

The Confessor's Tongue for January 26, A. D. 2025

31st Sunday after Pentecost; Holy New Martyrs, Confessors, Passion Bearers of Russia
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.

The New Russian Martyrs

The Synaxis of the New Martyrs and Confessors of the Russian Church under the Bolshevik yoke is celebrated the first Sunday following January 24.

Martyrdom is the same thing as Christianity. These two words have the same meaning. Hatred against Christ and His followers should not surprise us. It is natural, it was foretold by the Lord Himself, Who said: "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you" (John 15:18).

Today we celebrate the memory of the Holy New Martyrs and Confessors of the Russian land. These are all the multitude of bishops, priests, monks, nuns, laymen, laywomen, and children who were killed or suffered gravely because of their faith and their refusal to compromise their faith, to cooperate with the new revolutionary atheistic government, or to renounce their faith in Christ.

The experience of each and every one of these martyrs and confessors was unique. Even if their manner of death or suffering was similar in many cases, each of them brought with them to that moment of confession or martyrdom a unique soul, a unique set of experiences and circumstances. If we were to enter into the mind and heart of each one of these saints and observe the unique way in which they experienced their suffering and the knowledge of their coming martyrdom, we would see a wondrous tapestry of experience. And the thread which holds all this tapestry together is love, love for Christ. was foretold by the Lord Himself, Who said: "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you" (John 15:18)..

On the World Economic Crisis

St. Nikolai of Zicha

You are asking me, man of God, about the reason and meaning of the present crisis. Who am I that you ask me about this great mystery? "Speak if you have something greater than silence," said St. Gregory the Theologian. And although I find that presently silence is higher than any word, I will, out of love for you, write what I think about this question.

"Crisis" is a Greek word, and in translation it means "judgment". In the Holy Scripture the word "judgment" is used many times. We read in the Psalms, "*Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment*" (Ps. 1:5). Later again, "*I will sing of mercy and judgment: unto thee, O LORD, will I sing*". (Ps. 101:1).

The wise king Solomon writes that the judgment will come to everyone from the Lord (Proverbs 29:26). The Savior himself said, "*For the Father judges no man, but has committed all judgment unto the Son.*" (John 5:22). The Apostle Peter writes, "*For the time is come that judgment must begin in the house of God*" (1 Pet. 4:17).

Replace the word "judgment" with the word "crisis" and read, "I will sing of mercy and crisis",

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"Crisis will come to everyone from the Lord", "The Father committed all crisis unto the Son", "For the time is come that crisis must begin in the house of God".

Previously the Europeans, when some trouble befell them, used the word "judgment" instead of the word "crisis". These days the word "judgment" is replaced with the word "crisis", a clear word with one less clear. A drought would come and people would say – "God's judgment!" Flood – "God's judgment!" A war or epidemic would start – "God's judgment!" Earthquakes, locust, other trials, always the same – "God's judgment!" Therefore, crisis is because of the drought, because of the flood, of the wars and epidemics. And people see the present financial, economic catastrophe as God's judgment, but they call it "crisis" rather than "judgment". So that the trouble would increase from lack of reason! Because when the clear word "judgment" was said, the reason that led to the trouble was clear, and the Judge who allowed the trouble was known, and so was the purpose for which the trouble was allowed. But after replacing the word "judgment" with the word "crisis", which is unclear for the most, no one can explain why it is, from whom, and for what. And this is the only thing in which this crisis differs from the crisis that happens from drought and flood, war or epidemic, locust or other tribulation.

You are asking about the reason of today's crisis, or God's judgment? The reason is always the same. The reason for all droughts, floods, epidemics and other troubles is the same as of today's crisis – the falling away from God. The sin of falling away from God has resulted in this crisis as well, and the Lord allowed it so as to wake people, sober them, so that they would repent and come back to him. The crisis is commensurate to sins. And truly, the Lord used modern means to teach modern people: he struck the banks, the stock exchanges, the entire financial system. He overturned the tables of money-lenders just as he once did in the temple in Jerusalem. He created an unprecedented panic between merchants and money-lenders. Stirred up, brought down, mixed up, confused, bestowed fear. And all that so that proud European and American wise men would wake up, repent, remember God. So that they who are anchored in the haven of material comfort would remember their souls, acknowledge their trespassings, and bow down before God the Highest, the living God.

How long will the crisis last? Until the proud culprits acknowledge the victory of the All-Powerful. Until the people would realize that they have to translate the unclear word "crisis" into their native language and would exclaim with the repentant sigh, "God's judgment!"

Therefore you, honest Father, should also call "crisis" "God's judgment", and you will understand everything.

Greetings to you and the Lord's peace!

The Prayer of an Orthodox Christian

What level did the saints reach?

