

# The Confessor's Tongue for January 8, A. D. 2023

30<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost; St. Domnica

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.

## On The Holy Water

The Church blesses Holy Water at Theophany using the "Great Blessing of Water". The "Lesser Blessing of Water" is used to bless water at other times of the year when needed.

What is this water, and what it is for? Water is life. In the service, we offer back to God what He has made and given to us for life and ask Him to bless it for as a means of grace and help unto our salvation. What we pray sets our expectation for what we receive when we make use of Holy Water in faith:

And confer upon it [the water] the grace of redemption, the blessing of the Jordan. Make it a source of incorruption, a gift of sanctification, a remission of sins, a protection against disease, a destruction to demons, inaccessible to the adverse powers and filled with angelic strength. That all who draw from it and partake of it may have it for the cleansing of their soul and body, for the healing of their passions, for the sanctification of their dwellings, and for every purpose that is expedient. For Thou art our God, who didst renew through water and Spirit our nature grown old through sin. Thou art our God, who didst drown sin through water in the days of Noah. Thou art our God who, through the waters of the sea, at Moses' hand didst set free the Hebrew nation from the bondage of Pharaoh. Thou art our God who didst smite the rock in the wilderness: and the waters gushed out, and the streams overflowed, and Thou didst satisfy Thy thirsty people. Thou art our God who by water and fire through Elijah didst bring back Israel from the error of Baal.

Seeing the blessings the Church asks God to confer upon us through use of Holy Water, how can we not make use of it?

Let all be aware concerning the Holy Water: those who abstain from drinking the Holy Water because they have eaten are not acting correctly; for the Holy Water has been provided by the grace of God for the sanctification of the world and all creation. Wherefore, it is sprinkled in all places, even dishonorable ones, and even in places where it may be trodden underfoot. Where, then, is the logic in abstaining from it? But be aware that impurity comes upon us not because of eating, but because of our abominable acts; and that we may be cleansed from them, we drink this Holy Water without doubting.

Christ through His Baptism has sanctified the nature of water. For this reason, on the Eve of the Feast, after the blessing of the water, we take some home and keep it throughout the year, making regular use of it. The day of sanctifying the waters becomes a clear sign of God's grace, for the nature of these waters is not spoiled for a long time, but it endures for a whole year or two, or three, or many years. Today the waters that are drawn remain fresh and new and after an extended time is as on the day in which it was drawn.

By pious custom, the blessed waters of Theophany are taken home after the Great Blessing of Waters for the spiritual refreshment of soul and body and the sanctification of our dwellings. The water is drunk every day from the Feast (Jan 6) through its leavetaking (Jan 14). At other times, when we cannot come to church, or when we feel ill, are embarking upon a journey, are especially tempted, etc., we should resort to these blessed waters, partaking of them with prayer and deep faith.

Holy Water is kept in the church throughout the year for the faithful to take home as needed.

Old Holy Water may be disposed of by pouring it out on plants. It should not be poured down the drain.

If water acts as a means of grace preeminently in the Sacrament of Baptism, it is also used as a means of sanctification. That is why Orthodox Christians are encouraged to drink from the water that has been blessed and to sprinkle themselves with it; they take it to their homes and keep it there to use from time to time. In all this, they are not guilty of superstition. If they act so, it is because they are convinced that in virtue of Christ's Incarnation, of His Baptism and Transfiguration, all material things can be made holy and Spirit-bearing: the transforming and redemptive grace of the Savior, extending to all things.

*Bishop Kallistos*

*Ware*

One should always have at home enough Theophany water so that it will last the whole year, and make use of it at every need: in cases of illness, leaving on a journey, whenever one is upset, students when going to examinations. They do well who daily, before eating any kind of food, drink a little Holy Water. It strengthens the powers of our soul—if it is done, of course, with prayer and reverence, and one does not merely expect from it a mechanical result.

*Archbishop John of San Francisco*

## The Great Blessing of Water

*Fr. Alexander Schmemmann*

To bless water, making it "holy water," may have two entirely different meanings. It may mean, on the one hand, the transformation of something *profane*, and thus religiously void or neutral, into something *sacred*, in which case the main religious meaning of "holy Water" is precisely that it is no longer "mere" water, and is in fact opposed to it—as the sacred is to the profane. Here the act of blessing reveals nothing about water, and thus about matter or world, but on the contrary makes them irrelevant to the new function of water as "holy water." The sacred posits the profane as precisely profane, i.e., religiously meaningless.

On the other hand, the same act of blessing may mean the revelation of the true "nature" and "destiny" of water, and thus of the world—it may be the epiphany and the fulfillment of their "sacramentality." By being restored through the blessing to its proper function, the "holy water" is revealed as the true, full, adequate water, and matter becomes again means of communion with and knowledge of God.

