

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

23rd Sunday After Pentecost; St. Gregory of Decapolis & St. Proclus of Constantinople
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.

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? couldst 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

Having considered the command to be spiritually alert and aware of danger ("watch"), we turn to the command Christ joins to it, "pray". If watching keeps the Christian from being caught by the enemy by surprise, prayer is the means by which he fights the enemy. To overcome, both watching and praying are needed.

Christ commanded His disciples not merely to watch, but to watch and pray, that they not enter temptation. The Christian lives in a state of alertness for spiritual danger from thoughts the enemy insinuates into his mind. Each thought must be examined and discerned as to its nature and treated accordingly. The good thoughts may be embraced, the bad ones leading to sin must be rejected. It is not always so easy, however, simply to exclude a thought from the mind. The ready response to persistent thoughts leading to sin is to pray, to turn the occasion of the provocative thought into an occasion for prayer. As St. Porphyrios says, "The person who belongs to Christ turns everything into prayer." "All matters are sorted out with prayer."

How do we do this? A judgmental thought (what we call a provocation) comes into your head about someone in the Church. Turn the provocation into prayer for the person: pray for his salvation, healing, repentance. Thank God for putting this brother in your life. Ask God for grace to love him and serve him. A flood of angry thoughts in reaction to someone's offense against you rushes into your mind. Turn those thoughts into prayer for the offender in accordance with Christ's command to pray for your enemies and to do good to those who offend you. A lustful thought slips in. Do not dwell in it. Praise God for the beauty He has created, ask Him to help you see Him as the Source of all beauty to be worshipped rather than the creature, and pray for the person who is the object of your lust and God will preserve him in chastity and that he would not misuse the beauty given him. Pray for that person's salvation as well.

We may do this in every situation. When your child is difficult, thank God for the child He has given you, pray for the child, and ask God for grace and wisdom to love him. When married life is hard, thank God for your spouse and pray fervently for the growth and salvation of both of you through your marriage. When life is unfair, give glory to God, thank Him for providing your basic needs, and thank

Him for showing you mercy in abundance rather than dispensing justice to you.

Thoughts enter our minds throughout the day. Is it any wonder, then, that St. Paul commands us to "pray without ceasing"?

Another way of fulfilling these two commands is to say the Jesus Prayer throughout the day. That helps keep us spiritually awake—watchful. It also constitutes prayer. And in the moments of temptation or provocative thoughts, we may put more energy and attention into praying it. And when we don't know what else to pray in response to the thoughts, the Jesus Prayer will always serve.

Failure to watch and pray is a primary reason we fall again and again into the same old sins. May God give us new grace to watch and pray that we may not enter into temptation!

21 November:

Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple

We keep the feast for four days until it leavetaking November 25. We may use the Troparion of the feast before meals in place of our usual prayer and the Kontakion after meals in place of our usual giving of thanks.

Entrance of Theotokos, Troparion, tone 4

Today is the prelude of the good will of God, / of the preaching of the salvation of mankind. / The Virgin appeareth in the temple of God, / in anticipation proclaiming Christ to all. / Let us rejoice and sing to her: / Rejoice, O Fulfillment // of the Creator's dispensation.

Entrance of Theotokos, Kontakion, tone 4

The all-pure Temple of the Savior, / the precious Bridal Chamber and Virgin, / the sacred treasure of the glory of God, / is led today into the house of the Lord, / and with her she bringeth the grace of the divine Spirit. / Of her God's angels sing in praise: // "She is indeed the heavenly Tabernacle."

When the Most Holy Virgin became three years old, her parents, true to their vow to the Lord to dedicate their child to Him, solemnly led their Most-pure Daughter into the Jerusalem Temple "to be brought up in divine grace" "before the Lord." Though at that time the Most Holy Virgin, as expressed in church hymns, was yet "three years old in the body" she was already "many years in the spirit" although still "a child in the flesh, she was already perfect in soul". She looked at the temple of the Lord as at a paradisiacal dwelling of the glory of God, as at the most cultivated haven, for which Her soul thirsted more than the home of her parents, is why she entered into the temple majestically and rejoicing. The Holy Virgin was put on the first step of the temple and to the surprise of everyone, with no one supporting her, being encouraged by the spirit of love

for God, climbed firmly up the fifteen steps of the temple.

