

# The Confessor's Tongue for December 10, 2023

27<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost: Martyrs Menas, Hermogenes, Eucraphus

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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## Joy to the World

Inspired by Psalm 98 (97), Isaac Watts, an English Congregational minister, composed this hymn in 1719. Despite a certain tedious repetitiveness in the chorus, it expresses the enduring reason for joy: the Lord Savior has come into the world.

Joy to the world! the Lord is come;

Joy to the world! the Savior reigns...

He rules the world with truth and grace...

Christ's incarnation is the decisive moment in history, the expression of God's love directed against man's mortal enemies to free the captives and give them hope, life, and love.

The hymn also well instructs us in what man's response to the Lord's coming in the flesh should be.

Let Earth receive her King;

Let every heart prepare him room...

Let men their songs employ...

No more let sins and sorrows grow,  
Nor thorns infest the ground...

Each of us has the task to make room in our hearts for the Lord. This entails repentance, turning away from sin, giving Him attention, opening our hearts, purifying our thoughts. Each of us is to sing to the Lord, joyfully praising Him for His mighty works on our behalf and returning thanks. Having cleaning our hearts and made room for the Lord, we are to work to keep the thorns of sin from growing again in us.

May the Lord grant us joy and a worthy response to Him!

## On Prostrations & Bows

In prayer, the creature man has the inestimable privilege made possible only through the Godman Jesus Christ of standing before the infinite, uncreated God and addressing Him as "Father." When we go to pray, remembering who God is and who we are in our sin and weakness, we are naturally moved to bow in worship and repentance before Him.

Pride is something that God hates and which creates a barrier between God and man so that man cannot receive the grace of God to aid him. "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble." When we truly pray, we come with a felt awareness of our great need, even with a holy desperation, seeking to receive God's grace. Knowing that humility attracts God's grace, Christians have cultivated the practice of prostrating themselves in prayer to humble themselves. By humbling the posture of the body, the Christians works to humble the soul.

Making prostrations (crossing ourselves and bowing to the ground on our knees so the forehead

touches the floor) and bows (crossing ourselves and bending at the waist and reaching towards the ground with our hand) is a normal, prescribed part of private prayer and public worship in the Church. Every rule of prayer at home should begin with prostrations to warm the heart and humble the soul and honor God as King and Lord. Prostrations involve the body in prayer. They help us fight against sluggishness and sloth. They prepare us for Christ's return when "every knee shall bow".

The great *hesychast* bishop Theoliptos of Philadelphia (+1322) answers the question of why we do prostrations. "Do not neglect prostration," he admonishes his spiritual children. "It provides an image of man's fall into sin and expresses the confession of our sinfulness. Getting up, on the other hand, signifies repentance and the promise to lead a life of virtue. Let each prostration be accompanied by a *noetic* invocation of Christ, so that by falling before the Lord in soul and body you may gain the grace of the God of souls and bodies."

Prostrations are normally done all days of the year in Church except: Sundays (Saturday night after Vigil until the start of Vespers Sunday evening), Great Feasts of the Lord, and the period from Pascha to Pentecost. Even when they are not done in Church, some do them at home nonetheless out of love for God, and we should feel free to do them on such days privately if our soul requires it, or our confessor prescribes it.

When we are young and healthy, there is no excuse for not doing prostrations. As we age, our body may not permit us to do many or any. We may still cross ourselves and bow, while patiently bearing the infirmities that keep us from prostrating while prostrating ourselves before Christ in our soul.

The back of the Jordanville Prayerbook contains the seven-bow beginning below. I highly recommend it for starting both morning and evening prayers. A suggested twelve-bow beginning is given for those who may desire more. We may use these and other short prayers including the Jesus Prayer with prostrations, doing as many as we desire. One may also do prostrations during one's rule (one could repeat at the end the prayers and prostrations one did at the beginning). Some cross themselves and prostrate at the end of each prayer, some at "come let us worship and fall down". However we do them, we should make prostrations a regular part of our prayer life.

