

The Confessor's Tongue for November 12, 2023

23rd Sunday after Pentecost: Venerable Nilus of Sinai; St. John the Merciful of Alexandria
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.

He That Endureth to the End Shall Be Saved

St. Theophan the Recluse

He that endureth to the end shall be saved (Matthew 10:22). Do we have anything to endure? No one has too little to put up with. There is so much that each person has to endure; therefore, our salvation is also at hand. Endure everything to the end, and you shall be saved. However, you have to be clever; otherwise, you might suffer a lot and not gain any benefit from your suffering.

First of all, you must stand strong in the holy faith and build your life upon it. If you happen to sin, wash your sin away with repentance as soon as possible.

Secondly, you must accept everything as if it were sent by God, remembering that nothing ever happens without God's will.

Thirdly, you must trust that everything that comes from God benefits our souls. Therefore, you must thank God sincerely for everything, sorrows and comforts alike.

Fourthly, teach yourself to love sorrows, for they are greatly salvific. Kindle the desire for them in your heart, since they are a bitter yet saving remedy.

Fifthly, keep in mind that when trouble hits, you cannot shrug it off like old clothes; you will have to get the better of it. No matter if you survive that trouble like a Christian or not, you will have to experience it anyway; so you had better act like a Christian. Grumbling does not save you from trouble—in fact, it makes it even worse. Humble submission to God's plan and good humor make troubles less unbearable.

Sixthly, you must realize that you deserve even greater sorrows. Be aware that if the Lord had wanted to serve you justice, you would have had a much greater turmoil.

Lastly, keep praying, and the merciful Lord will grant you spiritual strength, so that even if others are astonished by your hardships, you'll not regard them as something worth being sad about.

Preparing for Divine Communication

St. Paisius of Mt. Athos

– Geronda, in what way should we prepare before praying?

– It is akin to the preparation we do for Holy Communion. There, we talk of Holy Communion; here, we talk of holy communication. When we receive Holy Communion, we receive Christ within us, and divine Grace comes. By praying, we have constant communication with Christ, and we receive divine Grace in a different way. It is not a small matter! With the one, we commune of the Body and Blood of Christ; with the other, we communicate with God. Therefore, just as one is tasked with confessing to his spiritual Father prior to Holy

Communion, so is one tasked with humbly confessing to Christ prior to prayer, which is holy communication with God. "My Christ, I am in a terrible state, I am such a . . . and such a . . . It is not worthy Your while to bother with me; nevertheless, I beg of you, help me." That is how divine Grace comes, and then divine communication begins.

If one does not repent and does not humbly confess to God, he remains in an unsettled state. That then becomes a barrier which obstructs his communication with God. The door remains closed, and the soul does not obtain comfort. But if one says, "I have sinned, O God," the barrier is broken, or, rather, God opens the door, and one receives the Grace of divine communication.

– Geronda, in the *Ladder of Divine Ascent*, I had read that in order to pray, one must be arrayed in the type of clothing that befits one's presentation to a king. What type of outfit is that?

– To abase your own self before God and humbly ask forgiveness for your errors. You should say, "I am at fault, O God; I am ungrateful. I have saddened You. Forgive me." However, you should say it with inward contrition, not outward. That is the type of outfit that is suitable for you to wear when you converse with God. If that state of abasement does not precede prayer, then it is as if you say to God, "How are you doing? What's happening?" If one ought to ask for forgiveness from those whom he has wronged, how much more ought one to ask for forgiveness from God for his daily wrongdoings?

– In other words, Geronda, should I bring the wrongdoings of each passing day to mind?

– You should ask God's forgiveness for the wrongdoings you have made during that day, and afterwards, think about your sinfulness in general. That is how you are humbled, and afterwards, you can begin to make your requests. As for myself, I begin to pray by saying, "*God be merciful to me a sinner.*" I say that a few times in a whisper and then, I continue with the Jesus Prayer. I had once asked the Lord to teach me to pray. I then saw a vision of a seventeen-year-old boy praying. Oh, how that shattered me! He was crying and praying in such a way that I was overcome. He began with a confession, "I am ungrateful, incorrigible. . ." Then he said, "O God, how that I am in such a state, how will I be able to correct myself if You do not help me?" Then he began to make his requests.

– Geronda, it often happens that I am preoccupied with my wrongdoings whilst I am praying and am unable to concentrate.

