

# The Confessor's Tongue for October 22, 2023

20<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost: St. Abercius, Equal-to-the-Apostles

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.

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## On the Use of Images

*St. John of Kronstadt*

My carnal nature needs images. Therefore, we rightly and justly make images and reverence them. What else is man but a living image of the living God?

Can our nature do without an image? Can we recall to mind an absent person without representing and imagining him? Has not God himself enabled us to represent and to imagine? Images are the Church's answer to a crying necessity of our nature.

Images or symbols are a necessity of human nature in our present spiritually sensual condition; they explain visually many things of the spiritual world which we could not apprehend without images and symbols. It was for this reason that the divine teacher, the personal Wisdom through whom all things were created, the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, often taught men by means of images or parables. It is for this reason also that in our Orthodox churches it is the custom to represent many things to the sight of the Christian by imagery; for instance, to represent the Lord Himself, the immaculate Mother of God, the angels and saints, on images, in order that we may conform our lives, all our thoughts, words, and deeds, to the image of the thoughts, words, and deeds of the Lord and his saints.

By reverencing icons, first, I reverence in them God, who has begotten before all worlds the Son, his living image, who clothed in matter the infinite thought of God the Father by creating the worlds and all creatures that were in the thought of God and man, created after the image and likeness of God; second, I honor in them the image of God incarnate; third, I honor in them myself, man made in the immortal divine image, called to be a partaker of the divine nature, to unity with the Lord, to be the temple of the Holy Spirit.

Icons replace the persons themselves whose names they bear. The images of the saints upon our icons represent to us the nearness in the spirit of God's saints, who live in God, and are always close to us in the Holy Spirit, through our hearty faith and prayer to them.

We have images in our houses and venerate them in order to show, amongst other things, that the eyes of God and of all the company of heaven are constantly fixed upon us, and see not only all our acts, but also our words, thoughts, and desires.

Kissing with the lips corresponds to kissing with the soul; and when we kiss holy things, we ought to kiss them with the soul and heart as well as with the lips.

From *Spiritual Counsels: Select Passages from My Life in Christ*, SVS Press.

Notice that St. John speaks of kissing holy things with our lips, not laying our hands on them. When venerating

icons or holy things, we should always kiss directly with our lips whenever possible. If you are offered the chalice to venerate, you do not touch it with your fingers; you kiss it with your lips. So should we do with icons. Only if it is otherwise unreachable, we may kiss our fingertips and transfer the kiss by our fingertips to the icon.

## On Sickness

*St. Isaac the Syrian, Homily 5*

And whenever you are ill, say, "Blessed are those who discover the object which God has placed in what He brings upon us to profit us! For God administers sicknesses for the health of our soul.

## On Boasting

*St. Isaac the Syrian, Homily 5*

Do not believe yourself to be strong, until you are tempted and find yourself superior to change....Never boast of your labors with your tongue, lest you be put to shame. In each matter about which a man boasts himself, God permits that he change, so that he should be humbled, and learn humility. This is why you must surrender all things to God's foreknowledge, and not believe that there is anything in this life unchanging.

## How to Always Get Your Way

*From the Life of St. Moses of Optina*

One of the main reasons Father Moses of Optina always had a peaceful disposition—and also one of his most distinctive and remarkable traits—was that he never insistently sought his own will in anything. On the contrary, he entrusted himself to God's will with perfect submission in things great or small. He was never disturbed by anything, no matter what happened. Sometimes he would give a brother an assignment, but because of unforeseen circumstances things would not work out as he had expected. "It looks like it wasn't God's will," he would say on such occasions, and he would calmly lay aside his former plan. He would also say, "One must have patience ready at hand in all things, and not desire anything to turn out otherwise than it does, so as not to lose one's peace." He would counsel everyone to keep what he called Saint Dorotheus' 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." Father Moses himself would find peace by fulfilling this rule even in the most trying situations. In him were fulfilled these words of Saint Dorotheus in all their force, "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.

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**Excerpts from an Interview With Confessor  
Fr. Roman Braga (2012, +2015)**

*Can you talk about what it was like as a Christian to live under a communist regime?*

As a Christian you had to make many compromises. For example, you have children and they go to school. And they are told in school there is no God and you do not have to pray and you do not have to have crosses around the neck and not to go to church. The children went home and grandma was praying with them and making the sign of the cross. We kept this Christian life in the family. Nothing could be manifest. You were not allowed to manifest your Christian life.

