

# The Confessor's Tongue for June 9, 2024

Sunday of the Blind Man; Christ is risen! Indeed, He is risen!

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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## On Spiritual Blindness

St. Tikhon of Zadonks

*We sing this Sunday, "Since my soul's noetic eyes are blind and sightless, I come unto Thee, O Christ..." Here, St. Tikhon reflects on the spiritual blindness that afflicts man.*

What physical darkness is to the eyes, so sin is to the human soul. The spiritual darkness so darkens and blinds the eyes of the soul, that the sinner walks like the blind: he doesn't know where the path leads him; he doesn't see before him the torment of an eternal death in which he might fall; he doesn't distinguish vice from virtue, evil from good, truth from lies, true good fortune from evil fortune, and, thus, seeing he does not see and acts by touching like the blind. Does he live in good fortune? He becomes violent, as an untrained and unrestrained horse, and does not see that with this good fortune God draws him to Himself as a father of a little child draws an apple. Will misfortune visit him? He grumbles, is indignant and blames, that as if he told a lie; he makes complaints and says a malicious word: 'Am I a liar? In what have I sinned? Am I really more sinful than others? Am I worthy of this? Does my work deserve this?' He justifies himself, being full of every kind of untruth; he cleanses himself, being all besmirched; he considers himself unworthy of temporal punishment, but worthy of the eternal; he praises his merits, which stand for nothing.

All of creation, the heaven, the sun, the moon, the stars, the earth and its fulfillment, as if by mouth "tells of the glory of God" (Psalm 16:2); but the blind sinner does not feel the majesty of His glory and does not tremble. God, both through creation and by His word, reveals Himself for everyone; but the sinner, like a deaf person, does not hear His word and does not recognize the Lord. He hears the name of God, but he does not recognize God: he hears the voice of the Lord only with carnal instead of spiritual ears, and therefore, hearing he does not hear and seeing he does not see. When God is preached by His holy word, then His sacred will is also preached; but the sinner doesn't know it and does not make it his own. His omnipotence and majesty is preached, before which the sinner is not humble. His righteousness is preached before which the sinner is not afraid and does not honor. His truth is preached before which the sinner does not believe. His omnipresence is preached, before which the sinner does not show reverence. He does not show it because does not recognize Him. His most wise reason is preached, in which the sinner does not discern. His highest holiness is preached which the sinner does not honor. His supreme authority is preached which the sinner does not obey. His awesome glory is preached which the sinner does not honor. His timeless goodness is preached, in which the sinner makes no effort to

participate. His fearful judgment is preached before which the sinner does not tremble, and so forth.

Thus, the sinner is like "the man out of his mind who cannot know, and the stupid cannot understand (LXX Psalm 91:7)" God and the acts of God. And not only in relation to God, but also in relation to his neighbor, i.e. to any human, the blind man is a carnal and unenlightened man. We see that a person does evil to his neighbor, which he himself does not want; and does not do good to him, which he himself wants. We see that he is indignant and angry at the one who offends him, he abuses, abases, blames, discredits, lies about him, steals, kidnaps, takes away that which it his, and does other offenses; but he himself does such evil, or repays evil with evil, is not ashamed and does not sense this.

On the other hand, he wants his neighbor to be merciful to him and not leave him in need, for example: to quench his thirst and to give him drink when he thirsts, clothe the naked, welcome the stranger into his home and to comfort the sick and visit those in prison and do other works of mercy for him, all of this he wants; this truth is indisputable; but he himself does not want to do the same for a neighbor. We see that this evil is self-love, an untruth and blindness in Christians, who either silently pass by his neighbors living in misery as if not seeing them, or is ashamed to ask: what can I do for him? Many have plentiful food and a magnificent table for themselves, but do not care about a hungry neighbor; others wear all kinds of expensive clothes, and do not care about their naked neighbor; others build rich, large and tall houses and decorate the rest of the building, but for their neighbor who does not have a place to lay his head and to rest they do not care; they have silver, gold and other riches, comfortable for soul and life, that is kept whole and is saved, but there is no care for their neighbor who is burdened with debt and it is torment or prison for him for his shortfalls or sitting debts and suffering. We see this self-love and untruth in Christians: for not only they do evil, but also they don't do good for their neighbors, there is the untruth. But, what it is even worse, we see that many Christians are not ashamed and are not afraid to steal, to kidnap and to be cunning, to flatter, to lie, to deceive, to slander, to scandalize, to denounce, to abuse, to commit adultery and make other offenses against their neighbor that they themselves would not want. All this comes from blindness. *Bulgakov Handbook*

