

# The Confessor's Tongue for January 14, 2024

32<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost: St. Nina, Equal to the Apostles, Enlightener of Georgia  
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.

## 14 January St. Nina of Georgia

Born in Cappadocia in the late third century, St. Nina (or Nino, the Georgian form) was the only daughter of a Roman general, Zabulon, and his wife, Susanna. On her father's side, she was related to St. George, and on her mother's, to the Patriarch of Jerusalem. When Nina was twelve, her family traveled to Jerusalem, where with the Patriarch's blessing, her father became a monk; her mother became a church worker; and Nina became the foster child of Nianfora, a pious elderly woman. Under the tutelage of her foster mother, Nina quickly learned the rules of faith and piety.

At fourteen, Nina questioned her mentor about the location of Christ's robe; Nina felt that such an important relic could not have been lost. Nianfora told her that it was in Iberia (now Georgia), a land not yet completely illumined. When the apostles had drawn lots to determine who was to preach where, the Theotokos had received the lot for Iberia, but she had been held back from going and was assured that someone would later enlighten it. In a dream, the Theotokos came to Nina and urged her to preach the gospel in Georgia. The Mother of God assured Nina that she would protect her and as a pledge, left a cross of grape vines.

The patriarch, her uncle, was delighted with the news of her vision. He eagerly gave her his blessing. When the time arrived for her departure, the patriarch led Nina into the church and up to the holy altar, and placing his hands on her head, he prayed the following words:

Lord God, Our Saviour! As I let this young girl depart to preach Thy Divinity, I commit her into Thy hands. Condescend, O Christ God, to be her Companion and Teacher everywhere that she proclaims Thy Good Tidings, and give her words with such force and wisdom that no one will be able to oppose or refute them. And Thou, most Holy Virgin Mother of God, Helper and Intercessor for all Christians, clothe with Thy strength against all enemies, visible and invisible, this girl whom Thou Thyself hast chosen to preach the Gospel of Thy Son and our God among the pagan nations. Be always for her a shield and an invincible protection, and do not deprive her of Thy favour until she has fulfilled Thy holy will. Nina joined the party of Princess Ripsimia, which was traveling to Georgia to escape the persecution of Diocletian. All but Nina, who was sheltered in a crevice, were martyred in Armenia after Ripsimia declined to marry the king, Tiridat.

Living as pilgrim, by the grace of God and on the bounty of strangers, Nina once became weary. She wondered briefly where she was going, what she was doing. She fell, exhausted, asleep and had a vision of a

majestic man who handed her a scroll in Greek, which she read upon waking:

- Verily, I say unto you, Wherever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman has done, be told as a memorial of her. [Matt. 26:13]
- There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for you are all one in Christ Jesus. [Gal. 3:28]
- Then said Jesus unto them (the women), be not afraid: go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me. [Matt. 28:10]
- He that receives you receives me, and he that receives me receives Him that sent me. [Matt. 10:40]
- For I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist. [Luke 21:15]
- And when they bring you into the synagogues, and unto magistrates, and powers, take ye no thought how or what thing ye shall answer, or what ye shall say: for the Holy Spirit shall teach you in the same hour what ye ought to say. [Luke 12:11-12]
- And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. [Matt. 10:28]
- Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. [Matt. 28:19-20]

Strengthened and reassured, Nina continued until she arrived in Georgia, where she witnessed the worship of the local gods. Praying that the idols might be destroyed, she also witnessed a downpour that washed the idols into the river and out of sight.

Nina settled in Mtskheta, the capital, where she lived in a hut near the royal gardener and his wife, Anastasia. There Nina gained a reputation for holiness both because of her daily piety and her miraculous healings. She cured Queen Nana of a disease no doctor had been able to relieve. King Mirian was converted when he was saved from a rain storm similar to the one that had destroyed his idols.

After preaching to and converting many Jews and pagans, Nina learned the story of Christ's robe: a local Jew, Elioz, had obtained the robe from the soldier to whose lot it had fallen and had carried it home to Georgia. His sister, Sidonia, had clasped the robe to her breast and had died. No one could take the robe from her, and it had been buried with her. A cedar,

now part of the royal garden, was said to have grown from her grave. Nina had doubts about the identification of the particular tree, but she knew from her visions that the ground was holy.

Nina died in the early fourth century, after she had seen Christianity spread throughout Georgia and had, through her preaching, converted a neighboring queen, Sophia of Kakhetian and her kingdom. Nina was buried, near the place where she had died, in Bodbi. The church built by her grave was dedicated to St. George and became the Bodbi metropolitanate. Her cross was sent to the cathedral in Mtskheta. During wars between the Byzantine and Persian empires, the cross was taken to Armenia and eventually to Moscow. Tsar Alexander I returned it to Georgia at the beginning of the 19th century.

