

The Confessor's Tongue for April 14, 2024

Fourth Sunday of Lent: St. John of the Ladder

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.

Thursday of the Fifth Week

At Matins on this day [served Wednesday night] the Canon of St. Andrew of Crete is read in its entirety once a year, which was read in four parts on the first four days of the first week, and the Life of St. Mary of Egypt is read after the Sessional Hymn (Kathisma). According to this feature of the Thursday Matins it is called either the St. Andrew of Crete or the St. Mary of Egypt Thursday. In the Canon are collected and stated all the exhortations to fasting and repentance, and the Holy Church repeats it now in its fullness to inspire us new strength for the successful end to Lent. "Since", it is said in the Synaxarion, "the Holy Forty-Day Lent is drawing near the end so that men should not become lazy, or more carelessly disposed to the spiritual efforts, or give up their abstinence altogether," that this Great Canon is offered. It is "so long, and so well-composed, as to be sufficient to soften even the hardest soul, and to rouse it to resumption of the good, if only it is sung with a contrite heart and proper attention". And the church Typikon (Ustav) orders the Great Canon to be read and chanted slowly and "with a contrite heart and voice, making three prostrations at each Troparion". For the same purpose of abstinence and strength, and attention to repentance is the reading of the Life of the Venerable Mary of Egypt. According to an explanation of the same Synaxarion, the Life of the Venerable Mary also "manifests infinite compunction and gives much encouragement to the fallen and sinners", representing itself to us as a paradigm of true repentance, and an example of the unutterable mercy of God. It serves as the continuation of the Canon of St. Andrew of Crete and a transition to the order of the following Sunday. Reading the Canon of St. Andrew and Mary of Egypt on the Thursday of the Fifth Week was established from the time of the Sixth Ecumenical Council. *Bulgakov Handbook*

On Sufferings and Temptations

St. Ignaty Brianchaninov

The way of God from the beginning of time and from the creation of the human race has been the way of the cross and death. How did you get your idea that everything is just the opposite? You must realize that you are outside the way of God, that you are far from Him, that you do not wish to walk in the steps of the Saints, but want to make some special way for yourself and travel by it without sufferings. The way of God is a daily cross. No one has climbed to heaven by living a life of pleasure.

The innocent and all-holy Lord...has provided suffering as the way of salvation for all His followers... At the same time, He infuses into the sufferings of His servants from His own sufferings unspeakable

spiritual consolation in proof positive of the truth of salvation, and of the truth of the way of suffering which leads to salvation. The innocent and all-holy Lord spent His earthly life in sufferings; still more should the guilty suffer, fully aware that they deserve to suffer. They should rejoice that by means of brief sufferings they are delivered from eternal sufferings and join the ranks of the followers and friends of the God-man. He who refuses sufferings and does not consider that he deserves them, does not acknowledge his fall and perdition. He who has used his earthly life merely for earthly success, foolishly mistakes this briefest spell for eternity and regards eternity as non-existent—and he prepares himself for eternal misery! *From The Arena*

From the Triodion

Now that we have passed beyond the middle point in the time of the Fast, let us manifest in ourselves a beginning of divine glory, and let us hasten eagerly towards our journey's end, the life of holiness, that we may receive the joy that grows not old.

Sunday Vespers starting the 5th Week

Balaam's Donkey or Thoughts of a Sinner

Photius Kontoglou

The poor manger where Christ is born is the humble heart into which He enters and "makes a dwelling." He is never born in vain places.

No book is so simple and so clear as is the Gospel. And despite this, no book can be twisted so easily as the Gospel, because the human heart is wicked.

The more we feel in our hearts gratitude that we exist and for the whole world, and we want to give thanks, the closer we come to the faith of Christ. We want to cry, to forgive the wicked, and to give thanks also for those things which previously had seemed bad to us.

My soul is comforted when I look at the holy icons of Byzantine iconography. I think I am reading the Gospel. This art is a healing for the eyes.

"The Kingdom of God suffers violence, and the violent take it by force" (Mt 11:12). The Kingdom of God is gained with struggle, with affliction, and with harsh forcefulness on our bodies, and especially on our spirit, that is, on our egotism and our knowledge.

The fewer words a Christian says, the more he learns; and the less he examines, the more he is illumined.

When someone has been healed of the rage to grab and rip people apart, treating his neighbor unjustly, people call that person lazy and indifferent, because all the activity of humanity is none other than this mania.

The world has no need of Christ, as long as it has its own darkness as light.