– We have said that we should examine ourselves and confess our wrongdoings to God before we start praying, not while we pray. Such a thing is not self-criticism; it is a conversation with the devil. Before we start praying, we will think about what it is that is

wrong with our own self; we will turn our mind to that; we will aim, adjust the sight, and then . . . fire!
From St. Paisios, Spiritual Councils, volume VI pp. 41-43

Litias at Vigil

For the past few months, we have been serving the Litias at resurrectional Vigils and not just at festive vigils as had been our wont. Though appointed at all Vigils, the Litias is commonly omitted Saturday evenings in the interest of time.

The Litias is that part of the service when we go out into the narthex and offer prayers for the world and ask the prayers of a long list of saints. The Litias concludes with the blessing of bread, wheat, wine, and oil in the Church just before the end of Vespers. The blessed bread and wine is distributed during Matins as the faithful are anointed with the blessed oil.

The following petition of the Litias expresses importance of the Litias in our time and provides incentive to serve it at every Vigil:

Again we pray that He will keep this city, and this holy church, and every city and countryside from wrath, famine pestilence, earthquake, flood, fire, the sword, foreign invasion, and from civil war, and from sudden death; that our good God, who loveth man, will be gracious, favorable, and conciliatory, and turn away and dispel all the wrath stirred up against us and all sickness, and may deliver us from His righteous chastisement which impendeth against us, and have mercy on us.

The sins of our land are great. Judgment palpably hangs over us. Only the humble, repentant prayer of the righteous can hold it off. Hence, we pray.

Fifty-Five Beatitudes, Part III

St. Ephrem the Syrian

St. Ephrem, whose feast we celebrated January 28, is known as "the apostle of repentance".

38. Blessed the one who manages his possessions in accordance with God's will and has not been condemned by God the Savior as a lover of money without compassion for his neighbor.

39. Blessed the one who keeps vigil in prayers and reading and good work, such a one will become enlightened so that he does not sleep in death.

40. Blessed the one who has become a good spiritual net and caught many for the good Lord, such a one will greatly be praised by the Lord.

41. Blessed the one who has become a good example to his neighbor and not scandalized the conscience of his fellow servant by acting lawlessly, such a one will be eulogized by the Lord.

42. Blessed the one who has become long-suffering and compassionate and not become the slave of the barbarian, I mean anger and evil wrath, for such a one will be exalted by the Lord.

43. Blessed the one who, exalted by love, has become a city founded upon a mountain, from which the enemy, when he saw it, withdrew in fear, trembling at its security in the Lord.

44. Blessed the one who has shone by the light of faith of the Lord, like a radiant lamp on a tall lampstand, and has enlightened souls that are darkened, for they followed the heresy of the faithless and impious.

45. Blessed the one who loves truth continually and has not lent his mouth as an instrument of impiety by lying, for he fears the commandment about idle speech.

46. Blessed the one who, like one unwise, does not judge his neighbor, but as understanding and spiritual has struggled to throw the plank out of his own eye.

47. Blessed the one whose heart has blossomed like a palm tree by rightness of faith and has not been thrust out, as by thorns, by the heresy of the faithless and impious.

48. Blessed the one who has kept the mastery of his eyelids and has not deceived himself with either mind or senses with regard to the skin of the flesh that after a little while oozes putrefaction.

49. Blessed the one who has before his eyes the day of departure and has hated pride, before the weakness our nature has been proved as it rots in the tomb.

50. Blessed the one who considers those who sleep in their coffins in graves and has rejected every foul smelling desire, for he will rise in glory when the heavenly trumpet sounds, rousing all the children of humankind from sleep.

51. Blessed the one who observes with spiritual understanding the choirs of stars shining with glory and the beauty of the heavens and longs to contemplate the Maker of all things.

52. Blessed the one who keeps in mind the fire that came down on Mount Sinai and the sounds of the trumpets and Moses standing there with fear and trembling and who does not neglect his own salvation.

53. Blessed the one who does not set his hope on man, but on the Lord, who is coming again in great glory to judge the universe with justice, for he will be like a tree planted by waters and will not fail to bear fruit.

54. Blessed the one whose thought has been with grace, like a cloud filled with rain, and which waters souls for the increase of fruits of life; his praise will be for everlasting glory.

55. Blessed are those who watch according to God continually, for they will be overshadowed by God in the day of judgement, becoming sons of the bridal chamber, in joy and gladness they will see the Bridegroom. But I and my like, idle and pleasure-loving, will weep and lament as we watch our brothers in everlasting glory, while we are in torments.

Upcoming Events 2023

12 November: 4:00 p.m. Parish Thanksgiving Meal
15 November: Start of Nativity Fast
21 November: Entrance of Theotokos into Temple
23 November: Thanksgiving Day Liturgy

GLORY BE TO GOD FOR ALL THINGS!