

The Confessor's Tongue for September 29, 2024

14th Sunday After Pentecost; Venerable Cyriacus

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.

October 1: Pokrov (Protection of Theotokos)

The Protection of the Theotokos is counted as a Great Feast in the Russian Church, but not one of the Twelve. The Greeks also celebrate it, but with somewhat less festivity. Having to do with an appearance of the Theotokos, the Feast reflects the inner life of the Church, which is not readily apparent to those outside in the world. The *Synaxarion* gives this account of the feast (on oca.org):

This miraculous appearance of the Mother of God occurred in the mid-tenth century in Constantinople, in the Blachernae church where her robe, veil, and part of her belt were preserved after being transferred from Palestine in the fifth century.

On Sunday, October 1, during the All Night Vigil, when the church was overflowing with those at prayer, the Fool-for-Christ Saint Andrew (October 2), at the fourth hour, lifted up his eyes towards the heavens and beheld our most Holy Lady Theotokos coming through the air, resplendent with heavenly light and surrounded by an assembly of the Saints. Saint John the Baptist and the holy Apostle John the Theologian accompanied the Queen of Heaven. On bended knees the Most Holy Virgin tearfully prayed for Christians for a long time. Then, coming near the Bishop's Throne, she continued her prayer.

After completing her prayer she took her veil and spread it over the people praying in church, protecting them from enemies both visible and invisible. The Most Holy Lady Theotokos was resplendent with heavenly glory, and the protecting veil in her hands gleamed "more than the rays of the sun." Saint Andrew gazed trembling at the miraculous vision and he asked his disciple, the blessed Epiphanius standing beside him, "Do you see, brother, the Holy Theotokos, praying for all the world?" Epiphanius answered, "I do see, holy Father, and I am in awe."

The Ever-Blessed Mother of God implored the Lord Jesus Christ to accept the prayers of all the people calling on His Most Holy Name, and to respond speedily to her intercession, "O Heavenly King, accept all those who pray to You and call on my name for help. Do not let them go away from my icon unheard."

Saints Andrew and Epiphanius were worthy to see the Mother of God at prayer, and "for a long time observed the Protecting Veil spread over the people and shining with flashes of glory. As long as the Most Holy Theotokos was there, the Protecting Veil was also visible, but with her departure it also became invisible. After taking it with her, she left behind the grace of her visitation."

At the Blachernae church, the memory of the miraculous appearance of the Mother of God was remembered. In the fourteenth century, the Russian pilgrim and clerk Alexander, saw in the church an icon of the Most Holy Theotokos praying for the world, depicting Saint Andrew in contemplation of her.

The *Primary Chronicle* of Saint Nestor reflects that the protective intercession of the Mother of God was needed because an attack of a large pagan Russian fleet under the leadership of Askole and Dir. The feast

celebrates the divine destruction of the fleet which threatened Constantinople itself, sometime in the years 864-867 or according to the Russian historian Vasiliev, on June 18, 860. Ironically, this Feast is considered more important by the Slavs than by the Greeks. . . .

In the *Prologue*, a Russian book of the twelfth century, a description of the establishment of the special Feast marking this event states, "For when we heard, we realized how wondrous and merciful was the vision... and it transpired that Your holy Protection should not remain without festal celebration, O Ever-Blessed One!"

Therefore, in the festal celebration of the Protection of the Mother of God, the Russian Church sings, "With the choirs of the Angels, O Sovereign Lady, with the venerable and glorious prophets, with the First-Ranked Apostles and with the Hieromartyrs and Hierarchs, pray for us sinners, glorifying the Feast of your Protection in the Russian Land." Moreover, it would seem that Saint Andrew, contemplating the miraculous vision was a Slav, was taken captive, and became the slave of the local inhabitant of Constantinople named Theognostus.

Churches in honor of the Protection of the Mother of God began to appear in Russia in the twelfth century. Widely known for its architectural merit is the temple of the Protection at Nerl, which was built in the year 1165 by holy Prince Andrew Bogoliubsky. The efforts of this holy prince also established in the Russian Church the Feast of the Protection of the Mother of God, about the year 1164.

