

The Confessor's Tongue for October 8, 2023

18th Sunday after Pentecost: Venerable Pelagia & Thais

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.

"Perverse Thoughts Separate Men from God" Part Five

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

We once asked Father Paisios: "Father, you constantly tell us to have positive thinking. We would like you to give us some advice on how to deal with the following problem.

"Often, people come to us to tell us that some priests charge a lot of money for performing the Holy Sacraments; they say that they smoke, or hang around coffee shops; they even say that some priests are involved in immoral acts, and, in general, make strong accusations against them and present evidence to justify them. What answers can we give to people who accuse the clergy?"

The Elder started by telling us, "I know from experience that in this life people are divided into two categories. A third category does not exist. The first one resembles the fly. The main characteristic of the fly is that it is attracted by filth. For example, when a fly is found in a garden full of flowers with beautiful fragrances, it will ignore them and will go sit on top of some filth found on the ground. It will start messing around with it and feel comfortable with the bad smell. If the fly could talk, and you asked it to show you a rose in the garden, it would answer: 'I don't even know what a rose looks like. I only know where to find garbage, toilets, and filth.' There are some people who resemble the fly. People belonging to this category have learned to think negatively, and always look for the bad things in life, ignoring and refusing the presence of good.

"The other category is like the bee, whose main characteristic is to always look for something sweet and nice to sit on. When a bee is found in a room full of filth and there is a small piece of sweet in a corner, it will ignore the filth and will go to sit on top of the sweet. Now, if we ask the bee to show us where the garbage is, it will answer: 'I don't know. I can only tell you where to find flowers, sweets, honey, and sugar'; it only knows the good things in life and is ignorant of all evil. This is the second category of people who have a positive thinking, and see only the good side of things. They always try to cover up the evil in order to protect their fellow men; on the contrary, people in the first category try to expose the evil and bring it to the surface.

"When someone comes to me and starts accusing other people, and puts me in a difficult situation, I tell him the above example. Then, I ask him to decide to which category he wishes to belong, so he may find people of the same kind to socialize with.

Elder Paisios was constantly stressing the importance of pious thinking in spiritual life. He used to say that a single positive thought equals a vigil on

Mount Athos. Once, he told us the following incident.

"One day someone came to see me, but as I was busy, I told him to wait in the chapel. Later on, when he left the chapel to come into my guestroom, I did not notice that he had forgotten to take his cigarettes and had left them on the chapel's seat. Meanwhile, another guest arrived; he also went into the chapel to wait, until I was free to see him. When I called him in, he asked me,

'Elder, do you smoke?'

'No,' I said. 'Why are you asking?'

'I saw a pack of cigarettes in the chapel, that's why.'

'The person who was there before you must have forgotten them, but I did not notice it.'

After he left, a child came to visit me for the first time. He knocked on the door, and I immediately asked him what he wanted:

'I wish to see Elder Paisios. Is he here?'

'I'm afraid he is not,' I replied. 'He went to Karyes to buy cigarettes.'

The child answered innocently: 'It does not matter, Father. I will wait for him to come back.'

You see the difference between the two ways of thinking. The first person, who found the cigarettes in the chapel, had negative and suspicious thoughts, whereas the child, even then I told him that Elder Paisios went to buy cigarettes, reacted in the opposite way. He simply said he would wait, without asking if the Elder smokes or what he needs the cigarettes for. *To be continued...*

The Spiritual Power in Guarding the Tongue

When Abba Macarius was praying in his cell on one occasion, he heard a voice from God, which said, "Macarius, thou hast not yet attained to the state of excellence of two women who are in such and such a city." The old man rose up in the morning, and took in his hand a palm stick, and he began to set out on the road to that city. Now, therefore, when he had arrived at the city, and learned the place of the abode of the two women, he knocked at the door, and there went forth one of the women and brought him into the house.

And when he had been sitting down for a little, the other woman came in, and he called them to him, and they came nigh and sat down before him. Then the old man said to them, "On your account I have made this long journey, and have performed all this labor, and with great difficulty have come from the desert; tell me, then, what are thy works?"

And they said unto him, "Believe us, O father; neither of us hath ever been absent from, or kept herself from her husband's couch up to this day; what work, then, wouldest thou see in us?"