*How did your own struggles with the communist government impact your spiritual life?*

The communists could not control what is inside of you, but you couldn't express what you were thinking, you were not able to express your opinion. And this not only as a monk or as a priest or as a Christian, but as an intellectual in general. Not all intellectuals in Romania during the communist regime were communists. In order to survive they were forced to say one thing but they believed something else in themselves. So they had a double life. It was one thing what they had in their mind and in their soul – their convictions, and another what they were expressing aloud. It was all a matter of survival. So that was a very, very difficult life. It was not like here where you are not afraid of anything. You are not afraid to express yourself; it was not like this. People were saying exactly what the government asked them to say in order to be able to have a job, to be a teacher, to have a profession, to be able to provide for their family their daily bread. But what they thought and believed the communist couldn't control.

We were happy in prison in a way. Let aside all the physical tortures Physical tortures are nothing. You suffer from them even, you can even die. But the communist imprisonment is worse than physical torture. They want to keep you at the limit of normal and abnormal, but they couldn't control what is inside of you. In a way, for a priest the communist prison was good because there in prison we were praying. Once you are convicted (of "crimes" you did not commit) you are placed in a cell, there is nothing else. They put the intellectuals and especially the priests in solitary confinement at least one or two years, and in a way that was very good for us. Not having anywhere to go or even look out a window because there were no windows in those cells of solitary confinement you have to look, to go somewhere; and so you go inside yourself, inside your heart and inside your mind to examine yourself, to see who you are and why God brought you into this world. You question whether God even exists, and what is your relationship with God.

When we were free we did not have time to ask ourselves these questions. Our faith was superficial because you can learn a lot of things and can have a mind like an Encyclopedia full of all the knowledge, but if you don't know yourself and who you are! Even if you know everything in the world you are superficial if you do not ask yourself who am I? Why do I exist? What is the destiny of my life? Why did God create me? If I believe in God what does God want from me? These things when you live in freedom you do not ask yourself because you are in a hurry to do a lot of things, to read a lot of books and you become the slave of the books, the slave of the knowledge, of concepts of philosophy and so on. But you do not have the time to meditate on who you are. When you are free you are made out of quotations from books. We were not allowed in prison to have any books. In 11 years I did not see a pencil or a piece of paper, or a book, and not only myself, but all the intellectuals and all the priests. The communists gave books and papers to read to simple folks because they wanted to convince them to become communists. They wanted, however, that the intellectuals be transformed into beasts, become like animals. The interesting think is that it did not happen. Instead you became yourself because you started to examine yourself. Once you were out of prison, they were interested that you do not make propaganda to tell others what happened in prison, and so on and so many of us were expelled from the country just so we do not to tell the others what was going on in prison.

*How did you witness Christ in prison?*

In prison most of the time you were by yourself. I was in a forced labor camp too. In the forced labor camp we had our groups of prayer and we had priests that were hearing confessions. Each priest had a group around him. We witnessed Christ more in the forced labor camp because there was not too much control there. It was a large community and the communists were interested in how much you worked. In prison it was impossible to witness Christ, even if you were alone or maybe two in the same cell. Sometimes there were four in the same cell, but you only talked to a small group of people. In the force labor camps we even had the liturgy there because we had priests, without vestments and without anything else other than a piece of bread, and some tonic wine that the doctors in the hospital provided. I was in a forced labor camp with 16,000 people, and there was a hospital and the doctors were from among the prisoners so they provided tonic wine for us for the liturgy and we spared two pieces of bread from breakfast and so we had liturgy. The guards did not know we had liturgy; as they were passing by, they thought we were just babbling; we sure did not show it. I remember in prison though, in the cell, a priest had liturgy under the blanket; when the guard entered he covered everything with the blanket.

*Why is suffering important as a Christian?*

Suffering is good not only for Christians but for everybody. Because if you do not suffer you do not understand anything. Suffering is a good experience. And in the scriptures it says that suffering is a sign that God loves you. In the Epistle to Hebrew Chapter 13, St. Paul says that if you do not suffer you are not children of God. Who is the Father who does not chastise His children? He punishes His children because He loves them. If you do not suffer you are not the sons of God. After you experience suffering, you understand more and better things in this world, much deeper than the others who do not experience any suffering. So suffering is maturing you in your spiritual life. You should not avoid suffering but you should not look for it. God takes care of that. There is a lot of suffering in the world. So many families who have children in the hospital. My doctor has a daughter 11 years of age with bone cancer; they are young, what a suffering for that family whose daughter may be dying. We ask ourselves why?

