

The Confessor's Tongue for December 12, 2010

29th Sunday After Pentecost: Sunday of the Holy Forefathers, St. Spiridon

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.

December 14: Sunday of the Holy Forefathers

The Sunday of the Holy Forefathers occurs between the 11th and the 17th of December. This Sunday commemorates all the ancestors of the people of God, the holy patriarchs living up to the law, given on Sinai, and under the law, - from Adam to Joseph the Betrothed; together with them are commemorated "those who preached Christ" the holy prophets - from Samuel to Zechariah and to John the Baptist, and all the Old Testament righteous men, who were righteous in the faith in the coming of the Messiah. Especially in the service for this day are praised "the pious youths" Ananias, Azarias, and Misael, who "in faith were thrown into the fiery furnace" and "who in the middle of the flames were cooled by the dew of the Spirit and who walked about rejoicing, are mystically a prototype of the Trinity and the incarnation of Christ" from the Virgin, who after giving birth remained a virgin. With these holy youths are commemorated also "the righteous Daniel and the wonderful prophets", who, clearly revealing the divine second coming, saw Christ, "coming to all nations as Judge", and who, "your mind illumined by divine radiance", "that clearly the Virgin would give birth represented in mystical images".

"Today as we celebrate the Forefathers' memory", the holy Church exclaims: "let us offer praise to the fathers, who shone forth before and during the law, with righteous minds they served the Lord and Master who shone forth from the Virgin, now they delight in the unending light." "Let us offer songs of praise to the prophets of God". "Let us honor the holy youths, for they quenched the flaming furnace, together with the prophet Daniel, and all the righteous ones who shone forth before the law, together with those who served the Master under the law." By accomplishing "now the honor of the memory of the forefathers", the holy Church edifies us, that we, in the expectation of the great and light-bearing day of the Nativity of Christ, is reflected by the faith and life of the holy Forefathers and, through them, has prepared ourselves, by their example, to the worthy meeting of the Lord Who came from Heaven, who has adorned their soul with virtues beforehand to be ready for the great and light-bearing day of the Nativity of our Savior worthily to meet Him with the lamp of faith and with the oil of charitable deeds, with the firm hope of life everlasting, with the light of both the joyful face of cleanliness and purity.

Together with them the holy Church on the present day, that its appeal be not in vain, places in the Gospel reading by the clergy Jesus' parable about those invited to the Master's supper but would not come, warning us, that we can be distracted from

worthily meeting the Lord by the predominance of flesh over spirit, the attachment to the terrestrial, the blinding by gleam of worldly goods, the predilection for vanity, the unwillingness to deny one's self-love and pride everyday, the enslavement to passions and covetousness, and in the Epistle reading directly commands us to destroy our earthly members: fornication, impurity, passion, evil lust and cupidity, to lay aside anger, evil, blaspheming, slander, lies, and in general to take off the old man and put on the new in the image of the Creator (Col. 3:4-11).

December 12: St. Spiridon of Tremithus

He was born on the island of Cyprus of simple peasants and in childhood was a shepherd. At a mature age he entered matrimony and had children. In his family life he imitated the high example of the Old Testament Patriarchs. After a short time his wife died and he with a lot of eagerness still turned to acts of piety. For his wise humility and Christian simplicity he was elected Bishop of Tremithus. The Lord awarded St. Spiridon the gifts of insight and wonderworking for his virtuous life.

Once, during a famine, a poor farmer asked one unmerciful rich man grain for his livelihood, promised to return it with interest after the harvest. The rich man demanded some gold as security for the grain. The poor man told his sorrow to St. Spiridon. The hierarch calmed the poor man and let him go home. But, not having gold, he took a snake, and through prayer turned it into gold, brought it to the poor man who gave it as security so that after the harvest he could redeem the security of this pledge and have it returned to him. When, after the harvest, the farmer redeemed the gold from the rich man and brought it to his hierarch, then the hierarch while in the presence of the farmer through prayer turned this gold back into a snake.

St. Spiridon participated in the First Ecumenical Council in which in a simple speech and with wonderworking power countered the insincere words of the lying defenders of Arianism and converted one master of pagan philosophy to the Christian faith.

