

# The Confessor's Tongue for January 7, 2024

31<sup>st</sup> Sunday after Pentecost: Synaxis of St. John the Baptist

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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## 2024 Pastoral Encyclical for the New Year

*Metropolitan Hierotheos (Vlachos)*

The feast of the Incarnate Birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, which we celebrated a few days ago, is connected with the feast of the Circumcision of Jesus Christ which we celebrate today, together with the dawn of the new year and the feast of Basil the Great, because circumcision, according to the law given by God in the Old Testament, took place eight days after the birth of male children.

Thus Christ also submitted to this painful process and this is connected with His extreme humility and *kenosis* [self-emptying], which was done out of love for man. The whole life of Christ from His Birth to the Cross was a life of *kenosis*. He was born poor in a stable of horses and animals and died alone on the Cross of Golgotha.

He did all this out of love for man who, after his fall and banishment from Paradise, wandered without the true God and was tortured in various ways, worshipping idols and believing in ideas and fantasies.

God created man with honor and glory. He made him to have body and soul, but also to have His Grace and thus he was to be complete. And yet after the sin he remained only with the soul and the body, without the Grace of God, apart from the exceptions of the Patriarchs of the Old Testament, the Prophets and the Righteous, who had a revelation of the living God.

Thus, the Son and Word of God became human in order to give new life to man and restore him to his former glory and raise him higher, to receive him and become a member of His glorious Body. A great honor for man!

In this perspective, the Fathers of the Church were in amazement when they beheld man. Saint Gregory the Theologian exclaims: "What is this new mystery which concerns me? I am small and great, lowly and exalted, mortal and immortal, earthly and heavenly. I share one condition with the lower world, the other with God; one with the flesh, the other with the spirit."

According to the Saint himself, man is "God's most honorable and closest possession," which is why he exhorts us to "know our dignity." It is a great work to know our position, our glory. We need to study it throughout our lives.

Christ, in order to reveal to us the greatness of man and to exalt him, took on human nature, that is, soul and body, and deified it, and thus gave us the possibility to become gods by grace, completely with the soul and body.

However, people follow a different course, since they separate man from God and break him into many pieces. Some identify man only with his body, developing the worship of the body, others identify man only with his reason and end up in rationalism,

others identify him only with his soul, which however they detach from its theological interpretation and end up in psychoanalysis and psychology and much more.

In recent times worldwide, as a continuation of biotechnology, they are building a human robot, without a body, without a soul, without the Holy Spirit, they simply make a body made of matter, wired and connected to computers, which is the abolition of the person himself. This is what is referred to as an "internet of bodies", a "virtual reality".

Thus, there is talk of the "transhuman" and this whole movement has been described as "trans-humanism". It is a movement that claims that "intelligence and physiology are strengthened with technological implants and through genetics." Thus, one can "use bionic arms, bionic legs and eyes." And there is not only talk about the "augmented" man, as "optimization of human performance", but also about the effort to abolish death with "digital immortality".

This mentality of transhumanism is completely detached from the theology of the creation of man in the image and likeness of God. Also, it completely departs from the theology of the incarnation of the Son and Word of God and the deification of man. Even the whole content of the teaching of Christ and the Holy Apostles for the salvation of man as soul and body is removed. Furthermore, the entire teaching about man being the most perfect creation of God and about the resurrection of bodies is being altered.

What does transhumanism have to do with the incarnation of the Son and Word of God? What does the movement of transhumanism have to do with Christ's teaching about the deification of the whole human, who consists of soul and body? This is the reason why this movement is considered as an arrogant and opportunistic mentality, as an idolization of life.

But transhumanism is also opposed to the basic principles of humanism, because this is how the human being is lost, since one cannot approach his humanity as a human being, and have elementary human contacts with him.

We accept science when it benefits man, but we cannot accept it when it leads man to his dehumanization and denies the incarnation of Christ. These are terrible consequences for man himself.

Beloved children in the Lord, today is a new year, but it must be new in terms of perceptions, because otherwise we think that we are new people living in a new time, but in reality it is a regression to the idolatry from which Christ freed us.

I wish you a good new year, with love, health and freedom in Christ, to become people of God, people of Christ, people of the Church.