God allows into this world to have beggars and crippled people and all this because otherwise we would not be able to be charitable. We have to exercise our love because love is not just the word, it is something that we must do. And you do things for those who need them. So that is why there are orphan children and crippled people and so many other things, for us to exercise our love for our neighbor because Jesus said love God with your whole heart and whole mind but love your neighbor as you love yourself. But if my neighbor does not need my love what is love? Just a hand shake? That is not love. Or to give him a hug? That is nothing. Go there and take a crippled person on the street and give him a hug and ask him what can I do for you? That is love. Not to live for yourself; to live for others and always to deny yourself; to forget yourself and remember that others exist. That is Christian life. Not to say "what about me, and me, and I;" Who are you? You are nobody. Try not to pay too much attention to you. But when you say can I do something for you? Maybe you need me? That is meaningful Christian love. So suffering in this world is permitted by God that other Christians might concentrate their love on those suffering people and do something for them, to sacrifice themselves for them. In our own life suffering is permitted so we understand why Jesus was crucified.

I am able to forgive. I pray for those guards that tortured us in prison. I am not against them because I understand they were forced to do that. And you forgive only when you suffer. When you do not suffer you do not want to forgive, then you are condemned. There was a movie-maker who came and made a movie with me and Fr. Calciu. The interviewer said "how can you forgive them?" Well why not? They are the image of God. We know that in that kind of regime they were forced to kill us, to torture us, to do what they were told to do, otherwise their families would not have bread to eat. You are able to forgive when you suffer. When you do not suffer you are not

able to forgive. You say "no, no, no, you should not do such and such a thing and if you do you should be punished because you did it". So suffering is very important in Christian life.

*How is life in America different than your experience in Romania?*

I thought I came to a free country. And that is true; you have the freedom to do anything you want, as long as you do not hurt anybody. If you hurt anybody for sure you have to suffer the consequences. Speaking of the freedom of conscious and thought, I doubt that we are free because being free to do everything you can destroy yourself if you are not mature. Freedom without responsibility is not freedom. Only when you are prevented of doing what you want to do, then you understand freedom. But when you say "I want to do everything I want" you are not free. Think about Genesis, the first book in the Bible, when God created man, he did not understand what freedom was until God told him you cannot touch this tree; the tree is a symbol, it is the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. So if God created man free, then you ask why He gave him a limit: "do not touch this." Without this limit man cannot understand what freedom is. Freedom is just a word if you do not have restrictions. So freedom without discipline is not freedom. And many in our culture here in America think that they do not have to respect anything or anybody; they are free to do everything. This is not freedom.

*What are some ways we can find Christ today, in the American society?*

Well Christ first of all is in you. Christ is not just some nice guy. He is God and God is within you. God is in our conscious, in our heart, in our minds, is not something material you see outside of yourself. You find God in yourself. You descend in your personality. We are eternal, we never die, the body is going to the cemetery but the conscious, the person is continually living. So when you descend into yourself, your conscious is infinite. And this infinity is the temple of the living God. St. Paul says many times you are the temple of the living God because God lives within you. You find God when you know yourself, when you know who you are. If you neglect that, "I don't have time to think about myself" you will never find God because God is not something material, you do not find him in a specific place. God is always with you if you want Him to be with you. You find God when you find yourself. "Who am I?" Pay attention to these verses of the scriptures: "you are the temple of the living God because God lives within you." And Jesus said: "remain in Me and I in you. I am the vine and you are the branches" if you do not remain in me you do not have sap to feed yourself and you dry up. People who complain they do not feel God they are dry branches. They have to remain in Christ and to accept Christ by saying: "Lord, come, I am here. You

created me. Open my heart because You created this heart. You created the door, enter please.”