At Novgorod in the twelfth century there was a monastery of the Protection of the Most Holy Theotokos (the so-called Zverin monastery) In Moscow also under Tsar Ivan the Terrible the cathedral of the Protection of the Mother of God was built at the church of the Holy Trinity (known as the church of Saint Basil the Blessed).

On the Feast of the Protection of the Most Holy Theotokos we implore the defense and assistance of the Queen of Heaven, "Remember us in your prayers, O Lady Virgin Mother of God, that we not perish by the increase of our sins. Protect us from every evil and from grievous woes, for in you do we hope, and venerating the Feast of your Protection, we magnify you."

We celebrate the Protection with Vigil this Monday night and Divine Liturgy Tuesday morning. Most Holy Theotokos, save us and protect us from all evil!

On the Lord's Prayer, Part 4

St. Nikolai Velimirovic of Zicha

BUT DELIVER US FROM [THE] EVIL ONE

Who will deliver us from evil, if not Thee, our Father?

Who will stretch out hands to the drowning children, if not their father?

Who concerns himself more about the cleanliness and beauty of the house than its master?

Thou didst call us from nothing to be something, but we bind ourselves down with evil, and so we are transforming ourselves again into nothing.

We fold around our hearts the very serpent that we most fear.

With all our might we are crying against the darkness, but the darkness abides in our souls, the microbes of darkness and the microbes of death.

We are fighting with one voice against evil, while evil silently penetrates our home; while we are crying, evil is forcing one position after the other, and comes nearer to our heart.

Stand Thou, Almighty Father, stand Thou between us and evil; we will lift up our hearts, and evil will evaporate like a wayside pool under the burning sun.

Thou art high above us, and Thou dost not feel the swell of evil; but we are suffocating under it. Behold, evil grows in us from day to day before our eyes and spreads its abundant fruits all around.

The sun salutes us every day with "Good morning!" and with the question: What have we to exhibit before our great King? And we exhibit only our old corrupt fruits of evil. O God, is not the dust, unmoved and unvivified, purer than man in the service of evil?

Look, we have built our houses and our mansions in the clefts and crevices of the earth. It would not be difficult for Thee to order Thy brooks to overflow all these clefts and crevices, and to wash the earth of men and of their evil doings.

But Thou art above our anger and our counsels. If Thou hadst listened to man's counsels Thou wouldst by now have destroyed the universe to its foundations and been buried Thyself in the ruins.

O, Wisest among fathers! Thou smilest always in Thy divine beauty and immortality, and behold, from Thy smiles new stars are growing! Always with a smile Thou turnest our evil into good, and graftest the good upon the tree of evil, and so patiently curest our uncultivated and lost Garden of Eden. Patiently Thou curest, and patiently Thou buildest. Thou buildest patiently Thy Kingdom of good, our King and Father. We pray to Thee: make us free from evil and full of good, Thou, the perfect emptiness of evil, and fullness of good!

FOR THINE IS THE KINGDOM

The stars and suns are the citizens of Thy Kingdom, O Father. Do Thou array us, too, in this splendid army of Thine.

Our planet I small and dark, but it is Thy work, Thine architecture, and Thine inspiration. How could anything but something great be formed by Thy masterly hands. Yet by our own smallness and darkness we make our abiding place small and dark. Yes, the earth is ever small and dark when we call it our kingdom, and when we foolishly pretend to be its kings.

Behold, there are many among us who were kings on earth and who now, standing on the ruins of their thrones, are wondering and asking: "Where are our kingdoms?" And many kingdoms there are that do not know what happened to their vain and glorious kings. Blessed and happy is the man who looks through the clouds and whispers the words that Thou hearest: Thine is the Kingdom!

What we call our earthly kingdom is full of worms and as perishable as bubbles on a deep river. A heap of dust on the wings of the wind! Thou only hast a true Kingdom, and only Thy Kingdom has a King. Take us from the wings of the wind, O merciful King, save us from the wings of the wind! And make us citizens of Thy Kingdom. O yes, make of us the citizens of Thy eternal Kingdom, near Thy stars and suns, near Thine angels and archangels, yea, near Thee, our Father!

