

# The Confessor's Tongue for October 31, 2010

23<sup>rd</sup> Sunday After Pentecost: Hieromartyr John Kochurov

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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## The Sayings of St. Anthony the Great

*Abba Anthony said, "I no longer fear God, but I love Him. For love casts out fear." (1 John 4:18)  
Saying 32 Sayings of the Desert Fathers*

*Commentary:* The Scriptures teach us that "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding." True knowledge of God, of His character, His power, His holiness, will naturally bring about fear in us. To fear God recognizes that we shall one day stand before Him and account for all our actions and words. Wisdom in man begins with this recognition of God and resultant fear. This is why the wicked have no fear of God; there is no concern about judgment to restrain their evil desires and deeds. We cannot have wisdom unless we begin with a fear of God. We may come to God first out of fear of judgment and eternity with the devil; over time, we realize that God promises rewards to those who serve Him, and while we still fear, we are increasingly motivated to serve Him out of desire for reward, for our long-term benefit. This is rational and right. But it should not stop there. As we become more intimately acquainted with God, we grow to love Him. We see clearly His goodness, His mercy, His love, His faithfulness, His beauty, and we delight to serve Him and do His will. Being close to Him and basking in His glory is enough for us; it satisfies us. When we reach this state of true love for God, fear is driven away and the desire for reward pales in comparison with our desire for God Himself. St. Maximus expresses it this way: "Fear of hell causes beginners to shun evil. Desire to be rewarded with divine blessings confers on those who are advancing a readiness to practice the virtues. But the mystery of love transcends all created beings and makes the intellect blind to all that is sequent to God. Only upon those who have become blind to all that is sequent to Him does the Lord bestow wisdom, showing them what is more divine." *Chapters on Theology, 2.9*

*Fr. Justin Frederick*

## The Life of St. John Kochurov, Hieromartyr Missionary in America

Father John Kochurov, who was to become the first clergyman martyred during the Bolshevik Revolution, was born on July 13, 1871, in the village of Bigildino-Surka of the district of Danky in the Ryazan region, into a pious priestly family with many children.

Fr. John's upbringing, based on the remarkable traditions of many generations of the clergy and bound with the people's natural following after Orthodox piety, foretold that he would set out on the path of preparation for pastoral service.

As a student at the St Petersburg Theological Academy, Fr. John combined the possibility of his service as a parish priest with that of missionary activity, which he saw as the embodiment of the ideal of an Orthodox pastor. After his graduation from St Petersburg Theological Academy (1895), Fr. John was sent to the Diocese of the Aleutians and Alaska in accordance with his long-standing desire for missionary service.

Soon after his marriage to Alexandra Chernisheva, Fr. John's arrival in Protestant America put him in touch with a life dissimilar in many respects to his accustomed life in Orthodox Russia. The beginning of Fr. John's parish service was associated with the opening of an Orthodox parish in Chicago in 1892 by Bishop Nicholas. Assigned in 1895 by order of the Holy Synod to be a parish priest at St Vladimir's Cathedral in Chicago, Fr. John was put in touch with a parish life that was strikingly different from the Orthodox parishes in Russia, which were organized and rooted in a living tradition many centuries old.

Being a remote island of Orthodox Christian life, many hundreds of miles from the other scattered Orthodox parishes in North America, St Vladimir's Church in Chicago, and the Church of the Three Hierarchs in the town of Streator with which it was affiliated, required heroic labors from the young Fr. John to be established in a proper way. Almost three years after its founding, the parish still had not managed to achieve full parish status.

Beginning his work at the parish of Chicago and Streator, which was rather small and multinational in its constituency, Fr. John nourished these people, who represented a rather poor class of immigrants, in the Orthodox faith. He was never able to be supported in his work by a sound parish community with sufficient material resources at its disposal.

In an article written in December 1898, Fr. John gave the following vivid description of the Chicago-Streator parish community: The Orthodox parish of St Vladimir's Church in Chicago consists of a small number of the original Russians, Galician and Hungarian Slavs, Arabs, Bulgarians, and Aravians. The majority of the parishioners are working people who earn their bread by toiling not far from where they live, on the outskirts of the city. Affiliated with this parish in Chicago is the Church of the Three Hierarchs in the city of Streator. This place, together with the town called Kengley, are situated ninety-four miles from Chicago, and they are famous for their coal mines. The Orthodox parish there consists of the Slovaks who work there who have been converted from the Unia.

