

The Confessor's Tongue for February 4, 2024

35th Sunday after Pentecost: St. Isidore of Pelusium

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.

February 4: St. Isidore of Pelusium

Saint Isidore of Pelusium lived during the fourth-fifth centuries. He was a native of Alexandria, and was raised among pious Christians. He was a relative of Theophilus, Archbishop of Alexandria, and of his successor, Saint Cyril (January 18). While still a youth he quit the world and withdrew to Egypt to Mount Pelusium, which became the site of his monastic efforts.

Saint Isidore's spiritual wisdom and strict asceticism, combined with his broad learning and innate knowledge of the human soul, enabled him to win the respect and love of his fellow monks in a short time. They chose him as their head and had him ordained a priest (the earliest sources for his life, however, say nothing of him being an igumen).

Following the example of Saint John Chrysostom, whom he had managed to see and hear during a trip to Constantinople, Saint Isidore devoted himself primarily to Christian preaching, that "practical wisdom" which, in his own words, is both "the foundation of the edifice and the edifice itself", while logic is "its embellishment, and contemplation its crown".

He was a teacher and a willingly provided counsel for anyone who turned to him for spiritual encouragement, whether it was a simple man, a dignitary, a bishop, the Patriarch of Alexandria, or even the emperor. He left behind about 10,000 letters, of which 2,090 have survived. A large portion of these letters reveal profound theological thought and contain morally edifying interpretations of Holy Scripture. Saint Photius (February 6) calls Isidore a model of priestly and ascetical life, and also a master of style.

Saint Isidore's love for Saint John Chrysostom resulted in his support of Saint John when he was persecuted by the empress Eudoxia and Archbishop Theophilus. After the death of Saint John, Saint Isidore persuaded Theophilus' successor Saint Cyril to inscribe the name of Saint John Chrysostom into the Church diptychs as a confessor. Through the initiative of Saint Isidore the Third Ecumenical Council was convened at Ephesus (431), at which the false teaching of Nestorius concerning the person of Jesus Christ was condemned.

Saint Isidore lived into old age and died around the year 436. The Church historian Evagrius (sixth century) writes of Saint Isidore, "his life seemed to everyone the life of an angel upon the earth." Another historian, Nikēphoros Callistus (ninth century), praises Saint Isidore thus: "He was a vital and inspired pillar of monastic rules and divine vision, and as such he presented a very lofty image of most fervent example and spiritual teaching." *oca.org*

Sayings of St. Isidore

1. Abba Isidore of Pelusia said 'To live without speaking is better than to speak without living. For the former who lives rightly does good even by his silence, but the latter does not good even when he speaks. When words and life correspond to one another, they are together the whole of philosophy.'

2. The same abba said, 'Prize the virtues, and do not be the slave of glory; for the former are immortal, while the latter soon fades.'

3. He also said, 'Many desire virtue, but fear to go forward in the way that leads to it, while others consider that virtue does not even exist. So it is necessary to persuade the former to give up their sloth and teach the others what virtue really is.'

4. He also said, 'Vice takes man away from God and separates them from one another. So we must turn from it quickly and pursue virtue, which leads to God and unites us with another. Now the definition of virtue and of philosophy is: simplicity with prudence.'

5. He also said, 'The heights of humility are great and so are the depths of boasting; I advise you to attend to the first and not to fall into the second.'

6. He also said, 'The desire for possessions is dangerous and terrible, knowing no satiety; it drives the soul which it controls to the heights of evil. Therefore, let us drive it away vigorously from the beginning. For once it has become master, it cannot be overcome.' *From the Sayings of the Desert Fathers*

Letters of St. Isidore

Letter 3 – To the scholar Neilammon *Concerning an active life of good works.*

Having learned quite clearly from the ancients, that to be is not to think, what *then* is to be? Do more, and do not just talk.

Letter 4 – To the reader Timotheus.

Concerning the conflicts which you undergo, excellent sir, be convinced: the present circumstances put before us are an invisible arena, in which we do not wrestle against perceptible beasts, but *against* perceptible passions. *These are* the very things that, if they should prevail over the strength in us, will bring on danger not *just* as far as the body but bring death to the soul itself. But if they should be controlled then they will flee, *and* we will gain for ourselves great rewards and acclamation; and here *we wrestle these* often, but hereafter certainly *we will receive rewards and acclamation*, since the coming age has been entrusted with rewards, just as this age *has been entrusted with* trials.

Letter 8 – To Timotheus *That it is necessary that the labor of spiritual discipline be moderate.*

Just as the body that is healthy lacks a bruise, since it soothes the swelling of an injury, so also the *body* that is sick is in need of aid, and the soul that is downcast ruins *the body*, with the result that it *must* be illuminated by the divine commandments. One, therefore, must take care of both. For when one of the two is in want, sanctification is difficult.