At this time, on the outside in front of the Jerusalem temple there were about ninety apartments. In these apartments there were rooms for various persons: separately the maidens who lived there during the time they were dedicated to the services to God; separately widows lived there, promising God to keep the premises clean until their death; separately men, called supervisors, in the image of unmarried monks resided there. There were also other apartments for the comfort of pilgrims and strangers who came from a distance for worship in the temple. All of them served the Lord in the temple and had their livelihood from the church estates. The Most Holy Child Mary was lodged at the Jerusalem temple in the apartments where the maidens lived.

The Holy Young Child, living in the temple, spent all her time in prayer, reading the Word of God and thinking about God. She occupied half her time with her own needlework, especially loving to prepare clothes dedicated to serving in the temple; which she fulfilled while growing up, and occupied the other half with works of charity at the temple, serving the needy, the crippled and the infirm which tradition says, to whom she also gave all her food, herself eating only the "most glorious bread from heaven", brought to her by the angels", and "conversing with them". Living at the temple and devoting all her time to pious occupations, the Most Holy Virgin was continually used to being before the all-seeing, omniscient Lord God and His almighty will in soul and body, in mind and heart, in thought and desire, having formed in herself a living and firm faith in the word of the Lord, a fervent love for the Lord and for neighbor, an all-perfect fidelity to the will of God, the deepest humility and meekness, inscrutable patience and obedience to the word of the Lord. "

In the early years of her life she lost her parents. After their death, she all the more turned to the One God with all her soul, and with all the desires of a pure heart and singularly sought Him out for joy and consolation.

When the time has come for the Most Holy Virgin, according to the then existing custom, to leave the sacred dwelling of her pious formation and like other maidens to marry, she declared to the high priest and to the priests her vow to remain virgin and with their advice and consent, for the protection of virginity, at that time being 11 years old, was betrothed to her relative, the aged righteous Joseph, and moved from the temple into his house which was in Nazareth.

The example the Saints Joachim and Anna teaches us to fulfill pious vows. And the deeply instructive example of the upbringing of the Most Holy Virgin explains to us our duties to our children that we must as early as possible and to take them to the temple of God more often, to accustom them to the full complement of prayers at home, teaching them in the law of the Lord, particularly in their

growth to properly use their time to develop in them love for their neighbor and diligence to inspire obedience in them to the church rules (Ustav), and to waken and strengthen in them the spirit of piety and the fear of God .

How To Conquer Sin

St. Theophan the Recluse

"He Who Is Born of God Doth Not Commit Sin" I John 3:9

How is it we see sin reigning both within us and around us? Is it that God's promise is not true, or is it that His grace has grown weak? Neither the one nor the other! "For the promises of God in Him are yea and amen" (2 Cor 1:20) and he in whom is grace "can do all things through Jesus Christ who strengthens" him (Phil 4:13). The reason for this pitiful sight is not in God but in ourselves, in that we, from our side, fail to apply the measures necessary for us and do not use as we ought the means decreed for us. The doctor is not guilty of a failure to heal when the patient does not obey his directions and makes no use of the medicine prescribed for him to take.

He who does not wrestle with sin does not conquer it; he who does not conquer it falls into sin and abides in it. On the contrary, abundant help is always prepared for him who opposes sin and compels himself towards good. Strengthened by it, he may always turn from evil and do good—though not without effort. Consequently, our main business is the struggle with sin. One struggling must have weapons and then must know against whom to do battle and how to do battle.

The weapons against sin are the following: prayer, attending church, thorough obedience, the reading of God's Word and of the holy Fathers, sober attention to oneself, bodily labor, vigil, prostrations and bows, solitude, control of feelings, abstinence, fasting. All these weapons flow out of the nature of the struggle itself, and all of them are essentially necessary in the spiritual battle.

But let us assume that someone has armed himself with them all—has he done everything? No, it is still needful to employ them and that not any which way but expediently: otherwise they will not bring him their full effect. One person, for example, undertakes to read spiritual things—and reads and reads unto weariness—but without clarifying for himself beforehand why he needed to do this and what he needed to try to attain by these efforts. Still another undertakes fasting and fasts without pity for himself to the depletion of his strength, but he did not determine for himself why precisely he needed to fast and in what measure and what to keep sight of in it. I present these examples not to give grounds to judge unfavorably the indicated weapons, but in order to show that ill-considered action with them and failure to direct them towards the necessary goal deprives them of their inherent power—the conquest of sin.

Precisely how one must operate, I shall briefly define. It will not do to set the goal of Christian

armament as acquiring the arms themselves: it will not do to set the goal of fasting as just fasting, the goal of solitude as just in being alone, the goal of prostrations in just doing prostrations. The purpose of all this should be internal to identify and conquer the sin living in us.

