

The Confessor's Tongue for November 26, 2023

25th Sunday after Pentecost: Ven. Alypius Stylite & Nikon Preacher of Repentance
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.

26 November: St. Nikon the "Metanoite"

Saint Nikon Metanoite ("the Preacher of Repentance") was born at Pontus Polemoniacus at the beginning of the tenth century. He was the son of a wealthy landowner, and he was given the name Nicetas in Baptism.

Since he had no desire to take over the management of his family's wealth and estates, Nicetas entered the monastery of Chrysopetro, where he shone forth in prayer and asceticism. When he received the monastic tonsure, he was given the new name Nikon. The new name symbolizes a new life in the Spirit (Romans 7:6), and the birth of the new man (Ephesians 4:24). A monk is expected to stop associating himself with the old personality connected to his former life in the world, and to devote himself entirely to God.

Saint Nikon had a remarkable gift for preaching. When he spoke of virtue and spiritual matters, his listeners were filled with heartfelt compunction and love for God. His words produced such spiritual fruit in those who heard him that he was asked to travel through the eastern regions to preach. He visited Armenia, Crete, Euboea, Aegina, and the Peloponnesus, proclaiming the Gospel of Christ.

"Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." This was the message of Saint John the Baptist (Matthew 3:2), and of Christ Himself (Matthew 4:17). This was also the message of Saint Nikon. Wherever he went, he would begin his sermons with "Repent," hence he was called "Nikon Metanoite," or "Nikon, the Preacher of Repentance."

At first, people paid little heed to his message. Then gradually he won their hearts through his preaching, his miracles, and his gentle, loving nature. He stressed the necessity for everyone to repent, warning that those who utter a few sighs and groans and think that they have achieved true repentance have deluded themselves. Saint Nikon told the people that true sorrow for one's sins is cultivated by prayer, self-denial, almsgiving, ascetical efforts, and by confession to one's spiritual Father.

After sowing the seeds of piety, Saint Nikon began to see them bear fruit. People started to change their lives, but he urged them to strengthen their souls in virtue and good works so that they would not be overwhelmed by the cares of this world.

Eventually, Saint Nikon settled in a cave outside Sparta. Soon he moved into the city, because so many people were coming to hear him. In the center of Sparta, he built a church dedicated to Christ the Savior. In time a monastery grew up around the church.

Saint Nikon never ceased to preach the Word of God, and to lead people back to the spiritual life of

the Church. He also healed the sick, and performed many other miracles.

Saint Nikon fell asleep in the Lord in 998, and his memory was honored by the people around Sparta. During the Turkish occupation of Greece, however, he was all but forgotten, except in Sparta. After the Greek Revolution in 1821, a service to Saint Nikon was composed by Father Daniel Georgopoulos, and was based on the saint's Life, which had been written by Igumen Gregory of Saint Nikon's Monastery in 1142.

Saint Nikon was recognized as the patron saint of the diocese of Monemvasia and Lakedaimonia in 1893 when the cathedral church in Sparta was dedicated to Saint Nikon, the Preacher of Repentance. oca.org

From St. Paisios, On Prostrations in Prayer

– Geronda, does your body hurt?
– No, because I do . . . "spiritual ascetic exercises".
– What do you mean, Geronda?
– Prostrations, blessed one!
– You see, worldly people have Swedish gymnastics, and monastics have prostrations. Worldly people develop a healthy body through exercising, and monastics develop a healthy body and soul by doing prostrations. The pitiable worldly people do not know how beneficial prostrations are—not only for the health of the soul, but also for that of the body. They are good for arthritis; they get rid of flaccidness; they also eliminate unnatural-looking bellies; they impart serenity, and they contribute to a certain manliness. At the same time, prostrations provide one with e capability of ascending the spiritual heights of the virtues, just as he would climb the heights of the mountains with great ease, without huffing and puffing.

Prostrations are essential for both the young and the old. They help one who undergoes carnal warfare, as well as one who has been freed from such warfare. Whoever has a strong constitution should do more prostrations than one who is sickly, just as a powerful machine gets more work done. Prostrations are particularly helpful to younger people in subduing the flesh. That is why I always tell them, 'You should do as many prostrations as you can; not only for yourselves, but also for those who are sick and elderly and unable to do prostrations.'

Prostrations are prayer, but, at the same time, they are also a form of asceticism and more helpful than any other forms of spiritual asceticism. In addition to starting up our spiritual engine for prayer, prostrations bestow many other beneficial things as well. First of all is that through them, we worship God and humbly ask Him for His mercy. The second benefit is that doing prostrations humbles the savage flesh, so that calmness and dispassion of the flesh

ensue. And the third benefit they provide is to the health of the body, such that one acquires a twofold health of soul and body.