A great chasm is formed between Christians and others, even if the others are the best, most philanthropic ones. It's like another world. Completely another creation, "a new creation."

One whose heart has not had misfortune and has not been hurt or tightened, has not truly felt the hope of God.

Whoever has not despaired of everything does not run near God, because he considers that other protectors exist for him to lean on.

Whoever has been greatly embittered by the world is sweetened more by God, and nothing else pleases him anymore, except Christ, the saints, and humble Christians.

When we become Christians, the praises of people leave a bitter taste inside us, whereas the accusations of others embitter us sweetly and make us draw into ourselves, and our heart becomes warmer.

Christ enlarged man's heart, which haughtiness had narrowed. Humility widened it, something most strange.

He who sinned in the flesh is saved more easily than he who sinned with the spirit.

Photius Kontoglou was a famous 20th century Greek Iconographer and Theologian who had a great influence on his generation.

From the Triodion

Today is revealed the mystery that is from all eternity. The Son of God becometh the Son of Man, that, sharing in what is worse, He may make me share in what is better. Of old Adam was deceived: he sought to become God, but failed in his purpose. Now God becometh man, that He may make Adam god. Let the creation rejoice, let nature exult: for the Archangel standeth in fear before the Virgin, and with his salutation, "Rejoice!" he bringeth the joyful greeting whereby our sorrow is assuaged. O God, who in Thy merciful compassion wast made man, glory to Thee!

Friday Vespers of the 5th Week

From St. John of the Ladder

He who is proud of his natural advantages, I mean cleverness, ability to learn, skill in reading, a clear pronunciation, quick understanding, and all such gifts received by us without labor, will never obtain the supernatural blessings, because he who is unfaithful in a little is also unfaithful and vainglorious in much. *Step 22.31*

It is a sign of the beginning of health when our thought no longer prides itself on its natural gifts. But as long as it has that stench in its nose, it cannot detect the fragrance of myrrh. *Step 25.22*

Contrition is the result of a fall. He who falls is crushed, and he stands in prayer without boldness but with praiseworthy audacity, as one who is shattered, steadying himself with the staff of hope and using it to drive off the hound of despair.

Listen to me, listen, all you malicious reckoners of other men's accounts! If it is true (as it really is true)

that 'with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged,' then whatever sins we blame our neighbor for, whether bodily or spiritual, we shall fall into them ourselves. That is certain. *Step 10.9*

Do not regard the feelings of the a person who speaks to you about his neighbor disparagingly, but rather say to him: 'Stop, brother! I fall into graver sins every day, so how can I criticize him?' In this way you will achieve two things: you will heal yourself and your neighbor with one plaster. This is one of the shortest ways to the forgiveness of sins; I mean, not to judge. 'Judge not, and ye shall not be judged. *Step 10.7*

An angry person is a willing epileptic, who due to an involuntary tendency keeps convulsing and falling down. *Step 8.11*

He whose will and desire in conversation is to establish his own opinion, even though what he says is true, should recognize that he is sick with the devil's disease. And if he behaves like this only in conversation with his equals, then perhaps the rebuke of his superiors may heal him. But if he acts in this way even with those who are greater and wiser than he, then his malady is humanly incurable. *Step 4.48*

He who has tasted the things on high easily despises what is below. But he who has not tasted things above finds joy in possessions. *Step 17.*

From the Optina Elders on Fasting

The Holy Church cries out: fasting is not avoiding food, but putting away all evil, controlling the tongue from idle talking and gossip, forbearing from anger, and abstaining from lust, falsehood, and flattery. Whoever fasts in this way, his fast is pleasing to God.

St. Anthony

Fasting is praiseworthy and necessary in its time and place: it is better to keep to a moderate use of food and drink, avoiding satiety, indicated by a slight heaviness, and on the other hand, avoiding excessive and inappropriate abstinence. Moderation, the middle path, makes a person more capable of spiritual activity.

St. Ambrose

St. Theophan on Wandering Thoughts

Thoughts wander when one is reading spiritual works and during prayer. What should one do? No one is free from this. There is no sin in it, only vexation. Having wandering thoughts becomes a sin when one willingly allows flightiness of mind. But if thoughts scatter involuntarily, what fault can there be? There is fault, though, when one notices thoughts wandering and, taking no action, one wanders along with them. When we catch our thoughts wandering off, we must bring them back to their proper place at once.

Upcoming Events 2023

29 April-4 May: Holy Week
5 May: Holy Pascha

GLORY BE TO GOD FOR ALL THINGS!