

The Confessor's Tongue for Thomas Sunday, April 23, 2023

Christ is risen! Indeed, He is risen! Христос Воскресе! Во Истину Воскресе!

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.

Thomas Sunday & Antipascha

This Sunday commemorates the appearance of the Lord to the Apostles after His resurrection and the touching of His wounds by the Apostle Thomas. It assures that by the power of His Divinity Jesus Christ is risen again from the tomb, that after the resurrection He did not have an imaginary or illusory flesh in which form the bodiless spirits or inhabitants of heaven are vested when they sometimes appear to us or to the holy brethren, but the real immaculate flesh which He has assumed from the womb of the All-holy Theotokos, with which He was nailed to the cross and on which there remained wounds even after the resurrection.

The eighth day after Pascha as the ending of the celebration of Bright Week was a special celebration since ancient times, as if it replaced the very same Day of Pascha and was called Antipascha, which means 'instead of Pascha.' From this day the cycle of Sundays and weeks of the entire year begins. On this day the commemoration of the resurrection of Christ is updated for the first time. This Sunday of the Antipascha was called the New Sunday, i.e. the first day of renewal or simply renewal. The more proper name is the real day, the eighth day after Pascha, that on this eighth day the Lord Himself willed the renewal of the joy of His resurrection with a new appearance to the Holy Apostles.

Commemorating this day of "renewal" the Holy Church inspires in us the necessity for our beneficial spiritual renewal. "The real renewal", the same Holy Father teaches, "we now celebrate, is the going from death to life. And so we put off ourselves the old man and renewed ourselves; that we too might walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:4)". "The old has passed away, behold, the new has come" (2 Cor. 5:17).

From St. Silouan of Athos (+1938)

Orthodox Epistemology: How We Know

Pride is the root of unbelief. The proud man would acquire knowledge of things through his mind and his studying, but it is not given to him to learn to know God, in that the Lord reveals Himself only to the lowly in heart. To the lowly in heart does the Lord discover his works, which are beyond the understanding of our minds but are unfolded through the Holy Spirit. With the mere mind we can only come to know the things of this earth, and then only in part, while God and all that is of heaven are known through the Holy Spirit.

We may study as much as we will but we shall still not come to know the Lord unless we live according to His commandments, for the Lord is not made known through learning but by the Holy Spirit. Many philosophers and scholars have arrived at a belief in the existence of God but they have not come to know

God. And we monks apply ourselves day and night to the study of the Lord's commands but not all of us by a long way have come to know the Lord, although we believe in Him. To believe God exists is one thing, to know God another.

On Love for Enemies

If we wish to preserve grace, we must pray for our enemies. If you do not feel pity for the sinner destined to suffer the pains of hellfire, it means that the grace of the Holy Spirit is not in you...

The Commandments of Christ

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

Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. Matt 10:34

Several times in the Gospels, Jesus give commands regarding what His disciples should think or not think. He tells them not to think He came to destroy the Law and the Prophets but rather to fulfill them (Mt 5:17). He also says, 'Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father: there is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust.' He warns them that the Son of man will come at a hour "ye think not" (Mt. 24:44), a subtle way of saying "do not think you know when I am coming." In the command before us, He commands His disciples not to think that he came to send peace on earth, but a sword.

Through this command, Jesus would spare His disciples from falling prey to delusions about what following Him would entail. He does not offer a sales pitch that only speaks of the good and omits the bad. He frankly tells His followers what they can expect from following Him, both the good and the bad. This way, when bad inevitably comes, they will be prepared and not caught by surprise and shaken in their faith.

We associate Christ with peace. "Peace on earth, good will to men," sing the angels at His birth. "For the peace of the whole world" we pray at every service, and we repeatedly hear his blessing "peace be to all." One of Christ's titles is "Prince of Peace." So strong are these and other associations of Christ with peace that we may struggle to credit Christ's own word that He came not to send peace on earth but a sword. So what is He saying?

Indeed, true peace within a person and in the world among people is possible only through Christ, and He comes to bring us this peace. Yet until the end of all things, in this world, Christ and faith in Christ will create conflict, not because Christians seek conflict with others, but because others are not willing to live at peace with those following the Christian way of life.