An Address by St. Tikhon

San Francisco, February 23, 1903
St. Tikhon, Patriarch of Russia and Enlightener of North America, was once the ruling bishop in America. This address speaks to us still.

Orthodoxy is a precious treasure: in it we were born and raised; all the important events of our life are related to it, and it is ever ready to give us its help and blessing in all our needs and good undertakings, however unimportant they may seem.

Orthodoxy supplies us with strength, good cheer, and consolation; it heals, purifies, and saves us. The Orthodox Faith is also dear to us because it is the Faith of our Fathers. For its sake the apostles bore pain and labored; martyrs and preachers suffered for it; champions who were like unto saints shed their tears and blood; pastors and teachers fought for it; and our ancestors stood up for it, whose legacy it was that to us it should be dearer than the apple of our eyes.

Today there are many who were born, raised, and glorified by the Lord in the Orthodox Faith, yet who deny their faith, pay no attention to the teachings of the Church, do not keep its injunctions, do not listen to their spiritual pastors and remain cold towards the divine services and the Church of God. How speedily some Orthodox people lose their Faith in America—this country of many creeds and tribes of peoples! They begin their apostasy with things which in their eyes have little importance. They judge the Church as “old-fashioned” and “not accepted among educated people” to observe all such customs as praying before and after meals, or even morning and evening prayers, to wear the holy cross, to keep icons in their house and to keep Church holy days and fast days. Such people do not even stop at this—but go further; they do not go to Confession, they dispense with Church Marriage and delay baptizing their children. In this way, their ties with the Orthodox Faith are broken! They remember the Church on their death bed, and some don't even do that! To excuse their apostasy the naively say: “this is not the old country, this is America, and, consequently, it is impossible to observe all the demands of the Church.” As if the words of Christ were of use for the old country only and not for the whole world! As if the Orthodox Faith is not the foundation of the world!

If you do not preserve the Orthodox Faith and the commandments of God, the least you can do is not to humiliate your hearts by inventing false excuses for your sins! If you do not honor our customs, the least you can do is not to laugh at things you do not know or understand. If you do not accept the motherly care of the Holy Orthodox Church, the least you can do is to confess that you act wrongly, that you are sinning against the Church and behave like children! If you do, the Orthodox Church, like a loving mother, may forgive you your coldness and slights, and will receive you back into Her embrace.

The light of Orthodoxy was not lit to shine only on a small number of people. Orthodox people ought to

spread it among people of other beliefs. The Orthodox Church is universal; it remembers the words of its Founder: *Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature*, (Mark 16:15). We ought to share our spiritual wealth, our truth, light, and joy with others who are deprived of these blessings, but often are seeking them and thirsting for them. We live in a country surrounded by people of other creeds; in the sea of other religions our Church is a small island of salvation, towards which swim some of the people, plunged in the sea of life. Are we to remain deaf and insensible? God save us from such a lack of sympathy!

The spread of Christ's Faith ought to be near and precious to the heart of every Christian. Pastors are not alone in the work of spreading the Orthodox Faith. Every member of the Church ought to take a lively and heartfelt interest in spreading the Faith. This interest may show itself in personal preaching of the Gospel of Christ. In many places of the United States, those who have joined Orthodoxy point out that the truth was found by their being disposed to it by the laity.

Earnest prayer and material support are also essential to the work of spreading the Gospel. We pray with our lips but seldom with our hearts. If you can offer much, offer all you can, but do offer. Do not be ashamed of the smallness of your offering.

Orthodox people! you must devote yourselves to the Faith, not only in word or tongue, but in deed and truth.

The Hundredth Person

During the time Father Moses was abbot of Optina Monastery in Russia, a certain rich merchant stayed at a monastery guest house with his grown-up son. Because of unexpected flooding, they had to remain several days. This merchant did not trust monks and was not well disposed toward them, and he was only staying so long at the monastery because he was forced to by circumstances.

Seeing that the monastery guestmaster had diligently waited on them for several days and brought them meals, he once said to him at dinner time, “You sure treat us well, but just how much are you going to charge us later?”

“We're not going to charge you anything.”

“What, nothing?”

“This is how we do it—we have a box on the wall and you just put in there whatever amount God puts into your heart to give.”

“Why, of course I'll put something in, but the next person won't, and maybe there will be a lot of people like him, and so the monastery will go broke feeding everyone for free!”

“Our Father Abbot says that even if ninety-nine people do not give anything, God will send a hundredth person to make up for them all.”

At this the merchant looked at his son and said, “Well, my boy, it looks like that hundredth person is you and me.” Astonished at the Superior's faith, he became a regular benefactor of Optina Hermitage from that time forth. From *The Elder Moses of Optina*

Upcoming Events 2023

14 December: Holy Unction, 6:30 p.m.

GLORY BE TO GOD FOR ALL THINGS!