While the hierarch was at the Council, his virgin daughter Irene died. When the hierarch returned home one woman informed him in tears that she gave Irene one valuable thing for protection. The hierarch, not finding this thing anywhere in the house, went to the grave of the dead one and asked her as if she were alive where she hid the protected thing. Irene, as if waking up from a deep sleep told him where she put the protected thing. Then the hierarch «again spoke to her: sleep more, O Daughter, ultimately the Lord will be with you all in the general resurrection. And fear will be on all the former, for you wondered and were awed about the glorious wonder of this. The

Saint discovered the secret place for the hidden thing, and returned it to that woman".

Another time under a tearful request to the hierarch from "a barbarian woman", he raised up her dead son. But "that woman died from joy". Then the hierarch, after a prayer, cried out to the dead one: "arise"! "She rose up as if from sleep".

St. Spiridon died in about the year 348. The relics of St. Spiridon repose on the island of Corfu. His right hand is in Rome.

"Perverse Thoughts Separate Men from God" Part Two

From Elder Paisios in "Elder Paisios of the Holy Mt."

We must have positive thoughts, otherwise none of the spiritual fathers—not even the saints—can help us. When Jesus was on the Cross and all the terrible events were taking place, two thieves were also being crucified with Him. "And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour." "...And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom; and the earth shook, and the rocks were split; the tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, and coming out of the tombs, they went into the holy city and appeared to many." Each one of them had a different attitude towards Him, even though they were both placed next to the same God; a God who had never been blamed for, or accused by anyone for the slightest sin. On the contrary, many people were benefited by Him: some had been cured of a specific disease, others had been resurrected, and all these miracles took place in public. Now, even nature was reacting against the injustice done to Him.

The thief placed on the left cross had created inside his mind a "factory," which produced only negative thoughts. "...One of the criminals who were hanged railed at Him, saying, 'Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us.'" Although he could see what was going on around him, he never questioned himself about it. The one on the right, who had a positive way of thinking, reacted as follows: "But the other rebuked him, saying, 'Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.' And he say, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.'" Both thieves had the same almighty God placed between them who could help them. The negative thinking of the one on the left prevented God from helping him, whereas the one on the right—who had committed terrible crimes and was legitimately being punished—was able to "move" Jesus with his positive attitude. And He said to him: "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

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We should keep in mind that God "cannot" help us, even if He really wants to, unless we acquire a positive way of thinking.

Concerning the spiritual progress of a disciple monk, it is more important for him to develop good thoughts that to be guided by a spiritual father who is considered a living saint... *To be continued...*

Next week: The 'thought-producing machine'

From St. Seraphim of Sarov

If we do not agree with the evil thoughts suggested by the devil, we do good.

One should not undertake ascetic labors beyond one's measure, but one should strive to make our friend—the flesh—faithful and capable of performing virtues.

One should go by the middle path: "turn not aside to the right hand nor to the left" (Prov. 4:27); and one should render unto the spirit what is spiritual and unto the body what is bodily; for the maintenance of temporal life, one should render what is necessary, and for life in society, that which is lawfully demanded by it, in accordance with the words of Holy Scripture: "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's" (Mt 22:21).

One must condescend to the soul in its infirmities and imperfections, and bear its defects as we bear those of others; one must not, however, become lazy, but should spur oneself to do better.

Perhaps one has eaten too much, or done something similar to this which is natural to human weakness—do not be disturbed at this, and do not add injury to injury; but bestir yourself to correction, and at the same time strive to preserve peace of soul, according to the word of the Apostle: "Blessed is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth" (Rom 14:22).

One should partake of enough food each day so that the body, strengthened, may be the friend and helper of the soul in the performance of virtue; otherwise, it may happen that, while wearing out one's body, one's soul also will grow weak.

On Fridays and Wednesdays, and especially during the four fasts, partake of food once in the day, and an angel of the Lord will join himself to you.

When your activities fall into a real order, boredom will find no place in your heart. Only those are afflicted with boredom whose affairs have no orderly arrangement.

Upcoming Events 2010-2011

- 22 December: Wednesday, 7:00 p.m. Metropolitan Jonah visits at Vespers.
- 24 December: Nativity Eve Vigil & Holy Supper.
- 6 March 2011: Sunday, 6:00 p.m. Forgiveness Vespers
- 24 April 2011: Pascha

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!