

The Confessor's Tongue for June 25, 2023

3rd Sunday after Pentecost: New Martyrs of the Turkish Yoke, Ss Peter & Fevronia
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.

Unbelief

St. John of Kronstadt

Men have fallen into unbelief because they have either completely lost the spirit of prayer, or never had it at all, nor have it now—in short, because they do not pray. The prince of this world has full scope for action in the hearts of such men; he becomes their master. They have not asked and do not ask God's grace in prayer (for God's gifts are only given to those who ask and seek), and thus their hearts corrupt by nature, become dried up without the vivifying dew of the Holy Spirit, and at last from their extreme dryness they take fire, and blaze with the infernal flame of unbelief and various passions, and the Devil only knows how to inflame the passions that keep up this terrible fire, and triumphs at the sight of the ruin of the unfortunate souls that were redeemed by the blood of Him who has trampled the power of Satan under foot. *My Life in Christ, p. 24.*

Sunday of New Martyrs of the Turkish Yoke

Fr. Alexey Young

On May 29, 1453, the troops of the Moslem leader, Mohammed II, took the great city of Constantinople. For more than 1000 years Orthodox Christians had assumed that the Byzantine Christian Empire would stand until the Second Coming of Christ. They had always called their city the "God-protected City," and indeed, until now it had been protected by Heaven. But when their Emperor, Constantine XI, fell in battle, the holy city of Byzantium became the capital of a new empire, the Ottoman Empire, ruled by a pagan people, enemies of Christ and Christianity, the Moslems. It was a dark, dark time for Orthodox Christians in that part of the world.

In their violent hatred of Christianity, the Moslem Turks embarked on a course of persecution designed to effectively muzzle the flock of Christ. Their strategy was no less cruel than that of atheist communists in the Soviet Union; the parallels are striking. Most of the churches of Constantinople (whose name was changed to Istanbul, just as years later Petersburg was changed to Leningrad) were converted to mosques. Their movable icons were destroyed and whole walls of inspiring and radiantly beautiful mosaics were covered with paint or plaster. Crosses were torn off domes and broken off the roofs of churches. The Moslems guaranteed Christians a definite place in Turkish society; but it was a place of guaranteed inferiority. Orthodox Christians were required to pay an annual head tax, like cattle. To the Turks they were unbelievers, and they had absolutely no rights of citizenship. They even had to wear distinctive dress. They could not marry Moslems, nor could they engage in missionary work of any kind; in

fact, it was a crime, usually punishable by death, to convert a Moslem to the Christian Faith.

As if these measures were not enough, the Moslems actively undertook to control the Church itself. The Sultan ironically considered himself the "protector" of Orthodoxy, supposedly guaranteeing the existence of the Church, but actually keeping it in the vise of a terrible stranglehold. Under this system each Patriarch had to pay a stiff fee to the Sultan before he could be enthroned. Unable to raise the funds himself, the Patriarch was forced to exact a fee from each new bishop before installing him in his diocese, and this burden was eventually placed on the flocks. Taking advantage of this financially lucrative situation, the Turks forced re-elections of the Patriarch with undue rapidity. The majority of the Sultans themselves were sick, demon-ridden men, whose irrational rule and unbridled power only heightened the already demoralizing effect of Turkish rule on the Church. It is not without reason that an Englishman living in Istanbul in the 17th century wrote these words: "Every good Christian ought with sadness to consider and with compassion to behold this once glorious Church tearing and rending out her bowels and giving them as food to vultures and ravens."

The aim of Orthodoxy in the Ottoman Empire became, simply, one of survival. Little could they know, in 1453, that the heavy sword of Islam would weigh upon them not for a generation or two, but for five hundred years, five long centuries of darkness and difficulty. But even under such ruinous circumstances, God did not allow the light of Christianity to be extinguished. It was kept alive through the courageous confession of the New Martyrs of the Turkish Yoke.

When speaking of New Martyrs today, one generally thinks of the recently glorified New Martyrs of Russia. But until just last year, the "New Martyrs" listed in the Orthodox calendar of saints referred to those men and women who suffered for the faith under the Turkish Yoke. Their lives are not very well known, and yet they are a rich catalogue of the diversity and generosity of the Holy Spirit acting in the lives of Orthodox believers in time of oppression and persecution. The following examples illustrate the image often used in their Lives which describes them "laboring like diligent bees, gathering the honey of virtue" as they moved through life towards martyrdom. "Guard the deposit; keep safe what has been entrusted to you." (I Tim. 6:20)

St. Cyprian the New, for instance, was a pious monk from Mount Athos. After fortifying himself with Holy Communion, he went forth and found a Pasha (the ruler of a province). Straight way he witnessed to him that Mohammed was a false prophet and the enemy of God. The Pasha only laughed,

thinking he was crazy; he ordered his guards to beat him and cast him out, which they did. St. Cyprian then went to Constantinople, to the Grand Vizier whose position was like that of a prime minister. There he attempted to witness to the Grand Vizier by sending him a written message about the Gospel of salvation. The Vizier thought the saint must be drunk, or mad. But when at last he realized that the saint was quite sober and quite sane, he ordered that he be beheaded and, as his Life says, as he was being led to the place of execution, "his face shone with joy; it was as though he hurried not to execution, but to a wedding banquet."