You have to talk with God everywhere you are. Walking on the street, driving the car, you can say “Lord You are in the front seat, I know that You are here tell me something. Why did You create me?” You have a lot of things, an infinite number of things to converse with God and God wants you to talk with Him because prayer is not as much as you read in the book or how long you are kneeling, prayer is the whole life. When you eat, when you drink, when you drive the car, when you discipline your children: You are in a state of prayer. Life is a liturgy. It is not only in church that liturgy takes place, the liturgy is outside the church building too. The whole life should be a liturgy- if you have the feeling of the existence of God. But you have to get that feeling of the existence of God... how? I always say, especially to young people, have a dialogue, a permanent dialogue with God. Sure you are busy: you eat, you prepare your exam if you are a student, you work and you are very busy but always say: “Lord I know You are here I didn’t forget You. Look at me and do not abandon me.” See many times this permanent dialogue with God becomes a prayer because prayer is a communication between man and God.

Prayer is not just a short time and you say “I finished my prayer” and that’s it; you never finish your prayer. The definition of prayer is this: the feeling of the presence of God in you. And if you have this feeling of the presence of God you are in a continual prayer. If you pray only when you pray you don’t pray at all one of the monks said. So don’t pray only when you pray, you pray all the time because prayer is not “give me, give me.” Prayer is to say I love you and I want to spend time with you. Ask God something. And don’t worry God is answering you even if you don’t think it. He’s giving you good hints and good suggestions on how to resolve your problems. So to find God in our culture here is to be conscious that God exists first and God exists not outside of yourself but inside. And God is always with you and you can get the feeling of the existence of God. *Full interview at <https://pravoslavie.ru/54147.html>*

### ὁ ὢν ‘**Ho On**’--‘**He Who Is**’

At the end of most services, the priest exclaims: “Wisdom...He Who Is is blessed, even Christ our God, always, now and ever, and unto ages of ages.” This is Archbishop Dmitri’s translation of ὁ ὢν εὐλογετός, Χριστός ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν (*Ho On evlogetos, Christos ho Theos emon*). The ‘standard’ OCA translation has “Christ our God the existing One is blessed...” Apart from the ungainliness of speaking of God as ‘the existing one’, the ‘standard’ OCA translation leaves something to be desired, for it obscures an important connection to the Scriptures.

At the top of all icons of Christ, we find the Greek words in the halo: ὁ ὢν (*Ho On*). These words help identify the figure in the icon as Christ. “*Ho*” is

the definite article *the*, while ‘*on*’ is the present masculine participle of the verb ‘to be’, which may be translated as ‘the one being’, ‘the one who is’ or ‘He who is.’ This harkens back to the name God gave for himself to Moses at the Burning Bush: I am He Who Is—*ego eimi, ho On* ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ὢν. With this phrase the Greek Septuagint renders the sacred but mysterious name of God YHWH that God revealed to Moses. Thus, the Church identifies our Savior Jesus Christ as the One who spoke to Moses from the burning bush. Thus, the Church at the end of services cries “Wisdom”—one of Christ’s names—and then proclaims “He who Is” as our blessed Christ God forever.

### **God is Our Ally in the Struggle** *St. Symeon the New Theologian*

When God endowed us with free will, giving commandments to teach us instead how we must oppose our adversaries, He left it to the free choice of each either to oppose and vanquish the enemy, or to relax and be miserably defeated by him. Nor does He leave us entirely to ourselves—for He knows the weakness of human nature—but rather is present Himself with us and, indeed, allies Himself with those who choose to struggle, and mysteriously imbues us with strength, and Himself, not we, accomplishes the victory over the adversary....

God, . . . who is mighty and invincible, becomes, as we just said, an ally of those who willingly choose to do battle with the enemy, and he establishes them as victors over the cunning of the devil. He does not, however, compel to this war any who do not so choose, in order that He not destroy the power of choice which is proper to our reasoning nature, made according to His own image, and bring us down to the level of unreasoning brutes.

### **From The Diary of a Russian Priest**

It is divine to love those who hate.  
It is diabolical to hate and insult those who love.  
It is human to love those who love, to hate those who hate.

But—‘Be ye therefore perfect, as your Father which is in heaven is perfect’ (Matt 5:48).

We must not put our vices to sleep—we must uproot them. Here lies the advantage of life in the world: through conflict with other people and through situations which expose us to temptation, it reveals our own heart to us.

### **Upcoming Events 2023**

28 October: 19:00 a.m. Charpie Baptism  
31 October: 6:00 p.m. All Saints Party  
11 November 10:00 a.m. Adult Baptisms  
12 November: 4:00 p.m. Parish Thanksgiving Meal

**GLORY BE TO GOD FOR ALL THINGS!**