What is this “sin living in us”? Self-love, with the whole horde of passions flowing from it. Self-love is the root from which grow pride, self-interest, and sensuality. These are the main trunks of the tree of sin. From them sprout the offshoots—vainglory, hatred, envy, anger, despair, lust. Without these passions, we would always act correctly, living according to the commandments of God without any difficulty. Why, for example, does a blacksmith give short measure or exact an excessive price? From greed: without greed, he would not act so. Why do people quarrel and even fight duels? From anger: without anger, all matters would be settled peacefully. Why does one person do evil to another? From hatred or envy: without these passions, evil deeds would not be. In a word, if it were not for the passions in us, we all would live holy and undefiled, in peace and love, in mutual assistance and help for one another.

Consequently, the passions are our main enemies. We must overcome them particularly and direct against them all our martial spiritual strength, all our spiritual armament. If we will not do this, then we labor in vain and with all these weapons we shall gain no success whatsoever; we shall bear the weight of the weapons, but we shall not receive the crown of victory. Moreover, we may wound ourselves with these weapons. From this may be drawn the general conclusion: take all the spiritual weapons and use them courageously and vigilantly; do not use them aimlessly but rather with a set purpose, directing them against the passion definitely known to you and attacking you.

Now I shall briefly indicate how one must struggle, how to conduct battle and employ spiritual weapons to good effect.

1. Do not imagine you can wage war against the whole horde of passions—you will not be able to cope—but arm yourself each time against that passion warring against you. If pride tries to conquer, do battle with pride; if anger, do battle with anger; if envy, do battle with envy. Whatever enemy is before you, smite that enemy and direct all your martial strength and all your attention against it. If you set out to chase other foes, then this one will attack from the flank or rear and the victory will be lost.

2. Hasten to separate yourself from the enemy and oppose yourself to him and him to yourself. In spiritual battle, it is not as it is in physical [perceptible to senses] where the enemy stands visibly against you. In spiritual battle, you and your enemy are both in one soul and one heart. All our trouble stems from the fact that we do not know how to separate ourselves from the enemy and disunite ourselves from him; we think that the passionate movements disturbing us is, in fact, us—our nature—

and we hurry to satisfy it [what we think is our nature, ourselves]. But this is not our nature and not us, but our enemy. This error is the source of all our falls into sin and wrong actions. If only at the first moments of an attack we succeeded in separating the passion from ourselves, then we would aim not to satisfy it but to stand against it.

3. Having separated the passion troubling you from yourself and having acknowledged it to be your enemy, begin to war against it, to fight it, taking up one weapon after another until the passion flees or hides from you or until the soul finds peace. Fast, pray, read, meditate, be alone, visit your spiritual father, go to church, make prostrations at home—in a word, make use of every useful weapon that you have in order to overcome the foe. Sometimes the passion hides itself at once, sometimes it struggles long—our task is not to weaken but to endure in bearing up under the weight of the martial *podvig* until the soul has regained complete peace.

4. The enemy is driven off, the passion is extinguished, the soul has found peace, but this still does not mean that either this or another passion was defeated unto death—not, it has only concealed itself and gone away for a time, though it was defeated. Give it a new situation, and it will immediately arise, although not with its former strength. You overcame the passion in a familiar situation, but it will find thousands of such situations and will begin again the struggle and call you out to battle. This means that a Christian should never lay aside his arms; he is a permanent warrior who must always be ready for battle. Thus in this sense it is said: “He who endures to the end will be saved” (Mat 10:22).

Here is the whole program of battle! Having identified your enemy in the passion attacking you at this moment, begin to defeat it with your weapons, using first one, then another, while you drive it away. Having driven it off, stop and look and expect another attack from one side or another by any passion. When it attacks, deal with it as you did with the former passion with which you did battle and which by God’s mercy you defeated. So do each day, each hour, and each minute.

But when does it end? One cannot determine this. It may only be said that the more vigilantly a Christian fights and does not give in to any passionate attraction the more quickly the passions in him will begin to weaken, and to that degree, as the unrelenting war goes on, peace and quiet begin to be established in the soul. With the passage of time, it arrives at a quiet and peaceful state of order in which, as in the stillness of midnight, a deep silence will begin to reign, a sign that enemies have been driven far away or put in their place.

Help us all, O Lord, to receive such good!

