

The Confessor's Tongue for August 13, 2023

11th Sunday after Pentecost: Prophet Samuel, HM Alexander Hotovitsky

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.

Sermon at the Funeral Service of a Good Christian Woman

St. Justin Popovich

Brothers and sisters, until the Lord Jesus Christ appeared in our earthly world with His Holy Gospel, we people did not know what is good, nor what is evil, nor what is truth, nor what is a lie, nor what is truth, nor what is untruth. And most importantly, we did not know what a good man (person) was, nor what a good woman was. It was only from the Lord Jesus Christ that we learned all this: good is only that which comes from Christ and leads to Christ. And what is a good man? – Only the Christlike man is a good man. In other words, only a Christian is a truly good man and a true man; and only a Christian woman is a truly good woman and a true woman. Why is that? – Because only Christ's good is imperishable, immortal and eternal; only Christ's truth is imperishable, immortal and eternal; only Christ's righteousness is imperishable, immortal and eternal. Therefore, the good of this deceased Christian woman is immortal and eternal, therefore her truth is immortal and eternal, and her truth is immortal and eternal. Yes, here is her goodness, her truth, her righteousness – in her children. It is eternal and immortal both in her and in her children.

Therefore, dear brothers and sisters, this virtuous deceased is an example of a good Christian, which means the only truly good woman in our earthly world. For what is a good Christian woman? – A good Christian woman is a woman who day and night embodies in her life the evangelic good, the evangelic truth, the evangelic righteousness. There is no evil that she cannot overcome with her goodness; there is no lie that she cannot dispel with her truth; there is no unrighteousness that she cannot resist with her righteousness. She does not reward an insult with an insult, but with forgiveness; she does not reward evil with evil, but with good; she responds to hatred not with hatred, but with love. Against every human evil, she brings out the divine good – and thus always wins the victory of Christ.

Every mother is a martyr, and above all, a Christian mother. Why? Because she constantly cares and suffers day and night about the physical and spiritual health of her children. In this unceasing care, she dies every day for her children. This is the truth of our earthly world – the truth at which the inhabitants of heaven marvel. For if there is anything on earth at which the Angels of heaven marvel, it is a good Christian woman, a good mother, a good wife. There is nothing more difficult and responsible in our earthly world than the ministry of a Christian mother. Why? Because her main duty is to prepare her children for immortality and eternal life. If she prepared them for this, then by doing so she prepared

herself for heavenly paradise. And if she didn't, then her soul will fall into the underworld, where there is eternal crying and gnashing of teeth. How does a good Christian mother prepare her children for immortality and eternal life? By teaching and encouraging them to live according to the Gospel of Christ, for in the Gospel of Christ everything is immortal and eternal.

And this deceased true Christian worked on this all her life: she taught her children the Gospel, inspired them with the Gospel, brought them up according to the Gospel, and raised them according to the Gospel. Here before us is a true educator. For only a true Christian is a true educator; in the transitory earthly world, a Christian mother is the only true educator, because she has prepared immortality and eternity for her children. Yes, for she taught her children the eternal and immortal gospel truth, the eternal and immortal gospel righteousness, kindness, prayer, meekness, humility, hope. And this is exactly what introduces children to immortality and eternity. Such education is truly eternal, for this and for this people live in this earthly and in that heavenly world. Do not the Angels in heaven and the people on earth live by the truth of Christ? Do not the saints in heaven and the Christians on earth live by the love of Christ and prayer? Dear children of the dear deceased, keep in yourself the immortality that your mother planted in your soul! Bring it back, take care of it, because only by attentive care it stands and by attentive care it is perfected. And all that is immortal in you will stand, will be strengthened if you live and will live according to the gospel, if you live the gospel good, truth and truth. And if you leave the gospel truth, the gospel goodness, the gospel righteousness, you will lose the immortality that your praiseworthy mother left you, and you will not be worthy to see in this world the blessed and immortal soul of your faithful mother, worthy of all imitation, when your time comes to leave this world.

This good mother, this good Christian woman, who is now departing to the heavenly world, is an example of self-sacrifice. Look, did she not die every day for her children, did she not sacrifice herself day and night incessantly, so that only it would be good for them, their soul, their immortality? And you, children, will do a worthy service to your unforgettable mother and will pay her tribute if every day you resurrect in your soul the memory of her, prayers for her, and love, and reverence.

