

# The Confessor's Tongue for March 12, A. D. 2023

Second Sunday of Lent: St. Gregory Palamas

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.

## St. Gregory Palamas

Believing *in* God is different from believing God. To believe God is to regard His promises to us as sure and true, but to believe *in* Him is to have a right understanding of Him. Both are necessary for us....

The fact that we truly believe God, that we understand that His promises and warnings to us are true and sure, even though they have not happened yet, is shown by our good works and by our keeping of His commandments. But what proof is there that we have a right belief *in* God, that we have a trustworthy and devout understanding of Him? It is that we confess the same faith as our God-bearing Fathers. Sincerely believing God provokes opposition not only from the physical passions and the evil one's snares, but also from people in the grip of passions who lure others and drag them down with themselves into wicked pleasures. In the same way, having a right belief *in* the one true God provokes opposition not only from ignorance and the enemy's promptings, but also from godless men who treacherously pull believers down into the depths of their own destruction. In both aspects of faith, our greatest help comes not just from God Himself and our God-given faculty of knowledge, but from the good angels and from God-fearing people who live according to His will. *From Homily 8: On Faith*

## Second Sunday of Lent: Palamas

St. Gregory's father was an eminent official at the court of Emperor Andronicus II Palaeologus. The gifted Gregory, completing his secular studies, did not want to enter the service of the imperial court, but withdrew to the Holy Mountain and was tonsured a monk. He lived a life of asceticism in the Monastery of Vatopedi and the Great Lavra. He led the struggle against the heretic Barlaam and finally defeated him. He was consecrated as Metropolitan of Thessalonica in the year 1347 A.D. He is glorified as an ascetic, a theologian, a hierarch and a miracle-worker. The Most-holy Theotokos, St. John the Theologian, St. Demetrius, St. Anthony the Great, St. John Chrysostom and angels of God appeared to him at different times. He governed the Church in Thessalonica for thirteen years, of which he spent one year in slavery under the Saracens in Asia. He entered peacefully into rest in the year 1360 A.D, and took up his habitation in the Kingdom of Christ. His relics repose in Thessalonica, where a beautiful church is dedicated to him. *Prologue*

Barlaam propagated in the East the teaching of Abelard that the truth is only true when it is proved exclusively from the beginning of reason, and closely connected to this rationalism the teaching of Thomas Aquinas that God is entirely essence and that the essence and action in Him do not differ. This and other teachings rested on the ruminations and amplifications of the rationalism of Arianism then in the West. The Barlaamites taught that the light of Tabor was something material, created, revealed in space and painted in air because it was seen by the corporal eyes of people who were not yet

consecrated by grace. Through such, i. e. through the created, they recognized all the divine actions and even the gifts of the Holy Spirit: the Spirit of wisdom and reason and so forth, not being afraid to reduce God to the category of the created, "subverting light and the blessed righteousness in the Kingdom of the Father of Heaven, the power and action of the Trihypostatic Divinity" (see the Synaxarion). And in general through their rationalistic Arian teaching the Barlaamites threatened to shake the very bases of Christian teachings on faith, asceticism and morals. St. Palamas and his fellow Athonite ascetics taught and proved by their very life what could not be proved by philosophical reasoning, but the constant purification of the soul accomplished by silent feelings and thoughts, incessant exercise in meditating on God and intelligent prayer or through intelligent action the person can achieve the inner light from above. But the essence of the Deity which, abiding in the unapproachable light cannot be seen, is inaccessible to our limitations and our sinfulness, and the action of the Deity (energi,a is an expression used in this sense by Aristotle), i.e. the active movement can be seen as the manifestation of the essence. This active manifestation of the Divine essence usually is opened by silence in the image of the light, which can sometimes be seen even by corporal eyes. For example, during the revelation of the Divinity of Jesus Christ on Tabor and during all the appearances and revelations of the Deity in the form of light and fire, for example, by Moses and Elijah, or by ancient Christian ascetics, for example, Anthony the Great, all those who have seen God saw with both corporal and noetic eyes the Divine light, the reflection of the Deity. This light of Tabor and all immediate actions, the manifestations of the Deity is called by them the uncreated Divinity, as the essence of God is uncreated. This name in the addition to the moral actions and acts of grace of the Deity stands for better understanding, which the Prophet Isaiah calls the Spirit of wisdom and reason, the Spirit of council and fortress, the Spirit of knowledge and piety, the Spirit of the fear of God. The teaching on the subject of essence is mysterious and incomprehensible for the natural mind, but is convincing, immutable for the believing heart! St. Palamas, having acted as the defender of this doctrine and the fervent expositor of the Barlaamites, rendered the Church a rather important service. *Bulgakov*

## The Commandments of Christ

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

*Take heed therefore how ye hear: for whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have. Luke 8:18*

Hearing is one of the five bodily senses, the most powerful after sight. Noise from the world around us enters our ears constantly, and our brains work to identify the noises and tell how to respond to them. Though hearing works constantly, we typically give it little thought.

