one’s purpose, and attach oneself to the perfect good. But there is also a grief that comes from the enemy, full of mockery, which some call *accidie*. This spirit must be cast out, mainly by prayer and psalmody.”

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!