St. Paisius of Athos urges us to make prostrations.

"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 constitutions should do more prostrations that 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."

### **The Seven-Bow Beginning**

1. O God, have mercy on me, a sinner
2. O God, cleanse Thou me a sinner, and have mercy on me.
3. Thou hast created me, O Lord, have mercy on me.
4. Countless times have I sinned, O God, forgive me.
5. Most holy Theotokos, my Lady, save me, a sinner.
6. Angel of God, my holy guardian, protect me from all evil
7. Holy *Father, Mother, Martyr name of patron saint*, pray to God for me.

### **A Twelve-Bow Beginning**

1. O God, have mercy on me, a sinner
2. O God, cleanse Thou me a sinner, and have mercy on me.
3. Thou hast created me, O Lord, have mercy on me.
4. Countless times have I sinned, O God, forgive me.
5. Most holy Theotokos, my Lady, save me, a sinner.
6. Angel of God, my holy guardian, protect me from all evil
7. Holy *name of patron saint*, pray to God for me.
8. O Lord, my God, even though I have done nothing good before Thee, grant by Thy grace that I make a beginning of good.
9. Lord, cause the root of good to dwell in me — Thy fear in my heart.
10. Lord, grant me tears, the remembrance of death and compunction.
11. Lord, grant me humility, chastity, and obedience.
12. Lord, grant that I may love Thee with all my soul and mind and to do Thy will in all things.

*Fr. Justin*

### **Travel By Automobile**

The dangers of the road are self-evident, given the number of people who lose their lives on the road each year. One must always be alert and exercise one's responsibility to be a good, courteous driver. While careless driving might be an involuntary sin, reckless driving is a voluntary sin of serious character, because we unnecessarily endanger not only our own lives but

the lives of others. Need it be said? Texting while driving is reckless driving.

As pious Christians, we entrust ourselves to the providence of God whenever we travel. Making the sign of the Cross as we begin our daily travels should be more standard than wearing our seat belt. The following troparion may be sung in tone 2 or said upon setting out:

O Christ the Way, the Truth, and the Life, / as Thou didst send Raphael the archangel as a guide for Tobias, / so now send Thine angel to accompany Thy servant(s). / May he protect *him/her/them/us* from every evil thing. / Bless this journey, that Thy servant(s) may glorify Thy name, through the prayers of the Theotokos.

Some Christians will sing the Troparion to St. Nicholas, the patron of travellers, upon setting out.

Thou wast revealed to thy flock as a rule of faith, / an image of humility and a teacher of abstinence, / because of thy lowliness, the heights were opened to thee, / because of thy poverty, riches were granted to thee. / O holy Hierarch, Father Nicholas, / intercede with Christ our God // that our souls be saved.

There is also an excellent pious custom practiced by many saints of saying the prayer "Let God Arise, and let His enemies be scattered..." (found at the end of the evening prayers) upon leaving one's home. Such excellent practices are recommended to us to establish and maintain as means of effectively commending ourselves to the Lord.

### **How to Read the *Philokalia***

The *Philokalia* ("love of the beautiful") is a famous spiritual work known the world over. It contains the writings of many Orthodox spiritual fathers from many centuries, dealing with the inner, contemplative life of prayer. The writings were gathered over a number of years and published in 1782 by the Kollyvades fathers: St. Nikodemus of the Holy Mountain, St. Makarios (Notaras) of Corinth, and St. Athanasius of Paros.

What is not so widely known is that the *Philokalia* is but one of three works which the Kollyvades fathers published in order to renew the spiritual life of the church that had been under the Turkish yoke for more than three centuries and had also fallen under harmful Latin influences. The other two parts of the three part work are the four-volume *Evergetinos*, which addresses the active spiritual life, and St. Nicodemus' work *On Frequent Communion* which promotes the liturgical and sacramental life of the Church. Taken together, the three works were designed to be read by laymen, monks, and clergy alike for comprehensive instruction in the Faith unto salvation.