The unique characteristics of the Chicago-Streator parish community demanded of Fr. John a deft combination of pastoral-liturgical skills, as well

as missionary ones. These abilities would permit him not only to stabilize the membership of his parish community spiritually and administratively, but to enlarge his flock continually by means of conversions, or by the return to Orthodoxy of the ethnically diverse Christians living in Illinois. Already during the first three years of Fr John's parish service 86 Uniates and five Catholics were added to the Orthodox Church, bringing the number of permanent parishioners up to 215 men in Chicago, and 88 in Streator. There were two functioning church schools affiliated with the parishes, with more than twenty pupils enrolled in them. The course consisted of Saturday classes during the school year, and daily classes during the school vacations.

A significant obstacle to the normal functioning of the Church liturgical cycle at the Chicago-Streator parish was the condition of the buildings, which were unfit for the purpose. St Vladimir's Church in Chicago occupied a small part of a rented edifice located in the southwestern part of the city. On the ground floor of the house a wall separated the church from the kitchen and a room where an attendant lived. On the first floor there were several small rooms which were occupied by Fr John together with his family, and by the church Reader. The church of the Three Hierarchs in Streator employed the lobby of the Russian section of the Chicago World Exhibition.

The assignment of Bishop Tikhon, the future Patriarch of Moscow, to the Diocese of Alaska and the Aleutians on November 30, 1898, was especially significant for the resolution of problems of church life in the parish entrusted to Fr John. Zealously fulfilling his hierarchal obligations, Bishop Tikhon in his first months as diocesan bishop had already managed to visit almost all the Orthodox parishes scattered throughout the vast territory of the Diocese of Alaska and the Aleutians, in an effort to discern the most fundamental needs of the diocesan clergy.

Arriving in Chicago for the first time on April 28, 1899, Bishop Tikhon gave his archpastoral blessing to Fr John and to his flock. By the next day he had already inspected a plot of land proposed as the site where the new church, so necessary for the parish in Chicago, would be constructed. On April 30, Bishop Tikhon visited the Three Hierarchs Church in Streator and presided at the Vigil service at St Vladimir's Church in Chicago. On the following day, after serving the Divine Liturgy, he approved the minutes of the meeting of the committee for the construction of the new church in Chicago, which was chaired by Fr John.

The limited financial resources of the Chicago-Streator parish, where the people being ministered to were primarily poor, did not permit Fr John to begin construction immediately. And since more than five years had passed from the time of Fr John's arrival in North America, his great desire to visit his beloved

Orthodox Russia, at least for a brief time, prompted him to submit an application to Bishop Tikhon requesting leave for the journey to his motherland.

Mindful of the needs of the parish entrusted to him, Fr John decided to use the vacation granted to him from January 15 to May 15, 1900, to collect money in Russia which would allow the Chicago parish to begin construction of the new church building, and of the first Orthodox cemetery in the city.<sup>[15]</sup> Successfully combining his journey to his motherland with raising significant funds for the parish, Fr John began the construction of the church soon after his return from leave. Bishop Tikhon arrived on March 31, 1902, for the ceremony of the laying of its foundation.

With true pastoral inspiration, combined together with sober, practical record-keeping, Fr John managed to build the new church, which was completed in 1903. The church cost fifty thousand dollars, a very significant sum of money for that time.

The consecration of the new temple, which was named in honor of the Holy Trinity, was performed by Bishop Tikhon, and it became a real festival for the whole Russian Orthodox diocese in North America. Two years later, in greeting Fr John on the occasion of his first ten years of service as a priest in the Church, the highest praise went to his careful pastoral labors in the construction of the Holy Trinity Church, which had become one of the most remarkable Orthodox churches in America. "The year has been filled with the most vivid of impressions, sometimes agonizing, sometimes good. A year of endlessly trying fund-raising in Russia, a year of sleepless nights, worn-out nerves, and countless woes; and here is the testimonial of your care: a temple made with hands, in the image of a magnificent Russian Orthodox temple, shining with its crosses in Chicago, and the peace and love not made with hands that are springing up in the hearts of your flock!

In St Michael's Church in Old Forge, before a large group of diocesan clergy with the Most Reverend (now St) Raphael, Bishop of Brooklyn presiding, Fr John was awarded a gold pectoral cross, and the speeches offered a perceptive and thoroughly objective description of the whole period of Fr John's pastoral service in North America. "Directly after your study at seminary, having left the motherland, you came to this strange land to expend all your youthful energy, to devote all your strength and inspiration to that holy concern to which you were attracted in your vocation. A hard legacy was left for you: the church in Chicago was then located in an untidy church setting, in a wet, half-ruined building. The parish, with its loosely defined parish membership, was scattered over the huge city with a heterodox population torn asunder by the wild beasts. All that might fill the soul of a young laborer with great confusion, but you bravely accepted the task of selecting a precious spark from the pile of

