

The Confessor's Tongue for October 6, 2024

15th Sunday After Pentecost; St. Innocent of Alaska, Apostle Thomas

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. Theophan the Recluse (+1894)

For what reason were the martyrs tormented? Because, having believed in the Lord and been united with Him, they did not want to worship false gods. The false gods were the spirits of passions and evil deeds. He who refuses to give in to passions and sinful desires does the same as he who refuses to bow down and worship idols. He who refused to worship idols was given over to external sufferings, while he who refuses to satisfy the passions actually wounds himself and forces his heart to suffer until the passions quiet down in him. Victory over passions is a self-inflicted spiritual martyrdom, which is performed invisibly in the heart but is nevertheless very painful....But if there is a lot of pain, there are a lot of rewards.... The more the sorrows, the more intense the consolations.

Concerning Spiritual Reading

St. Nicodemus the Hagiorite (+1809)

If you *continually* read spiritual books with eagerness and diligence, know that this continuous eagerness and diligence will open your mind and make it receptive to spiritual meanings. And what you did not understand the first time you will easily understand when you read it two or three times. For God, seeing your continuous diligence, will illumine your mind to understand what is difficult.

On the Prayers of the Prayerbook

Fr. Justin Frederick

In order to pray better and appropriate more deeply the meaning of our customary prayers, we are reflecting on some of those prayers in this series.

Upon rising, we go to prayer as quickly as we can in order to offer the day to the Lord and ask His grace and blessing for it. How can we dare to start the day without prayer? Do we think we can live out the day in a God-leasing way without God's grace? Do we think we will receive His grace without asking? Are we so much in good control of our lives that we do not need to pray upon rising from sleep?

Most assuredly, we need it more urgently than we realize. So, in the morning prayers, after the Lord's Prayer, we offer these three troparia and one prayer..

Morning Troparia

Having arisen from sleep, we fall down before Thee, O Blessed One, and sing to Thee, O Mighty One, the angelic hymn: Holy! Holy! Holy! art Thou, O God; through the Theotokos, have mercy on us.

We rise from sleep only to fall before our Lord in adoration and humility, joining the angels in proclaiming His holiness and to seek His mercy in the day ahead.

Having raised me from my bed and from sleep, O Lord, enlighten my mind and heart, and open my lips that I may praise Thee, O Holy Trinity: Holy! Holy! Holy! art Thou, O God; through the Theotokos, have mercy on us.

We have arisen from the darkness of night and sleep and come to the Lord seeking Light--Him who Himself is the Light of the world. In His light we see light. Without Him, we are in darkness. He mercifully gives us light, and His mercy comes to us through His mother who gave birth to Him and who intercedes for us.

The Judge will come suddenly and the acts of every man will be revealed; but in the middle of the night we cry with fear: Holy! Holy! Holy! art Thou, O God; through the Theotokos, have mercy on us.

The prayer calls us to think of the last things--death, judgment, the lake of fire or the kingdom of God. Christ is the judge. When He comes in glory, He will illumine all things, and all things will be seen for what they truly are--not as we imagine or delude ourselves into thinking they are. In particular, the things hidden in our conscience will be revealed for what they truly are in the sight of God, and we shall be judged according to what is found there. This is a fearful thought, for who can stand before the coming of the Lord and justify himself? Hence, we cry for mercy through the intercessions of the Theotokos.

Having risen from sleep, I thank Thee, the Holy Trinity. In the abundance of Thy kindness and long patience, Thou hast not been angry with me for my laziness and sinfulness, nor hast Thou destroyed me in my lawlessness. Instead, in Thy usual love for mankind, Thou hast raised me as I lay in despair, that I might rise early and glorify Thy Reign. Enlighten now the eyes of my mind and open my lips, that I might learn of Thy words, understand Thy commandments, accomplish Thy will, hymn Thee in heart-felt confession and praise Thine all-holy name, the Father and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.

The fact that we awakened this morning still alive in this world is evidence of God's kindness and patience. It is better than we deserve. We acknowledge this, and express our gratitude that we are still alive, able to sing the Lord's praises, able to repent, able to do good, able to work out our salvation in the coming day. The prayer mentions rising early, indicating the Church's experience that prayer before sunrise is more concentrated, less distracted. We rise to glorify God, acknowledging that He governs the affairs of men, and that our lives are safely in His hands. We ask again for light for the eyes of our mind to understand and do His will expressed in His commandments in the day ahead as we confess and praise Him throughout the day from our hearts. *Translation from St. Tikhon's Prayer Book, 1982 ed.*