AND THE POWER

Thine is the power, because Thine is the Kingdom. Quasi-kings are powerless. Their only kingly power is in their royal title, which in truth is Thy title only. They wander in the dust, and the dust goes where the wind wants it to go. We are the wandering shadows and moving dust. But even when we wander and move it is by Thy power.

By Thy power we are and by Thy power we are going to be. Earth would be a corpse without Thy power. Thou art the breathing power in every grain of dust, and if the dust dances it dances by Thy power, or if the dancing dust is called man it is by Thy power.

Thou has lent a small grain of Thy power of man. If a man does good he does it by Thy power through Thee; and if a man does evil he does it by Thy power but through himself. Everything which is done, is done by Thy power, either used or misused, either understood or misunderstood. If a man, O Father, uses Thy power according to Thy Will, then Thy power is Thine, and it is good; if a man comes, however, and uses Thy power according to his own will, then Thy power is called his own, and it is evil.

I say, O Lord, when Thou disposest with Thy power it is good, but when the beggars, who borrowed the power from Thee, proudly dispose with it as with their own, it is evil. So there is one keeper, but many disposers of Thy power; and also there is no evil power in the world, but there are evil disposers and practicers of Thy power. Yea, of the particles of Thy power Thou mercifully lendest to them, from Thy plentiful table, to those poor mortals on earth.

Look down upon us, O powerful Father, look down upon us and be slow in sending Thy power to the earthly dust until it prepares two rooms to take it in: good will and humility – good will to use the borrowed divine gift for good, and humility to be steadily reminded that all the power in the universe belongs to Thee, great Power-giver!

Thy power is holy and wise. But when in our hands Thy power is in danger of being defiled and becoming unholy and foolish.

O Father, which art in Heaven, help us to know and to do every day one thing; that is, to know that all power is Thine, and to us Thy power according to Thy will. Behold, we are unhappy because we separated what is inseparable in Thee; we separated power from holiness, and also power from love, and power from faith, and, finally – which is the first cause of our fall – power from humility. Unite, O Father, what Thy children have foolishly separated, we pray.

Bring again to honor Thine own power which has been disregarded and dishonored, we pray. For behold, whatever we are, we are Thy children.

AND THE GLORY FOR EVER AND EVER

Thy glory is co-eternal with Thee, our Kingly Father. It is substantial in Thee and independent from us. It is not glory of words like the glory of mortals, but it consists of the same imperishable essence as Thou art. Yea, it is inseparable from Thee like the light is inseparable from the burning sun. Whoever has seen the center and the periphery of Thy glory? Whoever has become glorious without the touch of Thy glory?

Thy dazzling glory is enveloping us all around and looking silently at us half-smiling and half-wondering about our human pains and murmurings. When we become silent we hear a secret whispering: Ye are children of a glorious Father!

O, how sweet is this glorious whispering!

What could we want more than to be the children of Thy glory? Is it not enough? Surely it is enough for a normal life. But behold, men want to be the fathers of the glory. And that is the beginning and the culmination of their misery. They are not satisfied with being children and sharers of Thy glory; they want to be fathers and bearers of Thy glory. Yet Thou art the only Father and the only Bearer of all glory. There are many misusers of Thy glory and many self-deceivers. Nothing is so dangerous in the hands of mortals as glory.

Thou showest Thy glory, and men argue about theirs. Thy glory is a fact, men's glory is a word.

Thy glory nourishes the poor and leadest the meek ones; men's glory, when separated from Thee, is the best of Satan.

How ridiculous people are who try to make a glory of their own, outside and apart from Thee! There was a fool who hated the sun and tried to secure a place out of the light of the sun and to have it as his own. He constructed a shady hut and made no windows, entered it, and stood in quite darkness, rejoicing that he had gotten rid of the great source of light. Such a fool and such an inhabitant of darkness is one who makes an effort to build a glory of his own, outside and apart from Thee, O immortal source of glory!

There is no glory of man's, as there is no power of man's. Thine is the power and the glory, our Father. If we do not borrow from Thee, we lack both qualities and fade away like dry leaves when separated from the tree and scattered, at the mercy of the wind.

