

The Confessor's Tongue for December 3, 2023

26th Sunday after Pentecost: Prophet Zephaniah, Ven. Sabba of Zvenigorod

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.

St. Nicholas of Zicha On Happiness

From *Prayers by the Lake*

Are there days gone by, O man, to which you would wish to return? They all attracted you like silk, and now remain behind you like a cobweb. Like honey they greeted you, like stench you bade them farewell. All were totally filled with illusion and sin.

See how all the pools of water in the moonlight resemble mirrors; and how all the days that were lit up with you levity resemble mirrors. But as you stepped from one day to the next, the false mirrors cracked like thin ice, and you waded through the water and mud.

Can a day that has a morning and an evening as doorways be a day?

O luminous Lord, my soul is burdened with illusions and longs for one day—for the day without doorways, the day from which my soul has departed and sunk into the shifting shadows—for Your day, which I used to call my day, when I was one with You.

Is there any happiness gone by, O man, to which you would wish to return? Of two morsels of the same sweetness, the second is the more trite. You would turn your head away in boredom from yesterday's happiness, if it were set out on today's table.

Moments of happiness are given to you only in order to leave you longing for true happiness in the bosom of the every-happy Lord; and ages of unhappiness are given to you, to waken you out of the drowsy dream of illusions.

O Lord, Lord, my only happiness, will You provide shelter for Your injured pilgrim?

O Lord, my ageless youth, my eyes shall bathe in You and shine more radiantly than the sun. You carefully collect the tears of the righteous, and with them You rejuvenate worlds.

On Reading

A current article by a certain Brian Miller in the *Front Porch Republic* documents the decline in the reading of books by Americans.

The [data](#) on readership is dire for those who value books in a culture, especially the numbers for young boys on their bikes. More than half of adults in the U.S. did not read a book to its end in the past year, and an astonishing 10 percent have not read a book in more than ten years. (This number may be lower than others you've seen, but that is because most surveys count as "reading" both listening to audiobooks—which, no matter how enjoyable that might be, is most certainly not—and skimming a few pages of a book but not finishing it.) Accounting for this depressing trend by age, readership falls off the map by the time we get to Gen Z—making this essay akin to bemoaning the lack of horse-drawn

carriages on the interstate system. Even for those of us still in the category of readers, the number of books read annually is plummeting. And this is before we even consider the question of *what* is getting read.

Going to the source (<https://wordrated.com/american-reading-habits-study/>) of Mr. Miller's date, we learn that of those actually reading whole books, the average adult read 5.4 books per year. Baby Boomers did best at 9.5 books, Gen X next at 6.0, Millennials at 4.4, and Gen Z at 3.5.

Is this lack of reading a matter for concern? One might say that people are reading, but on the internet, that books are the technology of yesteryear and have been displaced by the products of technological progress. Yet books represent a much more serious effort to produce than an internet article. They require an investment in effort to write, to proofread, to convince a publisher to take a risk and publish them. Once printed, they are durable. While an article on the internet can be easily manipulated, edited, or removed, a book is a physical object that cannot readily be changed. It stands as long as it physically exists as a monument to a person's thought. The efforts of the Communists in the Soviet Union to send out new pages to paste over old pages in the Soviet Encyclopedia published with pictures of men who had fallen out of favor and been repressed or the efforts of others to burn books show both the power of the book and its permanence as a witness.

Moreover, reading books calls for concentrated attention, develops ability to follow sustained argument, and to think at a deep level. It provides us with means to meet with the minds of others who have something important to say. It allows us to learn from both the living and from those long dead.

What does dearth of reading mean for Christians? Writing and literature has been an essential part of Christian civilization. Reading has been given to man from God since He gave His law to Moses and had him write it down for generations to come. The Law contained not only the ordinances of the Lord to enable Israel to live in the Promised Land in God's blessing but also the record of what He had done for them, which they were to remember so as not to go astray after idols. While the eternal Word of God is a Person, the written Word of God bears witness to the truth of the Person and reveals God's will to us.

Christian faith has inspired much literature and promoted literacy around the world. The *Bible* is the world's perennial bestseller. While the Faith was primarily propagated by preaching, orally, much is preserved, passed on, and taught in written form. In our literature, we have a whole college of instructors in the Faith conveying to us both true doctrine and the proper way of life that corresponds to Christian dogma.