Now anyone who is acquainted with the content and text of the great prayer of blessing of water—at Baptism and Theophany—knows without any doubt that they belong to the second of the two meanings mentioned above, that their term of reference is not the dichotomy of the sacred and the profane, but the "sacramental" potentiality of creation in its totality, as well as in each of its elements. *For the Life of the World, "Worship in a Secular Age"*

### The Blessing of Homes

Homes are customarily blessed after the Great Blessing of Waters at Theophany, though they can be blessed at any time. This is a brief service in the home of prayer and sanctifying the house through the sprinkling of holy water. A longer order of blessing is often used for the first blessing and cleansing of a new home (or home new to the family). In Russia, it is common that laymen themselves sprinkle their homes each year with the blessed waters of Theophany. The service of the blessing of water indicates this in the petition "For those who draw from this water and take it for the sanctification of their dwellings, let us pray to the Lord." The priest blesses the house initially when the family first moves in and the family itself may renew that blessing by sprinkling the house each year at Theophany with the newly-blessed waters.

Yet there is a custom of having the priest come yearly to bless one's home. This has the benefit of giving us time alone with our priest in our home if we desire conversation with him or have questions to ask. If you desire that your priest come to bless your house this year, please contact him and he will set up a visit with you.

Whenever a priest comes to bless a house, we should have the house cleaned and ready and dress ourselves as we would for a church service. When the priest arrives, we turn off any television, radio, stereo, video, games, etc., that may be on. Pets that may interfere are placed out of the way. A small table may be set up before the Icon Corner, upon which a wide-mouthed but small bowl full of newly blessed water is placed. A lit candle, censer (if you have one), and icon are placed on the table. These things should be arranged before the priest arrives.

Family members and any guests gather and stand before the small table. The first names of those residing in the home are printed on a piece of paper and placed on the table. Proper baptismal names should be used.

One family member may carry the lit candle, going before the priest and leading him through the house, turning on lights, opening doors, etc. The other family members may accompany the priest or may stay at the table (children, though, usually want to see their rooms blessed).

After the service you may take advantage of having the priest in your home for the house blessing to ask questions, to voice any concerns you may have, or simply conduct some spiritual conversation. Some parishioners desire a more extended visit or to have a meal with the priest. This should be arranged beforehand.

After the service, some of the faithful will make an offering to the church or give a gift to the priest. There is no obligation to do this, but if done, it is done following the service.

### The Commandments of Christ

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

*Take heed that ye be not deceived: for many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and the time draweth near: go ye not therefore after them. Luke 21:8*

*Take heed lest any man deceive you: For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many. Mark 13:5-6*

The first cluster of commands in Christ's Olivet Discourse warn against deception by men. "Take heed". The verb is the Greek word "to see", so the command could be rendered, "See that you not be deceived" or "Keep your eyes open lest someone deceive you." Hence Christ

enjoins his disciples to live in a condition of watchfulness in which their eyes open and alert for danger rather than having their eyes closed in slumber. This is condition yellow: "There are dangers out there, stay alert. Don't be caught by surprise."

The lurking danger to which the Christian must be alert is deception. Satan wars against mankind and especially against the faithful by lies and deceptions. Every sin that a man commits starts with a thought tainted with untruth. As the primary theatre of spiritual warfare is in the thoughts, a man must learn discernment of his thoughts that he may not mistake them and be led into sin.

The lie misrepresents reality. It calls good, "evil", and evil, "good." It emphasizes pleasure and hides the pain. Conversely, it exaggerates the pain and hides the benefit. The lie misrepresenting reality induces a man to act contrary to his true best interests, to choose what is self-destructive and spiritually harmful while thinking it is somehow good and beneficial. As we well know, lies abound in our culture. These lies misrepresent God, man, the physical world, and the ultimate nature of reality. They tell man that he is the master of his fate and the captain of his soul. You can be whatever you want to be. You can create yourself after your own ideas. You need not obey or acknowledge God. Do what *you* want.

Satan often uses other men in his warfare as his proxies to disseminate his lies designed to deceive. Hence Christ warns against being deceived by men. These deceivers are many, and they will deceive many. The ones against whom Christ warns are particularly dangerous because they come not in the name of Satan but in Christ's name. "Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many" (Matt 24:4-5). These are sobering words. The battle is real. The deceivers are real. The deception is real, and it is persuasive and effective. The casualties are real and many. "Many" will be deceived, and that "many" could include anyone reading this.

Thus Christ warns his disciples to be alert, to be watchful that they not be among the "many" deceived. To avoid deception, we must know our faith. To know our faith is not merely to read books about it, to study it, or to listen to podcasts on Ancient Faith Radio. Knowing our faith requires doing it, living it. As Christ warns in the Sermon on the Mount, those who hear his words and do not do them are like "a man who built his house upon the sand." In contrast, they build their house of faith on rock when they hear Christ's words and do them (Matt. 7:24-27). A man who does not actively practice the Christian faith will easily be deceived. The command to "take heed" is further developed in Christ's related command: "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation" (Matt. 26:41). Hence, we must expect deception and temptation. It will come. To avoid falling to it, we must abide in Christ's commandments and be watchful and prayerful. By this and God's grace, we may escape being deceived by men who come in Christ's name but are false Christ's and prophets.

### Upcoming Events 2023

20 January, Friday, 7:00 p.m.: Festal Vigil for St. Maximus  
21 January, Saturday, 9:00 a.m.: Divine Liturgy with Bishop Gerasim for our patronal feast, festal meal to follow.  
26 February: Forgiveness Sunday  
27 February Beginning of Clean Week  
9-15 April Holy Week

GLORY BE TO GOD FOR ALL THINGS!