AMEN

Let us be satisfied to be called Thy children. There is no greater honor on earth or in Heaven than this.

Take from us our kingdoms, our power, and our glory. All that we ever called our own lies in ruins. Take from us what from the beginning belonged to Thee. Our whole history has been a foolish attempt to make our own kingdom, our own power, and our own glory. Close soon our old history, during which time we have been fighting to make ourselves servants in the house which is Thine. Behold, it is better and more glorious to be the humblest servant in Thy Kingdom than the greatest king is ours.

Therefore make us, O Father, servants of Thy Kingdom, power, and glory, through generations and generations, forever and ever. Amen *fnis*

On the Prayers of the Prayerbook *Fr. Justin Frederick*

Praying the prayers in our prayerbooks daily, we grow familiar with them. Being familiar with them gives us the opportunity to understand them well and to learn them by heart. But familiarity can also breed contempt, or, at any rate, boredom, as the modern world induces us to crave novelty and variety. So what are we to do when our familiarity with our prayers each morning and evening leads to inattention or boredom?

One might think that the answer is to change our prayers and vary our routine. While this might help, one would be mistaken that this is the best solution. Should we lay aside the Lord's Prayer because it is too familiar and we are not "getting anything out of it"? While we are not slaves to a particular prayerbook or set of prayers and are free to make changes, the more profound and effective answer is to engage our prayers at a deeper level with more attention and feeling.

To accomplish this, we should slow down when we pray, pray aloud when possible, and speak each word as speaking to God Himself who stands before us. Furthermore, we shall consider the content of some of the prayers in the weeks ahead to help us better apprehend and use what we have been given.

First Evening Prayer

Let us begin by considering the first evening prayer, "To God the Father" by St. Macarius the Great.

O Eternal God and King of all Creation, Who hast granted me to reach this hour: forgive the sins I have committed this day in deed, word and thought. Cleanse, O Lord, my humble soul from every defilement of flesh and spirit. Grant, Lord, that I may pass through this night in peace. When I rise from my humble bed may I please Thy most Holy Name all the days of my life and trample under foot the physical and bodiless enemies both that wage war against me. Deliver me, Lord, from vain thoughts that defile me and from evil lusts. For Thine is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory: of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.

For a short prayer before sleep, this prayer is comprehensive and to the point. We ask for forgiveness and cleansing of the sins we have committed in the course of the day. Sins, as a corruption of the image of God in us need to be forgiven. Because they stain our souls, we need to be cleansed of their stain. Just as at Compline and in our families we should ask forgiveness of one another at the end of the day, so do we ask God for forgiveness of all wherein we have fallen short of His glory, either by trespassing against His commandments or not fulfilling our debt to love Him with all our heart or our neighbor as we love ourselves.

We ask for a peaceful passage through the fearful and dangerous darkness of night and the fear it can bring.

We ask that we might rise from our beds to be pleasing to God and His holy name, not only in the coming day but for the rest of our lives. As lie down to sleep, facing the unrelenting spiritual warfare with the demons, we ask that we may overcome all who wage war against us. Knowing that every sin begins with a

thought, we recognize the danger of vain thoughts and ask that God deliver us from them and from evil desires.

This prayer, as all our prayers, elaborates the Lord's Prayer in the specific circumstances of daily life. The latter asks forgiveness in general; the former for the sins of the day. The former develops the latter's "deliver us from the evil one" and "lead us not into temptation" with requests for a peaceful night and to overcome bodiless enemies, vain thought, evil lusts. The former elaborates the request "Hallowed by Thy name" in asking cleansing of defilement of soul, for God is glorified by the pure lives of His people. The request that we may "please Thy most Holy name all the days of our life" develops from both "hallowed be Thy name" and "Thy will be done," for holy obedience pleases and glorifies God.

What could be more appropriate than this prayer before bed? Seeing its petitions and how essential they are for us, how can we tire of offering them? We might well reflect: how many times have we omitted the prayer and then fallen into sin? Or how many times have we breezed through it without attention and feeling and, later that evening, fallen into temptation? Are we so confident in our own strength that we judge we can safely omit this prayer at night? The apostle warns us, "let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (I Cor. 10:12). Knowing what is at stake in the spiritual warfare and that God is present to us, we can make this prayer forcefully and attentively to the Lord with faith, aware of our great need for His help. Such prayer He will deign to hear and answer.