rubbish, to fan the sacred fire into a small group of faithful! You were forgetful of yourself: calamities, illnesses, the poor location of your house, with its ramshackle walls, floors, and cracks that gave open access to the outer elements, with destructive effects on your health, and the health of your family members.... Your babies were sick, your wife was not quite healthy, and bitter bouts of rheumatism seemed to wish to destroy your confidence, to exhaust your energy.... We greet you, remembering another of your good deeds, the performance of which is plaited as an unfading laurel in the crown of honor of your decade of sacred service: we have in mind here your sacrificial service in the office of Chairman of our beloved Mutual Aid Society, in the office of Censor to our enlightening missionary publishing house, and in extending our evangelical efforts, organizing the parishes in Madison [IL] and Hartshorne [OK]. To complete your tribute, let us mention another circumstance, which magnifies the valor of your labor and the grandeur of its results. The remoteness of your parish in Chicago has torn you from your bonds with your colleagues in America, depriving you during these years of the chance to see your brother-pastors.... You were bereft of that which, for the majority of us, adorns the missionary service through which we pass. How touching, and how great a degree of isolation was yours, is witnessed by the fact that you had to baptize your children yourself, because of the absence of the other priests around you.... Let this Holy Cross we present serve you as a sign of our brotherly love, and the image of our Lord's Crucifixion on it permit you to accept the hardships, misfortunes, and sufferings that are so often met with in the life of a missionary priest, and let it encourage you to more and more labors for the glory of the Giver of Exploits and the Chief Shepherd, our Lord Jesus Christ."

In July 1907, leaving the Chicago-Streator parish which was so dear to his heart, and where he had given twelve years of missionary service, Fr John set out for the unknown future that awaited him in his motherland, where he would spend the rest of his priestly service.

Fr John's return to Russia in the summer of 1907 signified for him not only the beginning of his service in the Diocese of St Petersburg, familiar to him from his student years, but it challenged him with the need to apply the pastoral skills he had earlier acquired in America in the field of theological education. By order of the St Petersburg Church Consistory, in August 1907 Fr John was assigned to the clergy of Holy Transfiguration Cathedral in Neva, and beginning August 15, 1907, he began to perform his duties as a teacher of Law in the male and the female gymnasia in Narva. By order of the chief of the St Petersburg Area Educational Department, effective October 20, 1907, Fr John was confirmed in his service in the male gymnasium as a teacher of God's Law [this Russian term refers to the totality of

Orthodox teaching - Ed.] and was a hired teacher of the same subject in the female gymnasium of Narva, which became the main sphere of his Church service for the next nine years of his life.

The common way of life in small, provincial Neva, where the Russian Orthodox inhabitants made up scarcely half the population, reminded Fr John, in some measure, of the atmosphere familiar to him in America, where he performed his pastoral service in a social environment permeated with heterodox influences. However, the circumstances of his work as a teacher of God's Law in two secondary schools where the Russian cultural element and Orthodox religious ethos indisputably dominated, permitted Fr John to feel that he was breathing an atmosphere of Russian Orthodox life reminiscent of his childhood.

Being only attached to the Holy Transfiguration Cathedral in dreamed, and not being a member of its staff clergy, Fr John, because of the peculiarity of this situation, on account of his fulfilling his duties as a teacher of God's Law at the gymnasium, was deprived not only of the chance to lead, but even to participate fully in the parish life of Holy Transfiguration Cathedral in Narva. Only in November of 1916, by order of the St Petersburg Church Consistory, was Fr John assigned as a parish priest to the vacant second position at St Catherine's Cathedral in Tsarskoye Selo, whereby his dream of resuming service as a parish pastor in the motherland was fulfilled.

Having been warmly and respectfully received by the flock of St Catherine's, Fr John, from the first months of his service there, showed himself to be zealous and inspiring not only as a celebrant of the divine service, but also as an eloquent and well-informed preacher, who gathered under the eaves of St Catherine's Cathedral Orthodox Christians from all around the town of Tsarskoye Selo. It seemed that so successful a beginning of parish service at St Catherine's Cathedral would open for Fr John a new period in his priestly service. But the cataclysms of the February Revolution that burst out in Petrograd just three months after Fr John's assignment to St Catherine's began little by little to involve Tsarskoye Selo in the treacherous vortex of revolutionary events.

The soldiers' riots that had taken place in the military headquarters at Tsarskoye Selo already during the first days of the Revolution, and the imprisonment of the royal family at Alexandrovsky palace over a period of many months, brought the town to the attention of representatives of the most extreme revolutionary elements. These circles had propelled the country toward the path of civil war, and eventually, complete internal political division, the beginnings of which lay in Russia's participation in the bloodshed of World War I. These developments gradually changed the quiet atmosphere of Tsarskoye Selo, diverting the inhabitants' attention, day by day, from the conscientious fulfillment of their Christian and civil responsibilities to Church

and fatherland. And during all these troubled months the inspiring message of Fr John continued to sound forth from the ambo of St Catherine's Cathedral, as he strove to instill feelings of reconciliation into the souls of the Orthodox Christians of Tsarskoye Selo, calling them to the spiritual perception of their own inner life, so that they might understand the contradictory changes taking place in Russia.