## Dogmas of Faith & Moral Dogma

*a Reflection by St. Nikolai of Zicha*

If, at times, the dogmas of the Faith seem like hard food, you should first endeavor to fulfill the moral dogmas of Christianity: then the understanding of the dogmas of the Faith will be revealed to you. The inquisitive examination of higher things, without

effort regarding the improvement of your life, does not bring any benefit. Once, the monks of Egypt were reflecting on Melchizedek, and not being able to come to a clear understanding of the mysterious personality of this ancient king and high priest, they invited Abba Copres to their assembly and asked him about Melchizedek. Upon hearing this, Copres struck himself three times on the mouth and said: "Woe to you Copres! You left that which God commanded you to do, and you inquire into that which God does not require of you." Hearing him, the monks were ashamed and dispersed. St. John Chrysostom writes: "If we adhere to the true dogmas and are not concerned about our behavior, we will not have any kind of benefit; and in the same way, if we concern ourselves about our behavior and neglect true dogmas, we will receive no benefit for our salvation. If we want to be delivered from Gehenna and to gain the Kingdom, we need to be adorned on both sides—with correctness of dogmas and honorable living."

### The Ascension of Our Lord

The Great Feast of the Ascension is commemorated on the fortieth day after Pascha, which always falls on the Thursday after the Sunday of the Blind Man. It has a post-feast of nine days, concluding on the Friday before Pentecost.

It is preceded on Wednesday by the Leavetaking of Pascha, which marks the end of the forty-day Paschal season. On the Leavetaking of Pascha, all the services of the Church are celebrated as they were celebrated during Bright Week. (In general, services of Leavetakings of Great Feasts are the same as the services of the feast itself—with the omission of a few festal features to distinguish it from the feast itself.)

The Ascension marks the end of our Lord's earthly work and his triumphal return to Heaven.

On a deeper level, the Ascension marks the first entrance of human nature into God's Kingdom in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. Christ's glorification in the Ascension is also our glorification, for it is the elevation of human nature. Man's nature now shares Divine honor as Christ our brother by His humanity enters Heaven in human form. The Feast leads us to consider seriously the nature of our true home in God's plan of salvation. Too often we think of the Kingdom of God as an afterlife, a postscript to our existence in this world. In reality, our true home is not on this fallen planet, but in the perfect and eternal Heavenly Kingdom. As St. Paul writes to the Colossians:

If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory. (*Colossians 3:1-4*)

Our life is hidden with Christ in God in heaven. It is there and there alone where God desires us to live in common union with Him to its fullest. If we indeed have the vocation to become saints, to share in the Divine nature, we must be prepared to inhabit the abode God has prepared for us, which was first experienced in the flesh by our Lord Jesus Christ after His Ascension. Our Lord has prepared the way for us to participate fully

in God's Divine plan for our salvation. We glorify Him for establishing us as heirs to the Heavenly Kingdom and prepare ourselves in holiness to become worthy citizens of it.

St. John Chrysostom proclaims in his homily on the Feast, "Today, the human race is completely reconciled with God. The ancient battle and enmity have disappeared. We, who were unworthy to live even on earth, are now lifted up to Heaven. Today, we become heirs to the Kingdom of Heaven, we, who do not even deserve earth, we ascend to heaven and inherit the throne of the King and Lord. Human nature, against which the cherubim guarded paradise, is now raised up above all the cherubim."

During the nine days of the Ascension, we say or sing the troparion and kontakion of the Feast at meals and during our usual morning and evening prayers.

#### Ascension, Troparion, tone 4

Thou hast ascended in glory, O **Christ** our God, / granting joy to Thy disciples by the promise of the Holy Spirit. / Through the blessing they were assured / that Thou art the **Son** of God, / the **Redeemer** of the world.

#### Ascension, Kontakion, tone 6

When Thou didst fulfill the dispensation for our sake, / and unite earth to **heaven**; / Thou didst ascend in glory, O **Christ** our God, / not being parted from those who **love** Thee, / but remaining with them and **crying**: / I am with you and no one will be **against** you!

#### A Prayer to the Immaculate Virgin

*St. Nektarios of Aegina, the Wonderworker*

Take away from me, O Virgin, the fetters of sin, of my lusts and the other transgressions: the terrible carelessness and the overcaring, the evil curiosity and the talkativeness, the useless incontinence and the haughtiness, the negligence, the drunkenness and the lack of mercy, the bad desires, the terrible impurity, the extravagance, the darkness, the great insensitivity.

Take away the tendency to say jokes, the enjoyment, the prodigality, the laughter of immorality and every evil. Give me, O maiden, chastity, give me continence, fasting, carefulness, vigilance and perfect obedience. Give me carefulness in all

and acute discernment, silence, order and holy patience. Grant to me, O Lady, eagerness to work and to attain my perfection, and zeal for virtues and exercise. Keep, O most-holy One, my soul, my heart and my mind in holiness and guard it in virginity.

#### Upcoming Events 2024

23 June: Holy Pentecost with Bishop Gerasim

GLORY BE TO GOD FOR ALL THINGS!