The *Philokalia* itself is a daunting book. It has at last completely been published in English in five volumes. It presents its texts in chronological order based on the time of writing—most ancient first and most recent last. But this is not the best order in which to read the texts if one is to profit from them as the authors intended. The *Philokalia* is a selection

of patristic texts aimed at instructing one in noetic prayer, which is not for monks alone but laity in the world, too—in short, for all Christians. To receive the benefit, they need to be read in the proper order, from most basic to more advanced: Nikephoros the Solitary, Kallistos and Ignatios, Symeon the New Theologian (On the Three Methods of Prayer), St Hesychios of Sinai, Gregory of Sinai, and Gregory Palamas. Having read in this order and putting the lessons from each writer respectively into practice, the reader may make progress.

Here is the list in another form with more detail on which writings specifically and where to find them.

1. St. Nikephoros the Hesychast, On Watchfulness and the Guarding of the Heart
2. Saints Kallistos and Ignatios, Directions to Hesychasts (WfPh, pp. 164-270).
3. St. Hesychios, On Watchfulness and Holiness (EPh 1:162-198).
4. Evagrius, On Prayer (EPh 1:55-71).
5. A Discourse on Abba Philemon (EPh 2:344-357).
6. St. Symeon the New Theologian, On Faith (EPh 4:16-24).
7. St. Symeon the New Theologian, The Three Methods of Prayer (EPh 4: 67-75).
8. St. Gregory Palamas, In Defense of Those who Devoutly Practice a Life of Stillness (= Triads 1.2) (EPh 4:332-42).
9. St. Gregory of Sinai, On the Signs of Grace and Delusion (EPh 4:257-86).

*EPh* = *The Philokalia*, vols. 1-4, translated by G.E.H. Palmer, P. Sherrard & K. Ware (London, 1979-1995). The 5th and final volume, containing the works of Ss. Kallistos & Ignatios and other writers, has been published just this year.

*WfPh* = *Writings from the Philokalia on Prayer of the Heart*, translated from the Russian text by E. Kadloubovsky & G.E.H. Palmer (London, 1951).

### **The Kollyvades Movement**

On the Saturday of Bright Week, a service has been written to commemorate all of the Saintly Holy Fathers of the so-called "Kollyvades" movement. These were monastics primarily from Mount Athos who taught adherence to Holy Orthodox dogma and tradition amid waves of westernism and secularism during the years of the Turkish occupation of Greece. The ranks of such Holy Fathers include some of the Church's most beloved Saints: St. Nikodemos of the Holy Mountain, St. Makarios (Notaras) of Corinth, St. Nektarios of Pentapolis, St. Kosmas Aitolos, St. Sabbas of Kalymnos, St. Athanasios of Paros, St. Paisios Velitchovsky, St. Nicholas Planas, and so many more. The following quote (from [mountathos.gr](http://mountathos.gr)) discusses the Holy Mountain and the Kollyvades:

"In the mid 18th century a grave theological debate developed all over the Holy Mountain in connection with the issues of the holding of memorial