Then the old man made apologies to them and entreated them to reveal to him and to show him their spiritual labor, and therefore they said unto him, "According to worldly considerations we are strangers one to the other, for we are not kinsfolk, but it fell out that the two of us married two men who are brethren. And behold, up to this present we have lived in this house for twelve years, and we have never wanted to quarrel with each other, and neither of us hath spoken one abominable word of abuse to her companion. Now we made up our minds together to leave our husbands and to join the army of virgins, but, although we entreated our husbands earnestly to allow us to do so, they would not undertake to send us away. And as we were unable to do that which we wished, we made a promise between ourselves and God that, until death, no worldly word should go forth from our mouths."

Now when Macarius heard this, he said, "Truly, virginity by itself is nothing, nor marriage, nor life as a monk, nor life in the world; for God seeketh the love of a man, and giveth the Spirit unto him."

The Christian Understanding of Sin

Sin is primarily a metaphysical phenomenon whose roots lie in the mystic depths of man's spiritual nature. The essence of sin consists not in the infringement of ethical standards, but in a falling away from the eternal Divine life for which man was created and to which, by his very nature, he is called.

Sin is committed, first of all, in the secret depths of the human spirit, but its consequences involve the individual as a whole. A sin will reflect on a man's psychological and physical condition, on his outward appearance, on his personal destiny. Sin will, inevitably, pass beyond the boundaries of the sinner's individual life to burden all humanity and thus affect the fate of the whole world. The sin of our forefather Adam was not the only sin of cosmic significance. Every sin, manifest or secret, committed by each one of us, affects the rest of the universe.

The earthly-minded man when he commits sin is not conscious of its effect on himself as is the spiritual man. The carnal man does not remark any change in himself after committing a sin because he is always in a state of spiritual death and has never known the eternal life of the spirit. The spiritual man, on the contrary, does see a change in himself every time his will inclines to sin—he senses a lessening of grace.

From St. Theophan the Recluse (+1894)

For what reason were the martyrs tormented? Because, having believed in the Lord and been united with Him, they did not want to worship false gods. The false gods were the spirits of passions and evil deeds. He who refuses to give in to passions and sinful desires does the same as he who refuses to bow down and worship idols. He who refused to worship idols was given over to external sufferings, while he who

refuses to satisfy the passions actually wounds himself and forces his heart to suffer until the passions quiet down in him. Victory over passions is a self-inflicted spiritual martyrdom, which is performed invisibly in the heart but is nevertheless very painful....But if there is a lot of pain, there are a lot of rewards.... The more the sorrows, the more intense the consolations.

On Coldness in Prayer

St. Theophan the Recluse

May the grace of God be with you! You write, "My prayer is somehow going poorly." That prayer is going poorly is not the fault of the prayer, but of the one who is praying. Try to pray as you should, and the prayer will go well. If someone writes carelessly, people reprimand and threaten him, and he begins writing meticulously. Reprimand yourself, if you will, and threaten yourself with Divine judgment, and you will begin praying properly. We conscientiously correct human affairs, because people would see and reproach us. We conduct the affairs of God haphazardly, however, because the Lord is silent and does not reproach us immediately, presenting His children, as many as are benefitted by Him, the opportunity to serve Him. Oh, how bitter it will be when we will have to plead guilty in this to the Lord Himself!

Where has your prayer gone? It was going well, you know, and you were already feeling its beneficial action in your heart. I will tell you where it has gone. You prayed once or twice diligently and with warmth, and received such quick help from St. Sergius as a consequence of your prayer, that you therefore thought your prayer was already established, and there was thus nothing more to worry about concerning it, that it would go along well on its own. By permitting this kind of thinking, you began reciting the prayers carelessly and hurriedly, and ceased guarding the thoughts. Because of this, your attention became dispersed, your thoughts were scattered in different directions, and there was no prayer in the prayer. This happened a couple of times, and then prayer totally vanished. Acquire prayer from the beginning again, and ask for it from the Lord Himself.

"If you are not successful in prayer, do not expect success in anything else. It is the root of everything."

You will learn from this that you must never consider any spiritual activity to be established, especially prayer; always go about it as if you were going to carry it out for the first time. First zeal is given to something that is done for the first time. If when undertaking prayer, you go about it as if you have never prayed properly yet, and only now do you want to do so for the first time, you will always carry out your prayer with first zeal. And it will go well.

