

The Confessor's Tongue for October 13, 2024

16th Sunday After Pentecost; Fathers of 7th Council; Martyr Carpus, New Martyr Zlata
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.

On the Prayers of the Prayerbook: Psalm 50

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.

Psalm 50 (51), David's great prayer of repentance after he committed adultery and murder, is most familiar to us. We hear it before Divine Liturgy during the Third Hour, at Compline, at Midnight Office, at Matins, and it is included in the standard set of morning prayers. Along with "The Lord is my Shepherd," it is a Psalm many know by heart. Yet it contains at least a few lines of which the meaning is not readily apparent. Since many of us pray it daily and hear it regularly and it behooves us to recite it with understand, we shall consider the meaning of the Psalm.

Have mercy on me, O God, according to thy great mercy, and according to the multitude of thy compassions, blot out my transgressions. Wash me yet more from my transgressions, and from my sin purify thou me. For I know my transgression, and my sin is continually before me. Against thee alone have I sinned, and have done evil before thee; that thou mightest be justified in thy words, and conquer when thou art judged.

Christians pray this Psalm regularly, because life in Christ is based on repentance--turning away from their sins in word, in deed, and in thought, hating them, and seeking to do God's will in all things with His help. Christian life begins with repentance, it continues in repentance, and, at every service, we ask that we may end our life "in peace and repentance". The regular use of this Psalm assists us in this work of life-long repentance.

Knowing our sins is a work of God in us. His Holy Spirit works in our conscience to show us our sins. Some are deeply hidden, and we are surprised and dismayed when God reveals them to us.

Having come to knowledge of our sins, we with the Prophet David ask God for mercy. Asking for mercy implies at least two things. First, recognizing our guilt before God and that we merit punishment, we ask Him not to give us what we deserve. This request is negative: please do not punish me as I deserve! David, according to the Law, deserved death for his adultery and murder. We he confessed his sin to Nathan the Prophet, Nathan declared to him that he would not die, but that the child conceived in adultery would die. God was merciful to David. Second, asking mercy from God is a positive request to Him to be and do good to us, though we do not deserve it, have not earned it, and cannot claim such treatment by right. God has given each of us many good things in this life that we do not deserve, and He has not given us the full consequences our sinful deeds and words merit.

We ask mercy of God not on the basis of our goodness, greatness, or merit, but in accordance with the God's great mercy and compassion. It is God's nature to be merciful and compassionate. His mercies are great

and His compassions a multitude. We appeal to Him that He manifest His merciful, compassionate nature to us, and He is well-pleased to show mercy.

Behold, in transgressions was I conceived, and in sin did my mother bear me.

Since the ancestral sin of our first parents, we have all been born of sinful parents spiritually dead and subject to the consequences of the Fall. While we are not born guilty of Adam and Eve's sin, we are born with the disability ensuing from their sin, and we are affected by the sins of our parents, ancestors, and society. These influences make nearly certain that we shall choose to sin early in life.

Behold, thou hast loved truth; the hidden and secret things of thy wisdom hast thou revealed unto me.

The Lord who is Truth loves truth. He reveals to us the secrets of our hearts, the true nature of the sins we excuse, deny, or blame on others. He wants us to know the true nature of reality, and reveals it to us in His incarnation. In the Sacrament of Confession, we speak the truth about ourselves to the Lord who already knows the truth about us, but wants to see if we can and will in humility agree with Him about our desperate condition so that He may apply the remedy.

Thou shalt sprinkle me with hyssop, and I shall be cleansed; thou shalt wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

Sin dirties and defiles our soul. It corrupts it, distorts it, renders it diseased. Image a pure white garment of fine fabric spotted with blood, vomit, and oily mud. This is what sin does to our soul. The only way to cleanse the soul is initially through Baptism and then through the second baptism of tears--Confession. When we humble ourselves to receive these Sacraments in faith, the Lord cleanses our soul and restores its proper purity and beauty.

Thou shalt make me hear joy and gladness; the bones that have been humbled shall rejoice.

A guilty conscience weighs down the soul in sorrow, depression, and even despair. The removal of the guilt of sin opens the soul to joy and gladness and rejoicing in the Lord and his goodness.

Turn away thy face from my sins, and blot out my transgressions. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy face, and take not thy Holy Spirit from me. Give me again the joy of thy salvation, and establish me with a princely spirit.

We ask the Lord no longer to see our sins and to blot them out, and He "as far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us." He renews in us a right spirit--humble, pure, oriented towards its Maker. We ask Him that we may retain the Holy Spirit, even though by our sins we have grieved and quenched Him.

The phrase rendered here in Archbishop Dmitri's translation (based on the Greek of the Septuagint, the Church's canonical text) "and establish me with a princely spirit" is rendered variously in English translations. The Brenton translation of the LXX Greek has "establish me with thy directing Spirit." The KJV reads "and uphold me with thy free spirit"; the NIV renders it "and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me"; the NAS and the Amplified Bible read "and sustain me with a willing spirit."