There is no doubt, brothers and sisters, now the Angels of heaven are happy to meet this wonderful mother in the upper world and introduce her into the Kingdom of Heaven, which may the All-merciful Lord grant us with the prayers of this deceased good Christian. Amen.

From St. Moses of Optina (+1862)

For those of us who struggle with irritation, annoyance, and anger when things do not turn out the way we hoped:

"We must bear one another's spiritual infirmities cheerfully, without bitterness. After all, if someone is physically ill, not only are we not offended with him, but we even help him in any way we can. That is how we must treat spiritual illnesses also."

Abbot Moses counselled everyone to keep what he called St. Dorotheos's rule for being at peace: "Do not want things to turn out as you would like, but want whatever happens. That way you will be at peace with everyone.... One who does not have his own will always gets his way. Since he has no desire of his own, no matter what happens with him, he is content—and so it turns out that he always fulfills his desires, for he does not want things to turn out as he wishes, but as they do turn out."

From St. John of Kronstadt

In all your works, either at home or at the place of your service, do not forget that all your strength, your light, and your success are in Christ and His Cross; therefore, do not fail to call upon the Lord before beginning any work, saying: 'Jesus, help me! Jesus, enlighten me!' Thus your heart will be supported and warmed by lively faith and hope in Christ, for His is the power and glory unto ages of ages. *MLIC, p. 74*

If you invoke any saint doubting that he is near you and hears you, and your heart is oppressed and contracted, conquer yourself, or, rather, overcome with the help of the Lord Jesus Christ, the calumniator (the Devil) nestling in your heart; call upon the saint with the hearty assurance that he is near you in the Holy Spirit and hears your prayer, and you will at once feel relieved. Oppression and weariness of heart during prayer proceed from want of sincerity, from the deceitfulness and craftiness of our heart, in the same manner as when during ordinary conversation with other people, we feel inwardly ill at ease if we do not speak to them from the heart, but untruthfully, insincerely. "It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks." Be true in heart always and everywhere, and you will always and everywhere have peace, but especially be true in your converse with God and the saints, "because the Spirit is truth." *MLIC, p. 79*

That which a man loves, to which he turns, that he will find. If he loves earthly things, he will find earthly things, and these earthly things will abide in his heart, will communicate their earthliness to him and will find him; if he loves heavenly things, he will find heavenly things, and they will abide in his heart and give him life. We must not set our hearts upon anything earthly, for the spirit of evil is incorporated in all earthly things when we use them immoderately and in excess, this spirit having become earthly by excessive opposition to God. *MLIC, p. 69*

The Commandments of Christ

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

Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. (Matthew 5:43-45)

In this piece, we shall consider the overall purpose of this complex of commands before looking at each command separately.

Having worked through the commands from the Law relating to murder, adultery, false swearing, and an eye for an eye in the Sermon on the Mount, Christ now addresses a command given but not given in the Law, a command with a rabbinical gloss on it or a popular understanding of it developed into a maxim for life. The command to love one's neighbor is found in Leviticus 19:18: *Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself: I am the LORD.* "You have heard it said," He says, that you should "love your neighbor and hate your enemy." The command to "hate your enemy" is given nowhere in Scripture. Christ rejects the addition to His command. He then adds the command to love one's enemies.

How are we to relate to others? One might think we should love our family, our relatives, our neighbors, our friends and hate our enemies who would harm us. But Jesus commands us to love our enemies. This sets Christianity above every other faith and religion. We are commanded to do something impossible for us without God's help.

Jesus gives a compelling, unexpected reason for this command. The reason is not arbitrary, but is rooted in the nature of God and in man's destiny to become like God in goodness and wisdom. Jesus commands His disciples to love their enemies so that they may be the children of the heavenly Father, who is Christ's natural Father. They demonstrate the truth of their adoption as children by taking on the character of their heavenly Father, who loves all men a like, both those who love and serve Him, and those who hate Him and war against Him.

How can I feel love for enemies? Christ does not command loving feelings. Rather, He gives examples of loving deeds towards those who curse us, hate us, and wrong us. God gives good things such as rain and sun to evil people as well as to the good. We love enemies likewise by doing good to them. We cannot send rain and sun upon our enemies, but we can love them by blessing them, by doing good to them, and by praying for them. *Fr. Justin Frederick*

Upcoming Events 2023

1 September: Church New Year
24 September: Annual Meeting

GLORY BE TO GOD FOR ALL THINGS!