services for the departed, frequency of Holy Communion, and other matters relating to the exact observance of Orthodox tradition. The starting-point for this prolonged controversy was the building of the kyriakon at the Skete of St Anne (1754). The question arose as to whether the commemoration of the founders and benefactors should be held on Saturday or Sunday, and with what frequency the monks should receive Holy Communion. The debate divided the monks, and those who insisted that the memorial services should be held on Saturdays were mockingly dubbed 'kollyvades'. It seems, however, that, behind their apparent obstinacy, they had a profound knowledge of church tradition and fought hard for its authenticity and for its purification from adulteration. Thus the name of 'kollyvas' became a title of honour and the movement was responsible for a profitable and beneficial regeneration and renewal. Indeed, this devout movement was led by three saints: Makarios Notaras, Nicodemus the Athonite, and Athanasios of Paros, and they numbered among their supporters and sympathisers distinguished scholars such as Neophytos Kafsokalyvitis, Christophoros Artinos, Agapios of Cyprus, Iakovos the Peloponnesian, Pavlos the hermit, Theodoritos of Esphigmenou, and a number of others. Some of them chose voluntary exile and took refuge in mainland Greece or the islands, where they founded scores of monasteries, of which a fair number survive today. Thus we see Makarios Notaras on Chios, Niphon on Skiathos, Dionysios of Skiathos on Skyros, Ierotheos on Hydra, with numerous disciples and friends of that Athonite tradition which has nourished monks and saints. The monasteries which they founded were noted for their vigour and service. The Ecumenical Patriarchate by decisions of the Holy Synod finally put an end to the 'kollyvades' issue, by ruling that memorial services could be held as circumstances demanded and that Holy Communion, with the proper preparation, could be received frequently, and that the life of the substance, and not the aridity of the form, was to be adhered to.

"Saints Nicodemus the Athonite, Makarios Notaras, and Athanasios of Paros are the typical representatives of the renaissance on the Holy Mountain, and of the spirit which prevailed. They were the authors of widely circulating books which had their effect on the souls of the enslaved Greeks, and their works continue to be re-issued even today. The seal was set on the Athonite theological spirit of the time by the publication of the 'Philokalia of the Ascetic Fathers' (1785), a publication which was a landmark in theological literature.

"In a difficult period such as that of Turkish rule, the Holy Mountain kept its lamp perpetually burning, and was able, moreover, to hand on the flame to the peoples of the Balkans and the North. Thus the exchange of visits and the sojourn of many on the Holy Mountain of Athos gave rise to an important spiritual and cultural movement. The quiet of Mount Athos acted as a school of superior philosophy in

which not only asceticism and vigilance, but also study in its rich libraries, the translation of rare texts, concern for art, and the transmission of a spirit of service and self-sacrifice were cultivated. The work of the *starets* Paisios Velitskovski, the reformer of monasticism in Romania and Russia, after his departure from Athos, was particularly inspired. Similar work was carried out by his disciple the Blessed Goergios of Tsernika († 1806) in the monasteries of Moldavia, where hundreds of monks were his spiritual children, by the Blessed Sophronios Vratsis († 1813) in Bucharest, while the Blessed Antypas († 1882) from Moldavia went to Jassy and finally reached the Monastery of Varlaam in Finland. The Russian Saint Siluan the Athonite († 1938) continues to teach through his much-translated biography by Archimandrite Sophronios († 1993) even after his blessed death. Yet again the illuminating influence of the universality of the Holy Mountain is apparent.

"The Athonite monastic community has never kept the fragrance of the blossoming of its virtues all for itself. In spite of the harshness of enslavement to the Turks, penury, the difficulties in travelling and the many perils, the Athonite monk in his humble cap went everywhere in the Greek world, to bring the sober preaching of salvation, of redemption, of consolation, of support, and of hope - fiery missionaries like Cosmas of Aetolia, who crowned his long preaching mission with martyrdom, the Blessed Anthimos Kourouklis, who travelled the islands and built churches and monasteries, the Blessed Makarios Notaras, who on the islands of the Aegean created real centres of refreshment and aspiration, while similar work was carried out by his companion Blessed Athanasios of Paros, Arsenios of Paros, and Savvas of Kalymnos, to name but a few. The Ecumenical Patriarch Gregory V the Martyr and the company of glorious latter-day Athonite martyrs still teach more strikingly today after their martyr's end and strengthen the hearts of the people.