The Greek word translated "princely" and "directing" is the adjective *hegemonikos* derived from the noun *hegemon* which can be rendered "prince" or "governor" and the related verb which means "to command, to rule." Seen in the context of sin and what sin does to the human made in God's image, the meaning becomes clear. Sin enslaves, demeans, subjects man to the demons. A slave is not free, is not in control of himself. A princely, free, directing spirit is to be seen in contrast with a base, craven spirit enslaved to the passions of the body and to sin. After a fall into sin, we ask God to establish us with a directing, princely spirit. "Spirit" here can refer both to the highest part of man's soul and to the Holy Spirit. Both are needed—our own healthy, properly functioning soul governing the body to do the will of God and the Holy Spirit of God to empower, guide, and instruct us.

Then will I teach transgressors thy ways, and the impious shall return unto thee.

Delivered from sin and restored to health, the sinner becomes an example by which sinners and transgressors may be taught and drawn back to God. He also gains experience, from which he may be able to instruct and encourage others.

Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God, the God of my salvation; my tongue shall rejoice in thy righteousness. O Lord, open thou my lips, and my mouth shall declare thy praise.

The penitent asks the Lord to deliver him from his guilt. Deliverance causes him to open his mouth to rejoice what the Lord has done for him. Recognizing that he cannot praise God worthily, he asks God to open his mouth that he may more adequately declare the great things God has done for him, which is the essence of praise.

For if thou hadst desired sacrifice, I would have given it; with whole whole-burnt offerings thou wilt not be pleased. A sacrifice to God is a broken spirit; a broken and humbled heart God will not despise.

Becoming a recipient of God's mercy and goodness, the cleansed penitent admits he is in God's debt. If a sacrifice would please God, he would offer it. But the sacrifice that God desires is not a gift or an animal, but a broken and humbled heart. God opposes the proud, but He gives grace to the humble. As God will not despise this gift of a humble heart, we do well to work to be able to offer such a gift to Him.

Do good, O Lord, in thy goodwill unto Zion; and let the walls of Jerusalem be built. Then shalt thou be pleased with the sacrifice of righteousness, oblations, and whole-burnt offerings: then shall they lay bullocks upon thine altar.

This last verse seems out of harmony with the rest of the Psalm until we realize how the term "Jerusalem" is being used. While it does refer to the physical city, it also refers to the Church, to the new Jerusalem of eschatology,

and to the soul of man wherein God dwells as in a temple. We are the temple of the Holy Spirit. Sin defiles the temple and causes the protective walls of the soul to be broken down so that the enemy has easy access to influence us to continue in sin and plunge ever deeper into it. The walls protecting our soul from his assaults must be rebuilt, and so we ask it. With our soul protected and its purity restored, we are able to offer prayer and sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving worthily to the Lord, and ourselves as a living sacrifice.

May we ever use this Psalm with understanding and great benefit!

13 October Martyr Zlata (Chryse)

The Holy Virgin Martyr Zlata (Chrysé), that "golden vessel of virginity, and undefiled bride of Christ," was born in the village of Slatena, in the Meglena diocese, on the border of Bulgaria and Serbia, when Bulgaria was under the Turkish Yoke. Her father was poor and he had four daughters. Saint Zlata was beautiful in appearance, and her soul was beautiful as well. From childhood she displayed an unusually strong character, and an unshakeable faith in Christ.

A certain Turk became obsessed with her, and kidnapped her one day as she was gathering wood with some other women. He brought her to his house, and repeatedly tried to seduce the maiden, and persuade her to convert to Islam, saying that he would make her his wife. Zlata, however, resisted and asserted: "I know only Christ as my Bridegroom, Whom I shall not deny, even if you tear me to shreds."

Since persuasion and flattery proved unsuccessful, the Turk began to threaten her with grievous torments. The glorious martyr was not frightened by these threats, however. For six months the impious Hagarenes¹ tried to make Zlata accept their religion, but she remained steadfast. Then they ordered the saint's parents and sisters to convince her to become a Moslem. Otherwise, they would kill Zlata and torture them.

The Saint's parents and sisters wept and urged her to deny Christ "just for the sake of appearances," so that they might be spared torture and death. Saint Zlata was unmoved by their pleas, and replied, "You who now urge me to deny Christ are no longer my parents and sisters. Instead, I have the Lord Jesus Christ as my father, the Lady Theotokos as my mother, and the Saints of our Church as my brothers and sisters!"

When the Moslems saw that they could not weaken the Saint's resolve, they tortured her for three months, beating her with clubs. Later, they peeled strips of skin from her body so that the earth was reddened by her blood. Then they heated a skewer and passed it through her ears.

Standing nearby was her Spiritual Father, Hieromonk Timothy of Stavronikéta Monastery on Mount Athos. She sent word to him to pray that she would persevere until the end. It was he who recorded her martyrdom.

Finally, the Moslems fell into a rage at having been defeated by a woman, so they tied her to a tree and cut her virginal body to pieces with their knives. Her pure soul was received by Christ, Who bestowed on her the double crowns of virginity and martyrdom. Certain Christians gathered her relics secretly and buried them with great reverence. Saint Zlata suffered for Christ on October 13, 1795.

Upcoming Events 2024

20 October: Octoberfest 3:00 p.m.
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!