From the Optina Elders on Humility

St. Macarius of Optina is bold to say that "All problems come from pride; it is the main source of our sins distress, and misfortune." He also says, "Where there is a fall, even if only in thought, it was preceded by pride." Pride manifests in judging or criticizing others, looking down on others, comparing oneself favorably to others, despising others, thinking oneself better than others, and the like. "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall", warns Solomon in his Proverbs (16:18). Given the harm that comes from this malady, let us consider the remedies to pride and apply them to ourselves.

With only humility one can be saved, even without any works. *St. Macarius of Optina*

Let the following be for you signs of humility or pride: the latter scorns everyone, reproaches them, and sees darkness in them, while the former sees only his own faults and does not dare to judge anyone. *St. Macarius of Optina*

Humility consists in not judging and not reproaching anyone, and having simple clothing and furniture in your cell. *St. Ambrose of Optina*

The humble do not investigate the depth of the unknown, but they humble their thinking, and, in time, God enlightens them. *St. Macarius of Optina*

Humble yourself in spirit more—humility takes the place of works. Endure all misfortunes and entrust yourself to the Lord. *St. Ambrose of Optina*

By all means strive to acquire the opposite of pride—humility; and how it is acquired you will learn in the books of the holy fathers: continual self-reproach is the shortest path to it. *St. Macarius*

How do you reproach yourself? Very simply. The conscience immediately speaks out, it immediately censures us, and we have only to agree that we acted wrongly and humbly turn to God with a prayer for forgiveness. Even if only for a minute, you must absolutely reproach yourself in this way. Our job is to reproach ourselves, even if it is just for a brief time, and the rest is up to God. *St. Barsanuphius of Optina*

[How to reproach yourself:] When the devil points out to you the faults and weaknesses of others and urges you to judge them, then you say to yourself: "I am worse than everyone else, I deserve eternal torments. Lord, have mercy on me." And even if you say this without feeling, you still need to say it. *St. Barsanuphius of Optina*

One can acquire humility by means of obedience. The person who submits his will to his spiritual guide overcomes pride and acquires humility. *St. Barsanuphius of Optina*

Genuine obedience which brings great benefit to the soul comes when you act in defiance of yourself. Then the Lord Himself takes you in His arms and blesses your labors. *St. Nikon of Optina*

Every obedience which seems difficult becomes very easy when we fulfill it, because that is how obedience works. *St. Nektary of Optina*

Take this advice for your whole life: if the superiors or those older than you suggest something, then no matter how difficult or how lofty it might seem, do not refuse. God will help you for your obedience. *St. Nektary of Optina*

Humility consists in yielding to others and considering yourself worst than all. *St. Ambrose*

When your heart is troubled, keep silent, but not with anger. If you see that angry thoughts are secretly acting in you, depart and pray to God for those who have grieved you and ask for mercy through their prayers. Always try to find the fault in yourself, and if this time you were not at fault, then the reproach is being sent for previous sins and to expose our woeful condition. *St. Leo of Optina*

You ask, "By what path do I go to God?" Go on the path of humility! By humbly bearing the difficult circumstances of life, by humbly enduring sicknesses sent by the Lord, by the humble hope that you will not be abandoned by the Lord, the quick helper and Heavenly Father overflowing in love, by humble prayer for help from on high to dispel despondency and feelings of helplessness by which the enemy of salvation tries to bring us to despair, which is so perilous for man, depriving him of Divine Grace and removing from him the mercy of God. *St. Nektary of Optina*

Do not be despondent because you are not living as you should, but humble yourself and the Lord will look more favorably on your humility than on struggles which are great but not humble. *St. Anatoly of Optina*

Upcoming Events 2024

29 September: Annual Meeting
27 October: Octoberfest
28-31 October: Diocesan Assembly in Virginia
2-3 November: Fr. Justin in Alpine
10 November: Parish Thanksgiving Meal
15 November: Nativity Fast Begins

GLORY BE TO GOD FOR ALL THINGS!