

# The Confessor's Tongue for March 31, 2024

Second Sunday of Lent: St. Gregory Palamas, St. Innocent of Alaska

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.

## From St. Gregory Palamas on Illness

There are times when illness is better for sinners than good health, because it helps them towards salvation and blunts their inborn evil impulses. Inasmuch as it repays the debt of sin by means of suffering, it makes them able to receive healing of their souls in the first instance, then healing of their bodies. This happens most of all when the sick person, understanding that the affliction is a remedy from God, bears it courageously, falls down before God with faith, and asks for forgiveness, through whatever works he can manage. *Homily 10 on Mark 2:1-12*

## Three Degrees of Eating

*St. Gregory Palamas*

There are three degrees of eating: self-control, sufficiency, and satiety. Self-control is to be hungry after having eaten. Sufficiency is to be neither hungry nor to be weighed down. Satiety is to be slightly weighed down. To eat again after reaching the point of satiety is to open the door of gluttony, through which unchastity comes in. Attentive to these distinctions, choose what is best for you according to your powers, not overstepping the limits. For according to St. Paul, only the perfect can be both hungry and full, and at the same time be strong in all things (Philippians 4:12).

## On Priestly Vestments

The diamond-shaped vestment awarded to the priest recently is called the *palitsa*, or *epigonation*, literally "thigh shield". It comes long after the rectangular *nebedrennik*, a vestment which no longer exists outside of Slavic use. Both are given as a honor after so many years of service in the Russian tradition, but in the Byzantine tradition, the *epignotion* is given upon a priest's elevation to the rank of confessor (not all Greek priests are blessed to hear confessions). The *palitsa/epigonation* represents a shield, reminiscent of a thigh shield worn by soldiers in the time of the early Church. It symbolizes the priest as a soldier of Christ and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. Hence the priest is one who defends the faith and what is good and smites all that is impure and sinful.

This award complements the more essential vestments. The first liturgical vestment is called the *sticharion*, or baptismal robe. It is a long and narrow robe that fastens at the neck, with loose sleeves. Every sacred order of Orthodox clergy wears this vestment, but the design of the vestment differs depending on who wears it.

Priests and bishops wear the *sticharion* beneath all other vestments. Thus, for priests and bishops the garment is usually a simple white or gold robe (see Image 3). Deacons and subdeacons, on the other hand, wear it as their outermost vestment. So, theirs

typically have brighter colors and more intricate embroidery with a cross between the shoulder blades (see Image 4). Additionally, the deacon's *sticharion* is open down the sides and held closed by buttons. Some jurisdictions call the deacon's *sticharion* a *dalmatikon*, which was its name in the fourth century, when the vestment was developed.

The *sticharion* symbolizes the "robe of salvation," the white garment every Christian dons on his day of baptism. Thus, it symbolizes the new humanity of Jesus and life in the Kingdom of God (Rev. 7:9).

## From the Triodion

As we start upon the third week of the Fast, O ye faithful,  
let us glorify the Holy Trinity,  
and joyfully pass through the time that still remains.  
Causing passions of the flesh to wither from our souls,  
let us gather divine flowers,  
weaving garlands for the queen of days,  
that with crowns upon our heads we may sing in  
praise of Christ the Victor.

*Sunday Evening Vespers*

The *epitrachelion* (Greek, "around the neck") is the stole worn by priests and bishops. This Orthodox liturgical vestment is worn around the neck with the two adjacent sides sewn or buttoned together. The ends extend all the way to the priest's ankles. Similar to the *orarion* (deacon's stole), this vestment has seven embroidered or appliquéd crosses, one at the back of the neck and three down each side.

The priest wears this vestment whenever serving. For some services, like **Vespers** or **Orthros**, he wears the stole by itself over the outer cassock. When fully vested for the **Divine Liturgy**, he wears the stole over the *sticharion* and under the **belt** and the *phelonion*.

This liturgical vestment symbolizes the spiritual yoke of the priesthood. It also symbolizes the double portion of God's Grace bestowed upon a priest, for the celebration of the Mysteries. It is the one vestment (in the absence of any others) that is absolutely necessary for a priest to conduct any liturgical service. Without it, he cannot serve.

If an Orthodox priest simply attends a service, he does not wear liturgical vestments, but will put on the stole (and in many Slavic traditions, his cuffs) before receiving Communion.

The *zone* or belt is the liturgical vestment Orthodox priests and bishops use to fasten the *sticharion* and *epitrachelion* to his body. This helps the priest move about during Liturgy without impediment from the other garments. The zone signifies that the priest wears the mortification of the body and chastity, having girded his loins with the power of truth. It also symbolizes the divine power that strengthens the priest during the course of his

servicing (Psalm 18:32). Further, it reminds us of the towel which the Savior was given for the washing of the disciples' feet at the Mystical Supper.