With paternal blessings, +Hierotheos, Metropolitan of Nafpaktos

### St. Porphyrios "Pray & Work Hard"

Although Fr. Porphyrios was more than 75 years old and suffering from serious diseases, the Saint never complained and never stopped working hard. Whenever we went to either Kalissia or Milessi, we found him toiling in the fields with his sleeves rolled up, sweating and smiling! With an axe or a fork, he would walk around digging, sowing, planting, pruning. He spoke to farmers and technicians asking their opinion on everything he was about to do, and, although God illuminated him, he would never reveal it. Those who saw him work so hard tried to help him, and in this way they imitated him, following his example. In this way, he managed to turn the wilderness of Penteli and Milessi into a paradise of green. He used to tell us: "Pray and work hard! Labor benefits us physically and spiritually. Do not forget to say: 'Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me' as you work . . . ! *St. Porphyrios the Prophet: Witnesses, vol. 3, p. 222*

### St. Porphyrios: Conceiving a Baby

A friendly couple visited our house back in 1981 and while talking with my parents, the woman expressed her despair for the fact that they had not been able to have a baby. They told my parents that they were arranging a visit to a famous maternity clinic in Europe, where they would be examined and, if necessary, prescribed medication.

My father suggested taking them to Elder Porphyrios, because many couples with similar problems turned to the Elder for help and advice. They agreed, and a week later, they went to the Monastery in Milessi. As the woman told us later, the Saint put his left hand on her head, and with his right hand, he felt her pulse. Then he told her:

"You are very sensitive . . . very sensitive . . . you should not be so sensitive! I assure you that you will have a baby. Not only one! you will have two babies. The only thing you have to do is to stop worrying. Stop brooding over it. In this way, you will let your fallopian tubes free to function properly. The uterus is a very sensitive organ, and when women get upset, the uterus closes. You should be calm, happy, and pray to God. Have trust in God!" *ibid., p. 226*

### St. Porphyrios: About Non-Orthodox

One day on the occasion of a discussion with a teacher at the Sunday School, I asked the Saint when I came back home:

"Pappouli, what is going to happen with all those people who were born in Africa, in Asia, in America? They may have never heard about Christ. And what about Muslims and Catholics and Buddhists? Will they never get into the Paradise?"

The Elder answered, "Christ is our friend and He loves us all. He loves us and He wants us to be happy and enjoy life with Him, He does not hold hell in His hand. He does not threaten us! Everything around us is beautiful. All this around us are presents coming to us from God. We spoil everything because we have

dirty thoughts and do sinful things. God is Love, and He wants us all near Him. We should regard Christ as our friend. He is our friend. He tells us: 'YOU ARE MY FRIENDS!' He is righteous as well. We will be judged according to what we know, what we learn, and what we can understand and we can do . . . Those of us who have been Orthodox and learnt about Christ every since we were born . . . we must be very careful . . . The more you know and the more you have been given in this life, the stricter and more demanding the divine judgement will be for you. We commit sins continuously, thought. That is why we must confess and receive Holy Communion. We must always be ready to give ourselves to the love of God. Always say; 'Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me!' And God knows . . . *ibid., p. 227*

### St. Paisios On the Jesus Prayer

Question: "When I have guileful or blasphemous thoughts and try to say the Jesus Prayer, can I incur the wrath of God?"

Answer: "No. The devil, out of his malice, sows guileful thoughts, but you should utilize him as an assistant in unceasing prayer. Tell him, 'It is good of you to have brought me those thoughts, because I had forgotten God!' And start saying the Prayer. When the devil realizes that he is doing you good, he will withdraw on his own, because it is not advantageous for him to be the cause of your prayer. When he withdraws and no longer troubles you, you will have acquired unceasing prayer.

"In any case, the devil can do a great deal of good without wanting to, which is why God tolerates him. When I was at the Skete of Iveron, the demons attempted to kill me with a heavy slab one night! In the afternoon, a tormented man had come by the Kalyvi. I gave him whatever money I had, and he left. At night, I heard knocking at the door. I thought that he must have come back thinking that I had more money. 'Who is it?' I shouted. No answer. Then I heard knocking at the other door. I lit a candle to have a little light. Again I shouted, 'Who is it?' Again, no answer. Then I heard knocking on the ceiling. 'Well, now we understand each other,' I said to myself. At that point, a terrible noise began. I knelt and continuously said the Prayer. Suddenly, they threw a slab from above, 'Bang!' It broke the beam of the ceiling, and the slab came down with the pointed edge just above my head. I said, 'I understand; we will be at this all night long!' Indeed, after that, we kept a vigil -- I with the Prayer below, and the demons with the pounding on the roof . . . Those were beautiful vigils indeed!" *Spiritual Councils VI: On Prayer, p. 163*

### Upcoming Events 2023

21 January: Feast of St. Maximus

GLORY BE TO GOD FOR ALL THINGS!