

The Confessor's Tongue for September 24, 2023

16th Sunday after Pentecost: St. Silouan, Alaskan Martyrs Peter & Juvenaly

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.

What or Who Is Truth?

St. Sophrony on St. Silouan

The Lord said to Pontius Pilate, 'I came into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth', to which Pilate replied skeptically, 'What is truth?' and convinced that there could be no answer to the query, did not look for one, even from Christ, but went out to the Jews.

Pilate was right. There is no answer to the question WHAT is truth? if we have in mind the ultimate truth at the root of the whole existence of the world.

But if Pilate, meaning Primal or Axiomatic Truth, had phrased his question as it should have been phrased—if he had asked WHO is truth? he would have received the answer that, a little while previously, Christ, foreseeing Pilate's query, gave at the Last Supper to his beloved disciples, and through them to the whole world: 'I am the truth'.

Science and philosophy set themselves the question, WHAT is truth?, whereas Christian religious perception always consider truth as 'WHO'.

Scientists and philosophers not infrequently look upon Christians as unsound day-dreamers, whereas they themselves stand on firm ground and so label themselves positivists. In a curious way they do not realize all the negativeness of truth as WHAT. They do not understand that authentic Truth, absolute Truth, can be only 'WHO', never 'WHAT', since Truth is not some abstract formula, some abstract idea, but *life itself*.

In fact, what could be more abstract, more negative than truth as WHAT? And we notice this tremendous paradox throughout the history of the human race, starting with Adam's fall. Enchanted by his reasoning mind, man lives, intoxicated as it were, so that not only 'positive' science and philosophy, like Pilate power the question, 'WHAT is truth?' but even in the religious life of mankind we find the same great delusion, with people continually seeking truth as 'WHAT'.

The reason that if they can arrive at the truth they seek as WHAT, they will be possessed of magic power and become unrestrained masters of being.

if man in his religious life adopts the course of rational research, his approach to the world will inevitably be pantheistic. Every time the theologizing mind essays of its own strength to know the truth about God, whether or not it understands, fatally it falls into the same error in which science and philosophy and pantheism are sunk—intuiting truth as 'WHAT'.

Truth as 'WHO' is never arrived at through reason. God as 'WHO' can be known only through communion in being—that is, only by the Holy Spirit. Staretz Silouan constantly emphasized this.

The Lord Himself spoke of it thus:

'If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him . . . The Comforter, which is the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things.'

Orthodox ascetic experience rejects the course of abstract contemplation. Whoever restricts his thinking about God to abstract contemplation of Good, Beauty, Eternity, Love, and so on, is on the wrong road. The one who only strips himself of empirical forms and conceptions has also not found the true path.

Orthodox contemplation of God is not abstract contemplation of Good, Love, and the like. Nor is it a simple withdrawal of the mind from all empirical forms and conceptions. True contemplation is given by God through His coming into the soul. The soul then contemplates God and beholds that He loves, that He is good, magnificent, eternal; sees Him celestial, ineffable. But in the abstract nothing can be contemplated.

Imagination plays no part in true spiritual life, which is wholly concrete and positive. Genuine concourse with God is to be sought solely through personal prayer to the Personal God. Real spiritual Christian experience is communion with God absolutely free, and so does not depend only on man's efforts and will, as is possible in non-Christian (pantheistic) experience.

Three Stages of Spiritual Life

St. Sophrony on St. Silouan

Elder Silouan knew the spiritual trail by experience. He would point out the three main stages along the route. The first—the acquisition of grace. The second, when grace is lost. And the third, when grace returns or is acquired anew through the ascetic toil of humility. Many people have received grace, and not only those in the Church but outside the Church, too, for God is no respecter of persons. No one, however, has preserved their initial grace, and only a very few have acquired it again. Whoever has not experienced this second period, whoever has not gone through the ascetic struggle for the return of grace, is virtually lacking in authentic spiritual knowledge. [These three stages correspond to the Exodus of Israel from Egypt: Exit, Life in the Desert, Entrance to Promised Land.]

