

The Confessor's Tongue for January 22, A. D. 2023

32nd Sunday After Pentecost; New Martyrs of Russia; Apostle Timothy

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)
Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves. But beware of men... Matthew 10:16.

Christ likens his followers to harmless sheep who are surrounded by fierce wolves—a dire situation in which to be! But Christ's sheep are rational sheep, not dumb, and Christ gives them a command as to how they are to conduct themselves in their unfavorable position: "Be wise as serpents, and harmless as doves."

The Christian is to be harmless. He seeks the good for each person. He knows that his enemy are the demons, not the people whom the demons have enthralled. He is guided in his relations to others by God's commandments. He does not murder, does not abuse with words, does not use others for sexual gratification, does not take other people's goods by theft, deception, extortion, or law, does not harm others by slander, gossip, or false accusation, and is thankful for what God has given him and does not envy others for what they have been given. The Christian does not live by the maxims of the world, "Might makes right" or "Survival of the fittest." He does no harm to others as the dove is harmless. Living this way, he does not provoke others by threatening harm to them.

Yet the Christian lives in the midst of wolves who are more than ready to do him harm, to take advantage of him, to exploit him. Hence Christ commands him to be "wise as a serpent". Wherein lies the serpent's wisdom? The Fathers primarily find it in the care the snake takes for its head. While it takes blows on the rest of its body, it protects its head, its most important part. So too, the Christian preserves his soul and conscience even at the expense of his body and possessions. As the snake squeezes through a narrow hole to help shed its old skin, so the Christian chooses the narrow way to put off the old man.

The snake is a master of concealment. It lies still, hidden from the sight of its predators and prey. It knows that unneeded movement reveals its presence to its enemies, and so it lies still or moves slowly with caution. When a snake moves into a new environment, it quietly explores the territory to find places of refuge and where it may find food and to identify where predators lurk. Only when it knows the territory well does it begin living a more active life. This sort of wisdom is reflected in military planning and reconnaissance, or in the common advice given to seminarians that, once they are ordained and given a parish, that they live and minister there for a year before trying to make any significant changes.

The word translated here as "wise" is not *sofos*, related to *sofia*, or "wisdom", but *fronimos*, which means "prudent, sensible, shrewd, wise, thoughtful." The five virgins who took extra oil to await the bridegroom were prudent. Prudent and wise is the man who builds his house on the rock and not on sand. Shrewd and prudent was the unjust steward who, upon learning he was being let go, called in his master's debtors and reduced their debts so that they would help him when he lost his position. The master on learning what the steward had done commended him for his shrewdness. Jesus comments, "For the children of this world are in their generation wiser [shrewder, more prudent] than the children of light." In this context, Jesus goes on to command his disciples to "make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations." This is wise and prudent; this is being wise as a serpent.

Being wise as a serpent and harmless as a dove enables the Christian to live among the wolves without suffering spiritual harm. May God grant this harmlessness and prudence to us. *Fr. Justin*

Human Life is a Vale of Tears

St. Simeon (Zhelnin)—Vasily in the world—was born in 1869 and reposed in 1960.

He was still a young boy when Monk Kornily of Krypetsky Monastery foretold that he would become a monk and an elder. Throughout his long and hard life, the Elder battled against the unclean spirits. Elder Simeon had great love for God and men and great humility. The Lord also gave St. Simeon great gifts for his disposition towards the work of salvation: the gift of healing souls, clairvoyance, and the gift of wonderworking.

He reposed in the Lord on January 18, although the Lord had revealed to him that he would die on January 15. Realizing that this meant the burial would take place on the feast of the Theophany of the Lord, the abbot blessed him to die another day. Out of humility and obedience to the abbot Archimandrite Alipy (Voronov), the Elder begged God to allow him to die later.

Human life is a vale of tears, with one temptation replacing another. It can seem like temptations will never end, but we must remember and not forget that the clouds are replaced by the sun. So in life: We rest a little at the oasis, and again the desert of sorrows. The Holy Elders, having passed through this desert of sorrows in perfection, instructed not to become despondent, but to hope in God: *Many are the tribulations of the righteous, and the Lord shall deliver them out of them all* (Ps. 33:19).