With the command to "take heed how ye hear", Jesus asserts the important of hearing and the attention we should give it. The command in Luke follows Jesus's telling of the Parable of the Sower and

the Soils and His explanation of it to His disciples. Having given them the interpretation of this foundational parable of the Kingdom, He delivers this command: "be careful how you hear."

Hearing gives us a chance to receive and retain something of value: knowledge, direction, a warning. Or we may hear something of value but let it come in one ear and go out the other, as we say. If we are careless hearers, we will think we have something just because we have heard it and it is, therefore, not new to us, but we shall not truly possess anything of substance if we have not heard it carefully and retained it.

How do we hear carefully and retain something valuable from our hearing? Christ gives an indication how just three verses later when He says, "My mother and my brethren are these which hear the word of God, and do it" (v. 21). In his epistle, St. James urges Christians to be "doers of the word and not merely hearers who delude themselves." "Take heed how ye hear", then, means we should hear what Christ says, take it to heart, and act upon it. Only to hear it and keep a memory of it without doing anything about it is not to hear carefully. Such a person will think he has something, because he knows about it in his head, but he does not have anything substantial, because he does not act upon it.

On the day of judgment, we shall be held responsible for what we heard and what we did with it. We might say, "I did not know that." Christ may respond, "I became man. I gave you the Church, the Gospel, good priests, the holy Fathers. You read it in the Gospel. Your priests told many times, a couple of which were in response to your own question. You heard this. But you did not do it. What more would you have Me have done for you?" To avoid such a sad interchange at the end, our Lord says, "Take heed how you hear."

When a bishop asked St. Moses of Optina why it was hard to retain what he read in St. John of the Ladder's work *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, the elder answered, "That sort of literature requires that we do it in order to know it and not just read it." Hearing and reading much without applying it only serves to feed pride. Take heed how your hear!

### **How To Partake of Food** *St. Gregory of Sinai*

What shall I say about the belly, the queen of the passions? If you can deaden or half-deaden it, do not relent. It has mastered me, beloved, and I worship it as a slave and vassal, this abettor of the demons and dwelling-place of the passions. Through it we fall and through it – when it is well-disciplined – we rise again. Through it we have lost both our original divine status and also our second divine status, that which was bestowed on us when after our initial corruption we are renewed in Christ through baptism, and from which we have lapsed once more, separating ourselves from God through our neglect of the commandments,

even though in our ignorance we exalt ourselves. We think that we are with God, but it is only by keeping the commandments that we advance, guarding and increasing the grace bestowed upon us.

If you eat too much, repent and try again. Always act like this – lapsing and recovering again, and always blaming yourself and no one else – and you will be at peace, wisely converting such lapses into victories, as Scripture says.

As the fathers have pointed out, bodies vary greatly in their need for food. One person needs little, another much to sustain his physical strength, each according to his capacity and habit. A hesychast, however, should always eat too little, never too much. For when the stomach is heavy the intellect is clouded, and you cannot pray resolutely and with purity. On the contrary, made drowsy by the effects of too much food you are soon induced to sleep; and as you sleep the food produces countless fantasies in your mind. Thus in my opinion if you want to attain salvation and strive for the Lord's sake to lead a life of stillness, you should be satisfied with a pound of bread and three or four cups of water or wine daily, taking at appropriate times a little from whatever victuals happen to be at hand, but never eating to satiety. In this way you will avoid growing conceited, and by thanking God for everything you will show no disdain for the excellent things He has made. This is the counsel of those who are wise in such matters. For those weak in faith and soul, abstinence from specific types of food is most beneficial; St Paul exhorts them to eat herbs (cf. Rom. 14:2), for they do not believe that God will preserve them.

What shall I say? You are old, yet have asked for a rule, and an extremely severe one at that. Younger people cannot keep to a strict rule by weight and measure, so how will you keep to it? Because you are ill, you should be entirely free in partaking of food. If you eat too much, repent and try again. Always act like this – lapsing and recovering again, and always blaming yourself and no one else – and you will be at peace, wisely converting such lapses into victories, as Scripture says. But do not exceed the limit I set down above, and this will be enough, for no other food strengthens the body as much as bread and water. That is why the prophet disregarded everything else and simply said, 'Son of man, by weight you will eat your bread and by measure you will drink water' (cf. Ezek. 4:16).

There are three degrees of eating: self-control, sufficiency and satiety. Self-control is to be hungry after having eaten. Sufficiency is to be neither hungry nor weighed down. Satiety is to be slightly weighed down. To eat again after reaching the point of satiety is to open the door of gluttony, through which unchastity comes in. Attentive to these distinctions, choose what is best for you according to your powers, not overstepping the limits. For according to St Paul only the perfect can be both hungry and full, and at the same time be strong in all things (cf. Phil. 4:12).

### **Upcoming Events 2023**

25 March Annunciation  
9-15 April Holy Week  
16 April Great & Holy Pascha

**GLORY BE TO GOD FOR ALL THINGS!**