St. Timothy of Esphigmenou is an example of a Christian who betrayed Christ and then returned to suffer martyrdom for his Lord. He was married, but his beautiful wife was abducted by a Moslem who added her to his harem after forcibly converting her to Islam. In order to get his wife back through the process of Islamic law, St. Timothy himself converted to Islam. His wife was indeed returned and they both secretly repented of having converted to Islam and returned to Christianity. Finally his wife withdrew to a convent and he to Mount Athos, where he became a monk and prepared for the day when he could descend back into the Turkish world, there to witness for Christ and accept martyrdom, which in fact he eventually did.

Sometimes the family of a martyr begged him to embrace Islam rather than die. In the life of St. Zlata, a pious virgin-martyr of the 13th century, for example, the parents and sisters of the saint implored her to convert to Islam, saying, "O sweetest daughter, have pity on yourself and on us your parents and your sisters.... Deny Christ just for the sake of appearances." But she turned and said to them, "You who incite me to deny Christ, the true God, are no longer my parents and sisters.... But in your place I have my Lord Jesus Christ as a father, my Lady the Theotokos as a mother, and the saints as my brothers and sisters." She suffered a particularly horrible form of torture and martyrdom, including thrusting a red-hot skewer through one ear and out the other, so that smoke came forth from her nose and mouth. The writer of her Life tells us that her sufferings were so terrible "that even the most stout-hearted of men would be humbled." This martyr, he says, "now dances and rejoices together with the prudent and prize-winning virgins in the heavenly bridal chambers, and stands at the right hand of her Bridegroom, Christ."

Another striking example of faithfulness to Christ and His Church is found in the Life of Martyred Monk James and his disciples. This Saint led a very pure life and was often vouchsafed to see angels during the Divine Liturgy. One day, while a guest in the home of a wealthy Turk, St. James declined the meat given at a banquet because it was the Apostles' Fast. This identified him immediately as a Christian. For such a holy one as this, the Moslems devised a particularly painful method of torture and death,

which included wrapping bands of cloth around his head and twisting them gradually, crushing the skull.

There were many rewards given to those Christians who would convert to the Moslem religion. Sometimes these enticements worked and Orthodox believers gave up the struggle for the true Faith. St. John the Bulgarian was a young boy when he fell into the company of some Moslem youths and was led by peer pressure to renounce Christ and follow Mohammed. It was not long before he came to his senses and, overwhelmed with grief at having renounced Christ, he fled to Mt. Athos and gave himself up to a life of repentance. His conscience, however, would give him no rest until finally he set out for Constantinople in order to preach the Gospel. Dressing as a Turk - something forbidden to Christians - so as not to be detected, he entered a great mosque. There, in front of everyone, he made the sign of the cross and began to pray, witnessing to all that he had been a Christian and had fallen away, but that he had now been delivered from the error of Mohammed. Concluding with the ringing declaration, "Without Jesus Christ there is no salvation!", St. John was dragged out into the courtyard of the mosque and beheaded.

While many other Christians lived in daily fear and trembling, these noble warriors of Christ marched forth directly into the enemy's camp in order to boldly plant the cross of Christ like a battle banner. Penetrated by the very essence of Christianity, Christ Himself, they were able not only to endure the most frightful tortures - but also to be victorious. The victory of martyrs, however, is understood only from an otherworldly perspective, for they had deep in their hearts the words of Scripture: "What will it profit a man if he win the whole world and lose his soul? What can a man give in exchange for his soul?"

To paraphrase the closing paragraph from the life of yet another confessor of the Turkish Yoke: "Where are those Moslems who once saddened and despised the New Martyrs? Where are the mighty of the earth? Where is the Ottoman lord? Where the fearsome guards and Tartars who bound them and beat them and martyred them? Where are their pampered bodies? O! They are dispelled as a morning mist. The tombstone of forgetfulness has covered them. And in Jerusalem on high, in the dwelling where are found the blessed souls of the saints who lived in privation in this world so that they might pass through the narrow and afflicted way that leadeth unto life, there rejoices also with them the spirits of these much-suffering martyrs whom we remember today. They reposed in the Lord and received the reward of the labors and toils and pains which they endured for Christ, Whom they loved more than all the fleeting things of this world. And now, wearing crowns in heaven, they rejoice with the choirs of the saints and behold in glory the Prize-bestower, our Lord Jesus Christ Himself. To Him be glory and

dominion and worship unto the unending ages.
Amen"

Source : The following article is condensed from a lecture delivered at the St. Herman Summer Pilgrimage, August, 1982.