Translated by Fr. Justin Frederick

How To Attain Undistracted Prayer

St. Theophan the Recluse

You write that you cannot manage your thoughts at all, they constantly wander off, your prayer is not going as you would like it, and you scarcely think about God as you go about your daily affairs and deal with other people.

This is straight away forbidden. You must put a fair amount of labor into this so that the thoughts may be settled to even a small degree. You expected that all you had to do was begin, and everything would fall into place. It never happens that way. Even the success you began noticing should be considered as out of place. Indeed, this has happened previously, but you experienced little grief over it; now you not only notice the disorder of your thoughts, but you are disturbed by it and express the desire to cope with them, as if that were possible. Resolve to continue stirring up this anxiety, and intensify your effort in correcting this fault.

I have already written that steadfastness and continuity of labor over oneself is an essential condition for success in the spiritual life. Lasting pacification of the thoughts is a gift from God, but this gift is not given without intensifying one's personal labors. While you will not achieve anything just by your own labor, God will not give you anything if you do not labor with all your might. This is the fundamental law. You have St. Macarius the Great's *Homilies*. Try to read the nineteenth homily, which tells who the Christian must force himself in every good thing. It is written that "It is necessary to force oneself even in prayer, if one does not have spiritual prayer," and that "In this case, God, seeing that a man is calling with effort and restraining himself (that is, his thoughts) against the will of the heart, grants him true prayer," that is, undistracted, collected, absorbed, when the mind stands continually with God during prayer, it does not want to leave Him afterward, for this is attended by such sweetness that once it has been tasted, it does not want to taste anything else.

I have reminded you more than once just what kind of labor must be performed here: You must not allow the thoughts to wander voluntarily, but when they stray involuntarily, you must immediately turn them back, reproaching yourself, regretting and grieving over your weakness. St. John Climacus speaks about this, saying, "It takes effort to enclose the mind in the words of the prayer."

Thus, as I wrote last time, when you have memorized your prayers, things may go better. Best of all would be to go to church where the prayerful spirit is quickly manifested, because everything there is directed toward that end; but for you this is inconvenient. At least you labor at home to acquire prayer without distraction and spend as much of your other time as you can with God. When memorizing prayers, do not forget to grasp each word and feel it; then, at actual prayer time these words will engross your attending and kindle prayerful feeling.

There is something else for you to do. Do not stand at prayer immediately after household chores, conversations, or errands; instead, make some preparation for it, trying to collect your thoughts ahead of time and direct them toward standing worthily before God. Rouse within yourself the need for prayer at this particular time, because there may not be another time. Do not forget also to renew the consciousness of your spiritual needs and for the most immediate real need of all—the settling of your thoughts in prayer with the desire of finding satisfaction for them, namely in God. When there is this consciousness and the feeling for such needs in the heart, the heart itself will not allow your thoughts to wander off to something else, but will compel you to implore the Lord concerning them. Above all, you will feel more keenly your complete helplessness: without God, you are completely lost. If misfortune threatens someone, and if he is standing before a person who can save him from it with a single nod of his head, is he going to stand there looking around? No, he is going to fall on his knees before him and implore him. That is how you should be at prayer, when you go to it with a feeling of total misfortune and the consciousness that there is no one who can deliver you from it except the One God.

There is to be found in all of us a great little sin. It is this; We undertake almost anything else, no matter how trivial it is, with some sort of preparation, but we set about prayer on the spur of the moment, and hurry to get through it as quickly as possible, as if it were just something to do in passing, something extra, and not the most important thing of all. How then can we expect to collect our thoughts and feelings in prayer? It is done haphazardly, in a disorderly manner. No, you must resolve to refuse yourself this sin, and in no way should you allow yourself to be frivolous with regard to prayer. Persuade yourself that such an attitude toward prayer is an offense, the most serious criminal offense. Consider prayer as your first priority in life, and keep it in your heart as such. Then set about it as your primary task, not as something that is by-the-way.

Labor. God will be a help to you. But see that you do as you have been told to do. Once you begin doing this, you will soon see the fruit of it. Strive to feel the sweetness of true prayer. When you feel it, then it will entice you toward prayer and inspire you to complete and attentive prayer. May the Lord bless you! From *The Spiritual Life and How To Be Attuned to It*, chapter 48.

Upcoming Events 2022

15 November – 24 December Nativity Fast
20 December, 6:30 p.m. Holy Unction

GLORY BE TO GOD FOR ALL THINGS!