Icons of St. Nina are written with her holding her grapevine cross, the pledge of her relationship with the Theotokos. St. Nina is called Equal-to-the-Apostles because she preached the gospel in Georgia. Since the 17th century, iconographic tradition has revealed the scroll which she received in her second vision. Her title, her cross, and her scroll are the manifestations of her working with God to spread His word and to bring into His fold a new land.

Anonymous, *The Life of St. Nina Equal to the Apostles and Enlightener of Georgia with the Service*, (Jordanville, NY: Holy Trinity Monastery, 1988) pp.6-7

### On a Rule for Beginners

*St. Isaac the Syrian, From Homily 17*

This is the rule of life that is chaste and pleasing to God: to refrain from glancing here and there with your eyes, but always to gaze steadily on what lies before you; to refrain from speaking idly and to say only what is necessary; to regard mean attire as sufficient for your body's need and, in like manner, to make use of foods that sustain the body, and not those that satisfy gluttony; to take a little from all foods, and not disdain some and select others and choose to fill your belly with these. Discretion is greater than all the other virtues. Without companions (when not ill or infirm), do not partake of wine. Do not interrupt the words of one who is talking, and contradict him like someone uncouth; but like a wise man be patient. And wherever you find yourself, consider yourself the inferior, and the servant of your brethren. Do not expose any part of your body in front of any man; and do not touch the body of another, except for some necessary reason, nor permit anyone to touch your body without good cause, as I have said. Shun familiarity as death. Acquire a chaste rule for your sleep, lest the power that guards you remove itself far from you. Wherever you sleep, if possible, let no man see you. Do not spit in front of anyone. If a fit of coughing comes over you while seated at table, turn your face to your back, and cough in this manner. Eat and drink with moderation, as befits the children of God....

O glutton, bent on the worship of your own belly! It is better for you to cast live coal into your stomach than the fried foods of rulers and princes. Pour your

mercy out on all, and be moderate in all things. Keep yourself from much talk, for it is this that extinguishes the noetic movements produced in our heart by God. Flee from discussions of dogma as from an unruly lion; and never embark upon them yourself, either with those raised in the Church or with strangers. Do not pass through the streets of the hot-tempered and quarrelsome, lest your heart be filled with anger, and the darkness of delusion dominate your soul. Do not dwell with a proud man, lest the energy of the Holy Spirit be taken from your soul and she become the dwelling of every evil passion. If you keep these observances, O man, and occupy yourself continuously with the study of God, in truth your soul will see the light of Christ in herself, and will never be darkened unto all eternity. To Him be glory and dominion to the ages. Amen.

*There is much good for us in St. Isaac's words. To "refrain from glancing here and there with your eyes" readily applies to surfing on the internet. How much woe comes from this! If we go on the internet, we should go for a particular purpose, focus on that purpose, avoid every distraction, and, having fulfilled our purpose, leave.*

### On the Use of Holy Bread at Home

It is a pious custom to keep some holy bread and holy water in one's icon corner—to consume, breaking the night's fast, with one's morning prayers. This bread is either *antidoron* given out to us at Liturgy or the bread of a commemoration loaf (*prosporon*) we offered at Liturgy. It is eaten before eating anything else. The following prayer may be said with the eating of it:

“O Lord my God, may Thy holy gift and Thy Holy Water be unto forgiveness of my sins, unto enlightenment of my mind, unto strengthening of my spiritual and bodily powers, unto health of my soul and body, unto vanquishing of my passions and weaknesses, by Thy boundless merciful kindness, through the prayers of Thy Most-pure Mother and all Thy Saints. Amen.”

### From the Desert Fathers

A brother questioned Abba Matoes saying, ‘Give me a word.’ He said to him, ‘Go, and pray God to put compunction in your heart and give you humility; be aware of your faults; do not judge others but put yourself below everyone; do not be friendly with a boy nor with a heretical friend; put freedom of speech far from you; control your tongue and your belly; drink only a small quantity of wine, and if someone speaks about some topic, do not argue with him, but, if he is right, say “Yes”; if he is wrong, say, “You know what you are saying.” and do not argue with him about what he has said. That is humility.’

### Upcoming Events 2023

21 January: Feast of St. Maximus  
17 March: Forgiveness Sunday  
18-23 March: Clean Week

GLORY BE TO GOD FOR ALL THINGS!