The Virtues 5: Wisdom

Fr. Thomas Hopko

The virtue of wisdom differs from knowledge in that wisdom is normally understood as the immediate insight into things, the practical understanding and grasping of what is true and right in its living expression and form. The wise man is the one who sees clearly and deeply into the mysteries of God. He is the one who can give concrete advice in the everyday affairs of life, the one who can point out the will of God to man who is confronted by actual problems and decisions. He is the one, who like Jesus, knows not only what is in God, but "what is in man" (cf. Jn 2.25).

In the Old Testament, a whole body of literature developed concerning the theme of divine wisdom. (See *Doctrine & Scripture*, Part 2.) The Psalms, Proverbs and other wisdom writings such as Ecclesiastes, and the Wisdom of Solomon and Jesus, Son of Sirach show clearly what wisdom is, and what it is to be wise.

Does not wisdom call, does not understanding raise her voice?

On the heights beside the way, in the paths she takes her stand; beside the gates in front of the town, at the entrance of the portals she cries aloud:

"To you, O men, I call, and my cry is to the sons of men. O simple ones, learn prudence; O foolish men, pay attention. Hear, for I will speak noble things, and from my lips will come what is right; for my mouth will utter truth; wickedness is an abomination to my lips.

All the words of my mouth are righteous; there is nothing twisted or crooked in them.

They are all straight to him who understands and right to those who find knowledge.

Take my instruction instead of silver, and knowledge rather than choice gold; for wisdom is better than jewels, and all that you may desire cannot compare with her.

I, wisdom, dwell in prudence, and I find knowledge and discretion. The fear of the Lord is hatred of evil.

Pride and arrogance and the way of evil and perverted speech I hate.

I have counsel and sound wisdom, I have insight, I have strength" (Prov 8.1-14).

In the New Testament, divine wisdom is found in Jesus Christ, who is Himself, "the wisdom of God" (1 Cor 1.24).

... among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glorification. None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory. But, as it is written, "what no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love Him" (1s 64.4, 65.17) God has revealed to us through the Spirit. . . . And we impart this in words not taught by human

wisdom, but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who possess the Spirit (1 Cor 2.6-15).

In the holy Scriptures, the Spirit of the Lord is called "the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord" (Is 11.2). It is this Spirit that the Lord gives to those who believe in Him.

For God has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of His will, according to His purpose which He set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in Him, things in heaven and things on earth.

For this reason . . . I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know the hope to which He has called you, what are the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of His power in us who believe . . .

For this reason I, Paul have written . . . to make all men see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known . . . (Eph 1.9-10, 19-19, 3.1-10).

In the Church, as Saint Paul says, the divine wisdom is given to the spiritual person. The wise man, who possesses the Spirit of God, can show forth the "knowledge of salvation to His people . . . to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace" (Lk 1.77-79). The opposite of divine wisdom is sinful foolishness which brings man to calamity, sorrow, ruin and death (cf. Prov 10-14). In the spiritual life of the Church, it is the wise men, the spiritual masters and saintly teachers, who have gained divine wisdom and so are made competent to direct and guide the destiny of men's immortal souls. It is for this reason that all men should submit themselves to their instruction and rule. <https://www.oca.org/orthodoxy/the-orthodox-faith/spirituality/the-virtues/wisdom1>

On the Use of Incense in Church

In the Orthodox church, we burn incense in a metal vessel that hangs on three chains and has a sliding cover to regulate the burning of charcoal. The whole apparatus is called a censer or thurible. On the chains are twelve small bells, signifying the Disciples. [Not all censers have bells, however.]

Incense is a mix of spices and gums [usually a frankincense base] that we burn during services to produce fragrant smoke. We put grains of incense on burning charcoal in the censer with the sign of the cross and a prayer, "Incense we offer unto Thee, O Christ our God, for an odor of spiritual fragrance, which do thou accept upon thy heavenly altar and send down upon us in return the grace of Thy Holy Spirit."

We do not know when incense was introduced into church services. It is quite likely that we used it from the beginning of Christian worship, since its use was common in Jewish worship in the Temple at Jerusalem. This is a supposition, however, because the

early witnesses are silent about its use. We find written sources recommending its use only from about the 4th century on.

The burning incense symbolizes prayer. "Let my prayer come before thee as incense, the lifting up of my hands as an evening sacrifice. . . ." (Psalm 141: 2 – used during Vespers as the whole church is censed). In Old Testament times, the people would pray before the Holy of Holies while the priest within made the sacrifice. "And the whole multitude of people were praying outside at the hour of incense." (Luke 1: 10) Symbolically, the incense represents prayer ascending to God.