I suppose you began carrying out your prayer rule hurriedly—and haphazardly—just so you would finish it. Make it a rule for yourself from now on that you will never pray haphazardly. Nothing offends the

Lord more than this. It is better to recite a few of the set prayers with the fear of God and reverence than to recite all of them haphazardly. It is better even to fall down on your knees and recite one of the prayers or even use your own words than to do the other thing. You began praying that other way, and there are no results. Scold yourself thoroughly for such carelessness. Know that no one who prays attentively and diligently ever departs from prayer without having received its action. Oh, what good we deprive ourselves of when we permit ourselves to pray carelessly!

How does haste come about in prayer? It is not clear. We spend hours on other tasks, and it never seems long; but hardly have we begun our prayer than it seems we have been praying for who knows how long. We hurry ourselves along in order to finish sooner. There is no benefit from the prayer.

What should be done then? Some people do the following, so as not to be subject to this self-deception: They set aside a quarter of an hour for prayer, or half an hour, whatever is more convenient for them, and thus adjust their prayer time so that when the clock strikes, whether on the half hour or hour, they will know when it is time to end. While they are at prayer, they do not worry about reading a certain number of prayers, but only that they rise up to the Lord in a worthy manner for the entire set time. Others do this: Once they have established a prayer time for themselves, they find out how many times they can go around the prayer rope during that period, moving the beads in an unhurried manner. Then when they are at prayer, they move the beads unhurriedly for the set number of times, and during that period they pray to the Lord in their mind, speaking to Him in their own words or reciting set prayers, or bowing with reverence to His boundless majesty without either of those. There are others who get so accustomed to praying that the times they spend at prayer are moments of delight for them. It rarely happens that they stand at prayer for the set time only; instead, they double and triple it. Select whichever method pleases you most. Maintain it without fail. We cannot get along without a precise prayer rule for you. Those who are zealous about prayer do not need any rules.

I have already written you about memorizing the prayers and reciting them by heart when you are at prayer, without opening your prayer book. This is nothing to boast about! When you are at prayer, recite the prayer or psalm from memory, and embrace each word, not just with thought, but with feeling. If during this your own prayerful cries arise from some word of the psalm or prayer, do not cut them off, but let them come. You see, you will not worry about reciting a certain number of prayers, but only being at prayer for the allotted time, which will make itself known either by beads on the prayer rope or by the clock.

Rush through the recitation of prayers and nothing will happen. Recite one psalm or one prayer

for the whole time. Someone was saying that often he will recite a single prayer, the *Our Father*, for the entire allotted time. This is because he considers each word in the entire prayer. Another person said that when someone explained to him that one could pray in this way, he stood in reverential prayer for the entire Matins, reciting *Have mercy on me, O God*, and did not manage to complete the entire psalm.

Get accustomed to praying in this manner if you will, and God granting, you will soon cultivate prayer within yourself. Then you will no longer need any rules. Labor, for nothing will come from you otherwise. If you are not successful in prayer, do not expect success in anything else. It is the root of everything. May the Lord bless you.

On Holy Communion, the Purifying Treasure *Collected from St. Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain*

"With the fear of God, faith and love draw near"

We shall prove from scriptural and patristic witnesses that it is necessary for the faithful and Orthodox Christians to receive the Body and Blood of our Lord frequently throughout our lives, so long as there is no objection from our spiritual father, and that frequent Communion produces great benefits for the soul and body; while delaying this, on the contrary, produces many harmful and destructive results.

The commentary on the eighth and ninth Apostolic Canons emphasizes: "The commands of these canons are very strict and severe, for they excommunicate those who come to the Liturgy but do not remain until the end and take Communion. And other canons of the Councils command the same: namely, that it is wholly proper and appropriate to receive Communion."

When the Christian communes, what mind could understand the gifts and graces he enjoys after the Divine Communion? How can our feeble tongue express it?

Anyone who does not commune frequently is following the opposite way, for he is not sealed with the precious Blood of the Lord, as St. Gregory the Theologian states.

And so, my brethren, if we do as our Holy Fathers direct and receive frequently, we have not only the cooperation and help of divine grace during this temporal life, we also have the assistance of the angels of God and of Him who is the Lord of the angels.