The *epimanikia* (singular: *epimanikion*) or fabric cuffs, lace onto the clergyman's wrists. This vestment contains the sleeves of the baptismal robe, and there is usually a cross in the center. Note: since a deacon wears a more elaborate sticharion, he wears the cuffs underneath the robe and over his cassock sleeves instead. The cuffs serve a rather practical purpose: ensuring the sleeves of the sticharion do not get in the priest's way during worship. However, they still do remind the clergymen that they celebrate and partake of the Mysteries by the power and Grace of God, not on their own merit. The cuffs also serve to remind us of the bonds that tied the Savior's hands during His Passion.

The *phelonion* (plural, *phelonia*) is a liturgical vestment worn by Orthodox priests over their other vestments. It is large and sleeveless, like a cape. The front portion of the cape reaches down to the priest's waist, while the back portion touches down to the ankles. There are two main styles of this vestment. Byzantine or Greek *phelonia* simply fit over the shoulders, while Russian *phelonia* have a high, stiffened collar that covers the back of the head. The use of the phelonion is not limited to the Divine Liturgy, but is specified for any major liturgical function.

The phelonion symbolizes the red tunic with which Pilate dressed our Lord before His Crucifixion. In other words, it reminds us of the torment and suffering a priest endures during his ministry in order to serve God's faithful. Additionally, the phelonion embodies the garment of righteousness with which priests must be vested as servants of Christ. St. Cosmas the Aetolian adds another layer of meaning to this vestment; because the priest's hands remain close to his body, they do not receive or attach to worldly things. Thus, the priest can receive the Holy Gifts without anything hindering him.

<https://www.saintjohnchurch.org/orthodox-liturgical-vestments/#sticharion>

### **The Power of the Word**

*St. John of Kronstadt*

What can be firmer, more unchangeable, and mightier than the word! By the word the world was created and exists; "upholding all things by the word of His power;" and yet we sinners treat words so lightly, so negligently. For what do we show less respect than for the word? What is more changeable in us than the word? O, how accursed are we men! How inattentive we are to such precious things! We do not remember that by means of the word proceeding from a believing and loving heart, we may perform life-giving miracles for our own souls and for the souls of others; for instance, in prayer at Divine service; in sermons, at the celebration of the Sacrament! Christian! value every word; be attentive to every word; be firm in the word; trust in every

word of God, and of the saints, as in the words of life. Remember that the word is the beginning of life.

#### **From the Triodion**

With grateful souls let us accept the Fast:  
for by the power of the Spirit it maketh the stubborn  
passions to wither,  
and giveth us strength to do the works of God;  
it maketh our mind ascend to heaven,  
and gaineth for us the forgiveness of our sins from the  
God of all mercy.

*Vespers of the Monday of the Third Week*

#### **On the Carnal, Corrupted Man**

*St. John of Kronstadt*

The more a man leads the spiritual life, the more he becomes spiritualised: he begins to see God in everything; the manifestation of His power and might in everything; he sees himself always and everywhere abiding in God, and depending on God even in the smallest matters. But the more a man leads the carnal way of life, the more carnal he becomes: he does not see God in anything, not even in the most wonderful manifestation of His divine powers—he sees flesh and matter in everything, and nowhere, nor at any time, is God before his eyes. *My Life in Christ, p. 130*

#### **"Thy Kingdom Come"**

*St. John Cassian*

The second petition of a most pure mind eagerly desires the kingdom of its Father to come immediately. This means that in which Christ reigns daily in holy persons, which happens when the rule of the devil has been cast out of our hearts by the annihilation of the foul vices and God has begun to hold sway in us through the good fragrance of the virtues; when chastity, peace, and humility reign in our minds, and fornication has been conquered, rage overcome, and pride trampled upon. And of course it means that which was promised universally to all the perfect and to all the sons of God at the appointed time, when it will be said to them by Christ: 'Come, blessed of my Father, take possession of the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.' Desiring and hoping for this with intent and unwavering gaze, we tell him: 'Thy kingdom come.' For we know by the witness of our own conscience that when he appears we shall soon be his companions. No sinner dares to say this or to wish for it, since a person who knows that at his coming he will at once be paid back for his deserts not with a palm or rewards but with punishment has no desire to see the Judge's tribunal. *Conference 9*

#### **Upcoming Events 2023**

29 April-4 May: Holy Week

5 May: Holy Pascha

**GLORY BE TO GOD FOR ALL THINGS!**