"There is a loftier prayer of the perfect, a certain rapture of mind, a complete detachment from everything felt with the senses, when through unutterable groanings of the spirit man becomes closer to God, who sees the heart open like a book and expressing its will through innumerable images." (St. Nilus of Sinai, *Philokalia*)

In this form of prayer, which is impossible for the mind alone to attain, one's whole being enters into blessed and ceaseless repentance.

Does Holy Scripture provide any examples of oral prayer addressing God with the heart and mind together?

The Savior Himself, entering His great moment of trial as He and the disciples were heading to the Garden of Gethsemane, gave us an example of prayer aloud: *And when thy had sung a hymn, they went out into the Mount of Lives* (Matt 26:30). The Lord gave thanks to God the Father in the hearing of all when He had raised Lazarus (John 11:41-42). Likewise, St. Anna, the mother of the prophet Samuel, prayed with her lips: *Now Anna, she spake in her heart; only her lips moved; then Eli answered and said, Go in peace, and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of Him...* I Kings 1:13-18. *By Him, therefore, let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His name* (Hebrews 13:15).

How do we learn to pray with our lips, and then with our mind?

1. If our childhood habits have been forgotten, then it is possible to learn to pray aloud (that is, step onto the first level of prayer) by using a prayerbook and paying close attention to the standard Church prayers. "The church wisely established hymns and various troparia on account of the weakness of our mind, so that we, although foolish, might be attracted by the sweetness of the singing and thus praise God even against our will" (St. Peter of Damascus). The Church accepted hymns and troparia so that we would be humbled and rise to excellent thoughts as if upon a ladder.

2. Christ's teaching demands that our faith and our way of living be inseparable. For this reason, every Christian, in order to live in constant prayer, must have a daily order of prayer; that is, to establish under the guidance of a spiritual father a prayer rule. As St. Augustine said, "Once we were cleansed by baptism; but every day by prayer."

3. "Every established prayer, be it for home or church use, merely imparts to prayer an outer form; the soul or essence of prayer, however, is born by every person within, in the mind and heart. Our entire cycle of church prayers, as well as every prayer designed for home use, is filled with invocations to God...it is impossible to argue with the fact that mental prayer is necessary for all Christians; and if it is necessary, then

no one can say that it is impossible, for God does not force us to do the impossible. That it is difficult—certainly. But then everything worth doing is difficult; and all the more so should prayer be, since it is the source of everything good in our lives...(St. Theophan the Recluse, *Letters to Various Persons*, Letter 66).

The Kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force (Matt. 11:12).

What is the practical significance of a prayer rule?

"A prayer rule is an arrangement of several prayers written by holy and God-inspired Fathers, which are adapted to a specific time and circumstances" (St. Ignatius Brianchaninov).

"The purpose of a rule is to increase the number of prayerful thoughts and feelings...and so that they be correct, holy, and perfectly pleasing to God." "The soul, left to her own devices, would not be able to follow the correct path of prayer. She would become distorted: either through daydreaming, or through illusions of lofty visions, inspired by vainglory."

"Thus, the soul, filled and nurtured by prayerful thoughts and feelings selected from a ready-made prayerbook, begins of its own accord to live these thoughts and feelings" (St. Theophan).

How long should a prayer rule be?

The rule of prayer is for the person, not the person for the rule. When determining a rule, it is necessary to adapt it to, and not exceed, the individual's strength. A rule is meant to further spiritual advancement, and not to serve as an excuse for self-opinion. "It is better to alter parts of a rule, or even invent an entirely new one, lest prayer become a mere ritual" (St. Theophan).

"I prefer a brief rule that is continually performed to a long rule that is quickly abandoned: (St. Matheos, *Alphabetical Patericon of Scetis*).

"In the day of His judgment, God will not condemn us for leaving off psalms or abandoning prayers, but for allowing demons to enter us because we ceased our rule" (St. Isaac the Syrian, Homily 71).

Sayings of the Desert Fathers

Abba John the Dwarf prayed God to take his passions away from him so that he might become free from care. He went and told an old man this: 'I find myself in peace, without an enemy,' he said. The old man said to him, 'Go, beseech God to stir up warfare so that you may regain the affliction and humility that you used to have, for it is by warfare that we make progress.' So he besought God, and when war-fare came, he no longer prayed that it might be taken away, but said, 'Lord, give me strength for the fight.'

Upcoming Events 2025

2 February: Great Feast, Meeting of the Lord in the Temple
7-10 February: Fr. Justin in Alpine
14 February: Parish Fundraising Gala
1 March: Forgiveness Vespers, 5:00 p.m.
2-7 March: Clean Week
12-18 April: Holy Week
19 April: Great and Holy Pascha

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!