For several days after the October 1917 seizure of power by the Bolsheviks in Petrograd, reverberations from the momentous events happening in the capital were felt in Tsarskoye Selo. Attempting to drive Gen. Paul Krasnov's Cossack troops, which were still loyal to the Provisional Government, out of Tsarskoye Selo, the armored groups of the Red Guard (the soldiers and sailors supporting the Bolshevik upheaval) were on their way from Petrograd.

On the morning of October 30, 1917, stopping at the outskirts of Tsarskoye Selo, the Bolshevik forces subjected the town to artillery fire. The inhabitants of Tsarskoye Selo, like those in all of Russia, still did not suspect that the country was involved in a civil war. A tumult erupted, with many people running to the Orthodox churches, including St Catherine's, in hopes of finding prayerful serenity at the services, and of hearing a pastoral exhortation from the ambo pertaining to the events taking place. All the clergy of St Catherine's Cathedral eagerly responded to their flock's spiritual entreaties. A special prayer service, seeking an end to the civil conflict, was offered beneath the arches of the church, which was jammed with worshipers. Later, the dean of the Cathedral, Archpriest N. Smirnov, with two other priests, Fr John and Fr Steven Fokko, reached a decision to organize a sacred procession in the town, with the reading of fervent prayers for a cessation of the fratricidal civil strife.

A newspaper presented the testimony of a certain Petrograd newspaper correspondent describing the events which had taken place, as follows: "The Sacred Procession had to be relocated under the conditions of an artillery bombardment, and notwithstanding any predictions it was rather crowded. The lamentations and cries of women and children drowned out the words of the prayer for peace. Two priests delivered sermons during the procession, calling the people to preserve tranquility in view of the impending trials. I was fortunate enough to understand clearly that the priests' sermons did not contain any political tinges."

"The Holy Procession lingered. Twilight changed into darkness. Candles were lit in the hands of the praying people. Everybody was singing."

"Precisely at that time the Cossacks were withdrawing from the town. The priests were warned about it. 'Isn't it time to stop the prayers?' 'We shall carry our duties to completion,' they declared. 'These have departed from us, and those who are coming are our brothers! What kind of harm will they do us?'"

Wishing to prevent an outbreak of fighting in the streets of Tsarskoye Selo, the Cossack leadership began to withdraw troops from the town on the evening of October 30, and on the morning of the 31st the Bolshevik forces entered Tsarskoye Selo, encountering no opposition. One of the anonymous witnesses to the aftermath of these tragic events wrote a letter to the prominent St Petersburg Archpriest F. Ornatsky, who himself was destined to receive martyrdom at the hands of the godless authorities. The writer told in simple but profound words of the passion-bearing that became Fr John's destiny. "Yesterday (on October 31)," he wrote, "when the Bolsheviks entered Tsarskoye Selo with the Red Guard, they began to make the rounds of the apartments of the military officers, making arrests. Fr John (Alexandrovich Kochurov) was conveyed to the outskirts of the town, to St Theodore's Cathedral, and there they assassinated him because of the fact that those who organized the sacred procession had allegedly been praying for a victory by the Cossacks, which surely was not, and could not have been, what actually happened. The other clergymen were released yesterday evening. Thus, another Martyr for the Faith in Christ has appeared. The deceased, though he had not been in Tsarskoye Selo for long, had gained the utmost love of all, and many people used to gather to listen to his preaching."

The Petrograd journalist mentioned earlier reconstructed a terrifying picture of Fr John's martyrdom and its aftermath, ascertaining these details: "The priests were captured and sent to the headquarters of the Council of the Workers and Soldier Deputies. A priest, Fr John Kochurov, was trying to protest and to clarify the situation. He was hit several times on his face. With cheers and yelling the enraged mob conveyed him to the Tsarskoye Selo aerodrome. Several rifles were raised against the defenseless pastor. A shot thundered out, then another, after which the priest fell down on the ground, and blood spilled upon his cassock. Death did not come to him immediately... He was pulled by his hair, and somebody suggested, Finish him off like a dog. The next morning the body was brought into the former palace hospital. According to the newspaper *The Peoples' Affair*, the head of the State Duma, and one of its members, saw the priest's body, but his pectoral cross was already gone...." *Abridged From the OCA Website*

#### Upcoming Events 2010

- 14 November: IOCC event at Holy Trinity, 6:00 p.m.
- 15 November: Pan-Orthodox Unction Service at SS. Constantine & Helen, 7:00 p.m.
- 22 December: Metropolitan Jonah visits.

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!