Christians seek to live at peace with others. "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men," writes St. Paul to the Romans (12:18).

He writes to the Corinthians that a believing wife should stay with her unbelieving husband and not to use her faith as an excuse to leave him, if he is willing to live with her. This works for his good and the good the children. But, if he insists on leaving her due to her faith, she is free from obligation to him.

What is the sword of which Christ speaks? Blessed Theophylact in his commentary on this passage writes: "Harmony is not always a good thing, while separation sometimes is. The sword, then, is the word of faith which severs our bond to our families and relatives when they hinder our piety towards God. For He does not tell us simply to separate ourselves from them, but only when they will not come with us, and especially when they hinder us in our faith." So as long as our families are willing to live at peace with us despite our faith in Christ, we are to live at peace with them. Only when they seek to hinder the practice of our faith does the sword of faith sever the bonds which bind us to them.

Strong loyalty to family has been a primary value in most human cultures until recently. When Christ the Godman appears to call men to repentance and to follow Him, His presence and message challenge unquestioning loyalty to family, or to the state, or to any other human authority. For the Christian, loyalty and obedience to Christ supersedes all others. It does not negate them—so long as the other loyalties do not conflict with the primarily one. Hence Christians were able to serve in the Roman army under pagan emperors so long as he did not ask them to worship idols. But when he dared to make that demand, the Christians refused to compromise their loyalty to Christ for the sake of obedience to the human emperor.

Christ puts it starkly when He says, "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26). He is not calling people to hate their families; but the love and loyalty of his followers for Him must prevail against every other love and loyalty when they come into conflict.

If we look at the context of this command, we may see this all very clearly.

Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it. (Mt. 10:34ff)

Again, in Luke, Christ elaborates on the matter.

Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division: For from henceforth there shall be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three. The father shall be divided

against the son, and the son against the father; the mother against the daughter, and the daughter against the mother; the mother in law against her daughter in law, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. (Luke 12:51-53)

Let it be clear: Christ is not commanding division or separation. He commands us not to think that these things should not and will not happen. They will. The Christian's loyalty to Christ will bring him into conflict with those in the world who do not acknowledge Christ as King and Lord. Some in the world will tolerate the Christian; some will not, even to the point of persecuting and killing Christians, for the "sword" to which Christ refers may also indicate martyrdom. Christ was led as a "lamb to the slaughter"; so too, his disciples: "For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter" (Romans 8:36; Psalm 43:22). Whatever may be, thanks to Christ's command, we shall not be surprised or dismayed.

What To Do During Sleeplessness at Night

From *How to Live a Holy Life*

If you cannot fall asleep for a long time after you go to bed, then, after lying down, try to imagine the Lord Jesus Christ in His sufferings on the cross and pray to Him in your heart about everything that comes into your heart: pray that the Lord God may deliver you and your family from all sins, from every evil will, and from every sinful impurity, from deadly plague, from hunger, from lightning and storms, from sudden death, and especially from eternal death.

Pray that the Lord God may bring all sinners to heartfelt repentance and correction, that He may give to His Church faithful pastors who will zealously care for its purity, firmness, and glory; that He may subdue the enemies of His Church and persuade everyone of its purity and holiness, and that He may dispose everyone to sincere acceptance of its truth and principles.

Or try to imagine yourself at your death and think something like this: "If I were to die right now, what would become of me...? Now I lie in bed and find it annoying that I have not been able to fall asleep; but how hard will it be to lie in hell if I go there because of my sins. In hell there is never any sleep, not even for a moment."

When you happen to wake up in the night, always turn your thoughts immediately to the Lord God, taking care lest some foolish thought enter your heart, signing yourself with the sign of the Cross.

If you still do not sleep, it is better to get out of bed, stand before the holy icons, and read psalms with full attention, make full prostrations, or do prostrations with the Jesus Prayer until you are tired and peace enters you soul and you can go to bed.

Upcoming Events 2023

25 May Holy Ascension
29 May Memorial Day Picnic

GLORY BE TO GOD FOR ALL THINGS!