<https://www.roger-pearse.com/weblog/2010/11/11/14-letters-of-isidore-of-pelusium/>

Letter 78

If, from among your weapons, you consider your spears and your helmet and your breast-plate to be an assurance for your well-being, while you plunder and desolate the highways, know that many who had armed themselves more impregnably than you won for themselves a most lamentable death. Among us are recorded, on the one hand, Oreb, Zebah, Zalmunna, Abimelech and Goliath, and Absalom, and as many others who were like them. Among those outside, on the other hand, are the Hector, the Ajaxes, and the Spartans themselves who, above all others, were prideful of their strength, since they did not possess justice in proportion to their power. If, then, you do not wish to be a worthless soldier, arrange yourself at once toward the spiritual war and wage war rather upon your own disorderliness.

Letter 98 to Frontinos the Monk. *Concerning him who received (a slap) on the cheek.*

If you have been injured by words and given way to unrestrained anger, how can you become a worker in the Lord's Vineyard? For He determines that whosoever, struck on one cheek, is capable also of presenting the other, is that one who "bears the oppressiveness of the day and its heat" and who thus will have accomplished all the labor of the Lord's command. For if you aspire to those greater rewards, do not be distraught at the lesser toils, but learn to bear with love the greater ones, for you will not otherwise receive a penny unless witnessed to by the perfection of (your) own efforts.

Letter 99 – to Duke Gelasios *Concerning pride, impotence and insignificance*

It is usual for human beings- at least for most, although foreign to divine legislation, to be puffed up by (noble) descent, practical wisdom, possessions, beauty or rank. However it helps in no way the pride of those who are from earth and who again return to it. That you possess none at all of these qualities you will scarcely deny. If then you are deprived of all the things that cause one to swell and be puffed up, since you are of lowly extraction, poor, of weak intellect, [very] ordinary and ill-shaped, why do you strut through the city, as though you were the most reputed of all, and become the author of many disturbances there? Rather get to know yourself and acquire a manner proportioned to your insignificance, or alternatively prepare yourself for efforts and dangers, with which those in power will reward you.

For you are lacking in wealth, which frequently smoothes over the asperities of circumstances and the blows of fate.

Letter 100— to Syros the Reader *Against the Novatians*

Say to the disciple of Novatian's pride: why are you foolishly boasting as if [you were] clean? Why are you pretending that you are sinless? Why deny the (fault) common to nature? Isaiah declares himself unclean; David knows that every man is a liar and that all were conceived and carried in the womb in sin. God Himself knows that human beings are devotedly attached to evil and require only the mercy of divine kindness- and do you arrogantly boast of being clean? Either then give over lying or from what you are doing be exposed as a laughing-stock or indeed mightily shameful.

Letter 101— to Theognostos, a newly-professed monk *Concerning the need always to be sober*

You have grasped the ploughshare well and to the point. You are succeeding in escaping from suffocating matter. You have stepped forth well towards a higher citizenship. Stand therefore wide awake as a heavy-armed soldier, lest sleep slip in rendering you flabby and show you up as a deserter, which God forbid. For we are not unaware of the designs of the Evil One. <https://www.roger-pearse.com/weblog/2011/02/19/letters-97-101-of-isidore-of-pelusium/>

Letter 103 – To Timothy the Reader *Why Our Lord after His Resurrection questioned Peter three times about love.*

Our Lord's threefold questioning of Peter about love is not a reason to suspect ignorance on the part of the Master (let certain persons not think amiss in this way), but the good Healer expelled the threefold denial by means of the threefold assent.

Letter 107 – To Timothy the Reader. *On the harmony of the Testaments.*

The Son of God introduced no novelty of beliefs, dear friend, into the Law and the Prophets, but placed a term to those things which had been revealed of old concerning Him. If you open the Old Testament with the utmost attentiveness, you will find the whole of the New Testament announced therein. For those then who rely on the Law and consider the way of the Gospel strange, from the words of the Law He clarifies the truth of the beliefs (communicated by) grace. Thus they will (come to) see the intrinsic harmony of both Testaments.

<https://www.roger-pearse.com/weblog/2020/09/05/a-few-more-letters-of-isidore-of-pelusium-102-116/>

Upcoming Events 2023

1 March: Parish Dinner/Dance Fundraiser, 6:30
17 March: Forgiveness Sunday
18-23 March: Clean Week
29 April-5 May: Holy Week
6 May: Holy Pascha

GLORY BE TO GOD FOR ALL THINGS!