* Those who desire to save their souls should

remember that it's impossible to be saved without sorrows and temptations, and therefore they should thank God for all things sorrowful. Sicknesses, misfortunes, slander, insults, troubles, persecution, and the like are salvation for man.

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Tribulations are primarily the lot of those who are being saved in the last times: *We must through much tribulation enter into the Kingdom of God* (Acts 14:22).

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Our salvation is on the Cross, namely in the sufferings of the Cross. Through unjust sufferings and sorrows, we are grafted onto the Cross of Christ and from it we receive the power of the Cross, which purifies, sanctifies, and attracts the blessing of God. There's no other path to salvation than through Golgotha and the Cross.

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Our life is but a minute compared to eternity, and therefore the present temporal sufferings are worthless compared to the glory that will be revealed in us (cf. Rom. 8:18) (if we are found worthy) in the coming age.

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Courageously bear your cross—your character.

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The most important thing is to repent of our sins. The Lord will have mercy only for the constant struggle, not for "correctness," which you don't and won't have (and if you do—you'll become proud).

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Don't create bitterness for yourself, only endure insults and sorrows.

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As it's impossible to breathe without air, to live without food, and to walk without feet, so it's impossible to enter the Heavenly Kingdom without sorrows.

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It's possible to endure illness or sorrow but with grumbling against God or men, complaining about your fate. Such "good works" are displeasing to the Lord, as they're done without prudence.

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Whoever avoids sorrows renounces his salvation, and for the temporal sweetness of this life is deprived of eternal life, of ever-blessed rest.

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In general, this short earthly life with its disasters and sorrows is given to man that he might use it for his salvation; that is, to return himself from life to death.

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The monastic path is difficult [Elder Simeon wrote in his biography], but the ascetic labor of the schemamonk is more difficult, if it's borne as our Lord Jesus Christ, Who laid down the ascetic way, indicated to us. With the visitation of His All-Holy Spirit, everything can be overcome, endured, survived, and the longed-for, unspeakable eternal inheritance in His Heavenly Kingdom can be acquired.

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One pilgrim asked Elder Simeon several times about her son—whether he'd be saved. One day he answered her: "I'm tired of hearing about your son... How can he be saved if he himself doesn't want it?" But she again started testing the Elder's patience, continuing to ask if he'd be saved. Then the Elder told her: "You really want him to be saved? He can only be saved through sorrows, and all sorrows will fall to you. But don't grumble—bear them with patience, without grumbling." And her son became very ill.

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Not far from Pechory, in the village of Maly, there lived Matushka Anna—the widow of the local priest Fr. Vasily Rogovsky—a spiritual daughter of Elder Simeon, respected by all. In the old days, their family suffered much from the godless authorities—they spent time in Siberian exile. But even in those years, the Elder always remembered them and strove to support them in a Christian manner, at least with words of comfort and hope.

This is evidenced by the postcard sent by the Elder to their family in Krasnoyarsk exile, lovingly preserved by Matushka Anna. It reads:

A heartfelt greeting to dear Vasily, Anna, and Maria, wishing you good health and all good things. "Humility, patience, and labor can overcome anything," according to our Russian saying. Faith in God and hope in God will fix everything, and the Lord will help.

And so it happened just as Fr. Simeon had foreseen. Despite all their sorrows and woes, these sufferers eventually returned to their native lands.

From the book: St. Simeon (Zhelmin), Sretensky Monastery, 2015 Translation by Jesse Dominick 1/20/2023

Planning

Given the mix-up on our calendars, you may not be aware of important dates for your planning.

Please plan to attend Forgiveness Vespers, February 26 at 5:00.

Please avoid parties, travel, gratuitous entertainment Clean week (Feb 27--March 4) and Holy Week (April 9-15)

Paschal will be celebrated April 16, Palm Sunday April 9.

During Great Lent (February 27--April 15), it is best to avoid planning vacations and entertainments out of keeping with the bright sadness of the penitential period.

Upcoming Events 2023

26 February: Forgiveness Sunday
27 February Beginning of Clean Week
9-15 April Holy Week

GLORY BE TO GOD FOR ALL THINGS!