"In our own century the Holy Mountain has continued its hidden service to mankind which makes known the lofty spirituality and life of Orthodoxy and its benign influence beyond its boundaries by continuing to produce ascetics and figures of great spiritual and theological stature. In a world which thirsts and seeks in anguish for authenticity, discipline and truth, it gives its testimony of the experience of the Orthodox spiritual life and the salvation of the soul. The many young pilgrims today may not always be fired with enthusiasm, but they are set thinking by this way of life of asceticism, abstinence, simplicity, and quiet of the monks. Thus often a pilgrimage to the Holy Mountain is a turning-point in their lives. The humility and sanctity of Mount Athos play a role of spiritually alerting the Church and the people." (taken from:

<http://www.mountathos.gr/active.aspx?mode=en%07B00000000-0000-0000-0000-000000000004%07DView>)

## Worship Towards the East

*We worship towards the East in conformity with unwritten apostolic Tradition (in other words, it is not recorded in the Scriptures) for three reasons. First, Christ is Light, the Sun of Righteousness, and the Dayspring from on high. Just as the Sun rises in the East to enlighten a darkened world, so Christ enters the dark world to bring us light. Second, Eden was planted in the East. When man sinned, he was expelled. We worship towards the East in recognition of our loss of Paradise and our desire to return thereto. Third, we await the coming of the Lord from the East, as it is written 'just as the lightning flashes from the east to the west, so shall the coming of the Son of man be.' As man is composed of a visible and an invisible nature, so all our worship has visible and invisible aspects: we sing with our lips and our spirit; we are baptized with water and the spirit; we partake of the Mysteries bodily and in the grace of the Spirit. So the visible worship towards the East has its spiritual side too. Here is St. John of Damascus' text:*

"It is not without reason or by chance that we worship towards the East. But seeing that we are composed of a visible and an invisible nature, that is to say, of a nature partly of spirit and partly of sense, we render also a twofold worship to the Creator; just as we sing both with our spirit and our bodily lips, and are baptized with both water and Spirit, and are united with the Lord in a twofold manner, being sharers in the mysteries and in the grace of the Spirit.

Since, therefore, God is spiritual light (I John 1:5), and Christ is called in the Scriptures 'Sun of Righteousness' (Malachi 4:2) and 'Dayspring' (Zachariah 3:8, 6:12; Luke 1:78), the East is the direction that must be assigned to His worship. For everything good must be assigned to Him from Whom every good thing arises. Indeed, the divine David also says, *Sing unto God, ye kingdoms of the earth: O sing praises unto the Lord: to Him that rideth upon the Heavens of heavens towards the East.*

Moreover, the Scripture also says, *And God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there He put the man whom He had formed* (Genesis 2:8): and when he had transgressed His command He expelled him and made him to dwell over against the delights of Paradise, which clearly is the West. So, then, we worship God seeking and striving after our old fatherland.

Moreover, the tent of Moses had its veil and mercy seat towards the East. Also the tribe of Judah as the most precious pitched their camp on the East. Also in the celebrated temple of Solomon the Gate of the Lord was placed eastward.

Moreover Christ, when He hung on the Cross, had His face turned towards the West, and so we worship, striving after Him [towards the East]. And when He was received again into Heaven, He was borne towards the East, and thus His apostles worship Him, and thus He will come again in the way in which they beheld Him going towards Heaven; as the Lord Himself said, *As the lightning cometh out of the East and shineth even unto the West, so also shall the coming of the Son of Man be* (Mt. 24:27).

So, then, in expectation of His coming we worship towards the East. But this tradition of the apostles is unwritten. For much that has been handed down to us by tradition is unwritten."

### Upcoming Events 2023

14 December: Holy Unction, 6:30 p.m.  
24 December: Nativity Vigil, 6:00 p.m.  
25 December: Nativity Liturgy, 8:00 a.m.  
30 December: Nativity Monastery Feast Day, 10:00 a.m. (register on-line at <https://www.nativitymonastery.com/>)

GLORY BE TO GOD FOR ALL THINGS!