Not to read books may say that we think ourselves sufficient in ourselves, or that we have progressed beyond those who went before us. It leaves us blind and mired in the prejudices of our own time. It leaves us vulnerable to being manipulated and controlled by the readily manipulated world of electronic communication. It often means that we have to reinvent for ourselves a wheel that was long ago made for our benefit.

Reading can do much to educate and instruct us. It is not an unmitigated good, for it can also become an end in itself, a distraction, an idle entertainment, a feeder of pride, a display for vainglory. Even so, as Christians we should read literature that nourishes our minds and souls, that helps us appreciate God's wisdom, power, and goodness manifested in the universe, that instructs us in the spiritual life and guides us on the path of salvation. Learning from the experience of those who have gone before us, we may avoid many errors and pitfalls.

At St. Maximus, we have a well-stocked parish library that is every growing. Take time to use it. Tear yourself away from screen. Unplug. Benefit from a good book. *Fr. Justin*

The Witness of the Martyrs

Some of the Church's saints are universally known within the Church and are known by many outside? Who does not know of St. Peter, St. John, the Theotokos, St. Nicholas, the Prophet David, and the Baptist? The Church celebrates the feast of such saints with great splendor. Some of the Church's saints are little known, even within the Church. Last week, on November 29, the Church keeps the memory of the holy martyr Paramon, offering a simple, modest service in his honor.

Paramon was not a Christian. He had not been instructed or catechized. He apparently lived a decent, righteous life based on the truth he knew. During the reign of the persecuting emperor Decius (249-251), the governor of Bithynia, Akylinus, while taking the healing waters of a hot springs at Teridon (at the confluence of the Tigris and Euphrates), decided make 378 Christians from Nicomedia whom he had imprisoned to offer sacrifices to the idols in the local temple of Isis. Paramon, who lived in the town of the hot springs, was witness to the scene as the Christians refused the Akyulinus's demand. The governor proceeded to have them beaten. They refused. In anger, he had them all beheaded. Paramon was disgusted by this, and voiced his criticism of the deed aloud: "I see the greatest impiety being performed, because the vile ruler is slaughtering so many righteous ones, and, indeed, foreigners, as though they were irrational animals!"

Paramon went on his way, but the governor had overheard and sent his soldiers after the man who had criticized his actions. The soldiers caught up with him, knocked him down with their spears, cut off parts of his body, and otherwise abused him before bringing him before the governor, who commanded

that he be executed. So Paramon joined the ranks of the martyrs.

In St. Paramon, God's power is revealed in touching the heart of one who did not know Christ through the courageous death of His servants. In the demeanor and bearing of these strangers from another land, St. Paramon saw something attractive, something honorable, something worthy of respect, something so compelling that he spoke out against their mistreatment and ended up identifying himself with them and their Lord Jesus Christ, publicly confessing Christ and winning the martyr's crown. The courage and steadfastness of many such martyrs as Paramon saw witnessed powerfully to many pagans about Christ the Truth and brought many of them to Christ. God is truly glorified in His Saints, and He desires to be likewise glorified in us. *Fr. Justin*

A Prayer for Deliverance & Help

Prayer of the Fifth Kathisma from the Psalter

O God righteous and praised, O God great and mighty, O God Who art preëternal: Hearken unto the entreaty of a sinful man at this hour; hearken unto me, O Thou Who hast promised to hear those who call upon Thee in truth. Do not abominate me whose lips are unclean and who am stuck fast in sins, O Hope of all the ends of the earth and of those who wander afar off. Take Thou Thy sword and shield, and rise up to mine aid; unsheath Thy sword, and hold at bay those who do me violence; fend off the unclean spirits from the face of my folly, and may there be put away from my mind the spirit of hatred and the remembrance of evils, the spirit of jealousy and falsehood, the spirit of fear and despondency, the spirit of pride and of every other evil: and may every burning and movement of my flesh resulting from the activity of the devil be extinguished, and may my soul, my body and spirit be illumined with the light of the divine knowledge of Thee: that by the multitude of Thy compassions I may attain unto the unity of the faith, a man perfect according to the measure of my stature, that with the angels and all Thy saints I may glorify the all-honored and majestic name of Thee – the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit – now and ever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

The Battle is the Lord's

Then said David to the Philistine, Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied. This day will the Lord deliver thee into mine hand; and I will smite thee, and take thine head from thee . . . that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel. And all this assembly shall know that the Lord saveth not with sword and spear: for the battle is the Lord's, and he will give you into our hands. I Samuel 17:45-47

Upcoming Events 2023

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

GLORY BE TO GOD FOR ALL THINGS!