Incense continues to have that attachment to prayer in the New Testament, as we see in the book of Revelation. "An angel came and stood at the altar, with a golden censer; and he was given much incense to mingle with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden Altar before the Throne of God; and the smoke of the incense rose with the prayers of the Saints from the hand of the angel before God." (Revelation 8: 3-4). We remember that Christ received frankincense as one of the gifts of the Magi (Matthew 2:11).

In our liturgy we burn incense to symbolize:

1. Worship of God who is present in the Temple and in the Eucharist.
2. Prayer rising to God like the smoke, which is a sweet fragrance to Him.
3. The Grace of the Holy Spirit (see prayer above), which God pours The Church censes icons and other Holy things to honor God who crowns these saints in heaven, who worked wonders through them here on earth, and who sanctified and glorified their bodies; and to demonstrate our devotion to these special friends and servants of God called Saints.

We cense bishops and priests to honor in them Jesus Christ, whom they represent and with whose sacred character they are clothed.

We cense the faithful in order to honor in you the likeness to Christ that was imprinted on you at Baptism and to honor you as temples of the Holy Spirit (I Cor 6). When you are censed, you should make the sign of the cross to remind yourself of your baptism and that you are a Temple, made in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1).

Theologically, this censing is very important. Orthodoxy is focused on *theosis*, on "becoming like God," not in Essence but through God's Energies (as great writers like St John of Damascus and St Gregory Palamas made clear), which are imparted to us in myriad ways and chiefly through the sacraments. We cense the icons first because they are the people among us whom we venerate as having received *theosis* in high degree; we cense ourselves because we are in process, throughout this life, of becoming more and more God-like by grace. In a sense, you may also see censing people as a wake-up call: Recognize that you are made in the image of God and that you are being restored to that image and likeness through Christ who is at work in you through the Spirit to become a "partaker in the divine nature" (II Peter). Therefore, we cense the departed in the funeral rites to honor their bodies, made holy at Baptism, and to offer prayer for the repose of their souls.

When we cense the church, please note that you do not make the sign of the cross as the priest (or deacon) comes through for the great censing until he returns to the royal doors, turns and censes the congregation at that point. When he is going through the church the first time around, he is censing the icons and not the people present at worship. [*Some cense the people from the ambon after censing*

the church, some cense the people from the ambon after censing the iconostasis but before censing the church. We have done the latter for many years.] This is also true, but more obvious, for the smaller censings at the Alleluia and at before the Cherubic Hymn. There is no need to turn to follow the priest or deacon as he censes the church. The faithful should move aside to let him through but remain facing the altar.
minsk.com/2016/11/why-do-we-burn-incense-in-orthodox.html

A Morning Prayer

St. John of Kronstadt

O God! Creator and Master of the World! Mercifully protect Thy creature, adorned with Thy godly image, in these morning hours. Let Thine eyes, millions and millions of times brighter than the rays of the sun, vivify and enlighten my soul, darkened and slain by sin. Deliver me from despondency and slothfulness, grant me joy and vigour of soul, so that with a glad heart I may praise Thy mercy, Thy holiness, Thy boundless greatness, and Thine infinite perfections, at every hour and in every place. For Thou, Lord, art my Creator and the Master of my life, and to Thee Thy reasonable creatures every hour ascribe glory and praise, both now and for ever and to ages of ages. Amen. *My Life in Christ, p. 24*

On Righteous Hunger

St. John Chrysostom, Homily XV on Matthew

Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness. Matthew 5:6

What sort of righteousness? He means either the whole of virtue, or that particular virtue which is opposed to covetousness. For since He is about to give commandment concerning mercy, to show how we must show mercy, as, for instance, not of rapine [seizing and carrying off another's property by force] or covetousness, He blesses them that lay hold of righteousness.

And see with what exceeding force He puts it. For He said not, Blessed are they which keep fast by righteousness, but, Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: that not merely anyhow, but with all desire we may pursue it. For since this is the most peculiar property of covetousness, and we are not so enamored of meat and drink, as of gaining, and compassing ourselves with more and more, He bade us to transfer this desire to a new object, freedom from covetousness.

Then He appoints the prize, again from things sensible; saying, for they shall be filled. Thus, because it is thought that the rich are commonly made such by covetousness, Nay, says He, it is just contrary: for it is righteousness that does this. Wherefore, so long as you do righteously, fear not poverty, nor tremble at hunger. For the extortioners, they are the very persons who lose all, even as he certainly who is in love with righteousness, possesses himself the goods of all men in safety.

But if they who covet not other men's goods enjoy so great abundance, much more they who give up their own.

Upcoming Events 2023

12-28 June Apostles' Fast
26 June – 14 July, Priest on Vacation

GLORY BE TO GOD FOR ALL THINGS!