On Confession

St. Silouan

We must always bear in mind that a father-confessor performs the duties of his office in the Holy Spirit, wherefore we must venerate him. Know this, brethren, that if anyone should die with his confessor present, and, dying, say to him: 'O holy father, give

my thy blessing that I may behold the Lord in the Kingdom of Heaven,' and the confessor should answer, 'Go, child, and look upon the Lord,' it would be with him according to the confessor's blessing, for the Holy Spirit both in heaven and on earth is one and the same. Great power lies in the prayers of a spiritual father. For my pride, I suffered much from devils, but the Lord humbled and had mercy on me because of my spiritual father's prayers, and no the Lord has revealed to me that the Holy Spirit dwells in our father-confessors, wherefore I hold them in deep respect. Because of their prayers we receive the grace of the Holy Spirit, and joy in the Lord, who loves us and has given us all things needful for our soul's salvation.

If a man does not open his heart to his confessor, his will be crooked path that leads not to salvation; whereas he who keeps nothing back will go straightway to the Kingdom of Heaven.

A monk once asked me, 'Tell, me, what must I do to amend my life?' He was very fond of his food and ate unseasonably. So I told him, 'Write down each day how much you have eaten, and the thoughts you had, and in the evening read out what you have written to your confessor.' He answered me, 'I could not do that.'

So then he was unable to surmount the trifling shame of confessing his weakness, and thus he did not right himself and died of a stroke. May the Lord pardon our brother and preserve us from a like death!

Through the father-confessor the Holy Spirit operates in the sacrament (of confession), and this is why the soul, on leaving her confessor, feels renewed through peace and love for her neighbor. But if you are troubled, when you leave your confessor, it means that you have not made a clean confession of your sins, and have not in your soul forgiven your brother his transgressions.

St. Silouan on God's Mercy and Prayer for Others

The Lord would save all men, and in His goodness He summons all the world to salvation. The Lord does not take a man's will away from him, but by His grace urge him towards goodness and draws him to His love. And when the Lord would have mercy on a man, He inspires others with the desire to pray for him, and helps them in their prayer. Therefore, we must know that when we feel a wish to pray for someone, it means that the Lord Himself wants to show mercy on that soul and will graciously hear our prayers. But we must not confuse the desire to pray that the Lord instills in us with the desire born of a morbid attachment to the person for whom we pray.

When prayer proceed from pure grief for someone, whether among the living or the dead, it holds no element of morbid attachment in it. The soul in her prayer grieves for the man and prays fervently, and this is a sign of God's mercy.

"Perverse Thoughts Separate Men from God" Part Three

From Elder Paisios in "Elder Paisios of the Holy Mt."

Once, a journalist, who had a negative way of thinking about everything, visited Elder Paisios. He began asking the Elder about various things and making him feel in distress. At one point, he asked him:

"Why are you staying here in the peace and quietness of Mount Athos being carefree, and you are not going out in the world to help people who have so many serious problems?"

The Elder, slightly raising his tone of voice, told him:

"Your mind machine is a broken one and produces only negative thoughts. You misunderstand everything you see or hear. Now, you see me living here and ask me why I am not going out in the world. If I go to live in the world, you will then say that it is unsuitable for a monk and that I should go back to the quietude of my cell. For this reason, I will only tell you one thing: Repair your broken mind-machine and bear in mind the old saying which says, 'Traffic lights are made for noisy streets, whereas lighthouses for deserted rocky mountains.'"

One afternoon, I went to visit the Elder. At the fence of his cell stood a man about thirty years old, waiting for him to open the door.

When I arrived, Father Paisios opened his window and asked who it was. I replied,

"It is I, Father, and one layman" I said (and I told him his name).

"Tell the layman to leave," he replied.

Then, the layman said beggingly: "Father, I really wish to see you."

The Elder answered reproachfully: "Go, because you upset me as you only trust your own way of thinking and do not listen to what I tell you. Why are you coming here wasting your time?"

And he told him to go away. Then, he came and opened the door for me to come in.

"He is a real burden," Fr. Paisios told me. "He does not listen to my words. He comes, asks questions, and leaves; after a short time, he comes back and asks me the same things over and over again. This happens because he always listens to his own thoughts; therefore, he forgets what I tell him, or does not understand a word."

To be continued...

Upcoming Events 2023

24 September: Annual Meeting

15 October: 2:00 p.m. Octoberfest

12 November: Parish Thanksgiving Dinner

GLORY BE TO GOD FOR ALL THINGS!