This Blood of the Lord is salvation for our souls; with it the soul rejoices, with it, it is beautified, it is warmed; this Blood makes the mind shine more brightly than the light; it makes the soul more beautiful than gold. Those who partake of this Body stand with the angels and archangels and the powers above; with it they are adorned with royal robes and the weapons of the Spirit. Those who receive Communion receive the very King Himself.

Do you see what graces you receive if you commune frequently? Do you see how the mind

becomes radiant, thoughts shine, and all the powers of the soul are purified with frequent Communion? If you love mortifying the fleshly passions, commune frequently and you will delight.

Without frequent Communion we will not be able to free ourselves from the passions nor raise ourselves to the heights of sobriety.

And if we do not partake frequently—if possible, even daily—of the precious Body and Blood of our Lord, then we will not be able to escape the devil.

Many invent all kinds of virtues and think that just by doing these without frequent Communion, they will be saved—which is utterly impossible, since they do not wish to obey God's will and commune frequently and to follow the Church's standard for every festal Liturgy.

To be loved by Christ through frequent Communion of the holy Body and Blood, makes it impossible [for us] not to love everyone.

How can you love other good things, O Christian, and not frequently receive Communion? Would you like to enjoy each day? Would you like to have Pascha and rejoice with ineffable joy at the end of life? Then run frequently to the Mystery and receive it with proper preparation, so that you may rejoice.

It is the will of God that all of us who are Christians should receive His Body and Blood frequently, so that by means of frequent Communion in this present life, we shall be safeguarded from the snares and schemes of the devil" and when our souls depart in the hour of death, they may fly like freed doves and without any hindrance from the aerial spirits.

O the grandeur of the glory those Christians receive from frequent Communion, both in the present life and in that to come!

If it is necessary to confess and do penance in order to receive forgiveness of sins, Holy Communion is just as necessary for the remission of sins; as with a festering wound: first one removes worms, then cuts away putrid tissue, and last of all, applies ointment that it may heal; if you do this, you are restored to your former condition. Thus if you sin: with confession you remove the worms, and with penance you cut away what is putrid, and follow this with Holy Communion which becomes the ointment, and you are healed. For if he is not given Holy Communion, the wretched sinner will return to his former state and, in the end, will become someone who is worse than before (Matthew 12:45).

I am astonished and amazed how contemporary Christians can celebrate Sundays and other feasts of the year with true spiritual joy, and yet not partake frequently of the Holy Communion, which is the rationale and purpose of each of the feasts and festivals. It is most certain that those who do not commune frequently, fall short, alas, of all the celestial and divine good things; and beside this, they violate the commandments of the Lord and the authoritative decisions of the apostles and the Councils and of all the saints. They are under the

penalty of excommunication according to the holy apostles and the Council of Antioch. Such people give aid and opportunity to the devil through avoiding Communion, casting themselves into various sins and many other temptations.

O my brethren, let us see just once with the soul's noetic eyes of what heights and of what great, good things we fall short when we do not commune frequently; then indeed we will want to make ready all our faculties and commune in this manner, even daily. And if we have shown great negligence towards the Holy Communion until now, then let us from now on, I beg you with brotherly-love let us awake from the deep sleep of indolence, and let put forth eagerness and diligence.

On Living in the Present From *The Diary of a Russian Priest*

Our continual mistake is that we do not concentrate upon the present day, the actual hour, of our life; we live in the past or in the future; we are continually expecting the coming of some special moment when our life will unfold itself in its full significance. And we do not notice that life is flowing like water through our fingers, sifting like precious grain from a loosely-fastened bag.

Constantly, each day, each hour, God is sending us people, circumstances, tasks, which should mark the beginning of our renewal; yet we pay them no attention, and thus we continually resist God's will for us. Indeed, how can God help us? Only by sending us in our daily life certain people, and certain coincidences of circumstance. If we accepted every hour of our life as the hour of God's will for us, as the decisive, most important, unique hour of our life—what sources of joy, love, strength, as yet hidden from us, would spring from the depths of our soul!

Let us then be serious in our attitude towards each person we meet in our life, towards every opportunity for performing a good deed; be sure that you will then fulfill God's will for you in these very circumstances, on that very day, in that very hour.

Upcoming Events 2023

13-15 October Regional Young Adult Gathering
15 October: 2:00 p.m. Oktoberfest
31 October: 6:00 p.m. All Saints Party

GLORY BE TO GOD FOR ALL THINGS!