The Struggle for Holiness *St. Symeon the New Theologian*

[The Apostle Paul] proclaims, "Strive for peace with all men, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14). Why did he say, "Strive"? Because it is not possible for us to become holy and to be saints in an hour! We must therefore progress from modest beginnings toward holiness and purity. Even were we to spend a thousand years in this life, we should never perfectly attain to it. Rather, we must always struggle for it every day, as if mere beginners. This again Paul has shown us by saying, "Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect" (Philippians 3:12). *Discourse 5*

Introduction to *Indication of the Way* *St. Innocent of Alaska (written in 1833 in Aleut)*

People were not created merely to live here on earth like animals that disappear after their death, but to live with God and in God, and to live not for a hundred or a thousand years, but to live eternally. But only Christians can live with God; that is to say, those who rightly believe in Jesus Christ.

Everyone, whoever he may be, desires and seeks prosperity and happiness. To desire what is good for oneself and to seek prosperity or happiness is part of man's nature, and therefore it is not a sin or vice. But we need to know that here on earth there has not been, and is not, and never will be true and perfect happiness and prosperity; for all our prosperity and happiness is only in God. No one will ever find true happiness and perfect prosperity without God or outside God.

Nothing in this world but God can fill our heart or fully satisfy our desires. A fire cannot be put out with brushwood and oil, because only water will put it out. In exactly the same way, the desires of the human heart cannot be satisfied with the goods of this world, because only the grace of God can quench the thirst of our desires.

Everything we desire pleases us only so long as we do not possess it; and when we get it, we soon get tired of it. Or only what we do not as yet have seems to us good and attractive; while all that we have, even though it is the very best, is either not good enough for us or does not attract us. A good example of this is King Solomon who, as is well known, was so rich that all the household plate and furniture in his palaces was of pure gold; he was so wise that kings came to visit him; and he was so glorious that his foes were terrified of him. Being wiser and mightier than all his contemporaries, he was able to satisfy all his wishes and desires, so that there was hardly a thing in the world which he did not possess or could not obtain. But with all this he could not satisfy his heart, and the desires of his heart wearied and tormented him far more than an ordinary man: and in the end, having tried everything in the world, he said in his writings: Everything in this world is vanity, and nothing can satisfy our desires.

Truly not a single earthly pleasure can satisfy our heart. We are strangers on earth, pilgrims and travelers; our home and fatherland are there in heaven, in the heavenly Kingdom; and there do not exist on earth things which could perfectly satisfy our desires. Let a man own the whole world and all that is in the world, yet all that will not interest him for more than a minute, so to speak, and it will never satisfy his heart: for the heart of man can be fully satisfied only by the love of God and therefore God alone can fill the heart and soul of man and quench the thirst of his desires.

And so, do you wish to live with God there, in the Kingdom of Heaven? Be an Orthodox Christian. Do you want prosperity and happiness? Seek it in God. Do you want your heart to be fully satisfied? Turn it to God from Whom you have been separated by your sins.

However, no one by himself, without Jesus Christ, can turn and draw near to God, because our sins, like a high wall, do not let us come to Him. And unless Jesus Christ in His mercy to us had come down to earth, and unless he had taken to Himself our human flesh and by His death destroyed the wall which separated us from God, everyone would have perished and not a single soul could have drawn near to God or lived with Him. For everyone is a sinner and is born in sin from his mother's womb; and even in an infant, though it knows nothing of the world and does nothing, there is already the seed of sin.

Therefore Jesus Christ is our Redeemer, Savior, Deliverer and Benefactor. Now everyone who wants to do so can return to God and enter the Kingdom of Heaven

But there is only one way into the Kingdom of Heaven, and that is the very way that Jesus Christ went when He lived on earth. There is no other way, and never was and never will be, for Jesus Christ said: I am the way, and if anyone wishes to follow Me let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow Me.

And so, for every Christian, and even for every human being, it is extremely necessary to know how to find the way and how to follow it. And there I want to talk to you about the way; and although I know myself that I cannot show it to you as I ought, yet I shall try according to my powers, trusting in Jesus Christ Who can use dirt itself for healing and curing.

Now, whoever comes across my book and wants to read it will find in it nothing but a poor and feeble explanation of the Way into the Kingdom of Heaven. But if anyone reads it through with prayers to Jesus Christ, He, being almighty, even by these words of mine can enlighten and warm the heart of the reader.

Indication of the Way into the Kingdom of Heaven

Upcoming Events 2024

20 October: Octoberfest
28-31 October: Diocesan Assembly in Virginia
2-3 November: Frederick-Krammes Wedding
15 November: Nativity Fast Begins

GLORY BE TO GOD FOR ALL THINGS!