

The Confessor's Tongue for March 20, A. D. 2011

Second Sunday of the Fast: St. Gregory Palamas

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.

Second Sunday of Lent

The Holy Church calls the second Sunday of Great Lent the 'Sunday of the light creating fasts.' In its Divine services, in line with the destruction of the sinful condition of man, it is descriptively and touchingly represented in the church hymns, which explain the Gospel parable about the Prodigal son, and praises the fast as a means to the beneficial inner light, and posits in this glorification a new impulse for the ascetic effort of the fast.

The Orthodox teaching about fasting as a means for the beneficial inner light is opened with special power in the commemoration on this Sunday of St. Gregory Palamas, Archbishop of Thessalonica and Wonderworker (also commemorated Nov. 14). St. Gregory is known as the one who exposed the heresy of Barlaam, the Calabrian monk, who rejected the Orthodox teaching about the blessed light, which illuminates the internal person sometimes openly visible (as for example on Tabor and Sinai), and who did not admit the possibility to achieve this inner light through both prayer and fasting and other individual efforts.

At the Council in Constantinople called in 1341 concerning this heresy, Barlaam,* his disciple Akindynos, and their other accomplices were condemned for this false teaching. And during the subsequent time of his life St. Gregory zealously struggled for Orthodoxy, "not once", but "many times many" through his inspired speeches and writings denying the teachings and compositions of the evil followers of Akindynos and Barlaam. For this ascetic effort for the benefit of the Holy Church, and also for the confession and witness for the faith and Christ's flock, for the sanctity of the strict ascetic life and the deep edification for all ascetics through his works, St. Gregory is also glorified in the service on this day by the Holy Church. Thus the Holy Church, celebrating on the previous Sunday the triumph of Orthodoxy over all heresies, on the present Sunday celebrates the victory of Orthodox ascetic teachings over all false doctrines opposing it. The first celebration is in general for all Orthodox Christians; the second is for the use of ascetics, the monks.

*Barlaam propagated in the East the teaching of Abelard that the truth is only true when it is proved exclusively from the beginning of reason, and closely connected to this rationalism the teaching of Thomas Aquinas that God is entirely essence and that the essence and action in Him do not differ. This and other teachings rested on the ruminations and amplifications of the rationalism of Arianism then in the West. The Barlaamites taught that the light of Tabor was something material, created, revealed in space and painted in air because it was seen by the corporal eyes of people who were not yet consecrated by grace. Through such, i. e. [sic] through the created, they recognized all the divine actions and even the

gifts of the Holy Spirit: the Spirit of wisdom and reason and so forth, not being afraid to reduce God to the category of the created, "subverting light and the blessed righteousness in the Kingdom of the Father of Heaven, the power and action of the Trihypostatic Divinity". And in general through their rationalistic Arian teaching the Barlaamites threatened to shake the very basis of Christian teachings on faith, asceticism and morals.

St. Palamas and his fellow Athonite ascetics taught and proved by their very life what could not be proved by philosophical reasoning, but the constant purification of the soul accomplished by silent feelings and thoughts, incessant exercise in meditating on God and intelligent prayer or through intelligent action the person can achieve the inner light from above.

But the essence of the Deity which, abiding in the unapproachable light cannot be seen, is inaccessible to our limitations and our sinfulness, and the action of the Deity (energia is an expression used in this sense by Aristotle), i.e. the active movement can be seen as the manifestation of the essence. This active manifestation of the Divine essence usually is opened by silence in the image of the light, which can sometimes be seen even by corporal eyes. For example, during the revelation of the Divinity of Jesus Christ on Tabor and during all the appearances and revelations of the Deity in the form of light and fire, for example, by Moses and Elijah, or by ancient Christian ascetics, for example, Anthony the Great, all those who have seen God saw with both corporal and noetic eyes the Divine light, the reflection of the Deity. This light of Tabor and all immediate actions, the manifestations of the Deity is called by them the uncreated Divinity, as the essence of God is uncreated. This name in the addition to the moral actions and acts of grace of the Deity stands for better understanding, which the Prophet Isaiah calls the Spirit of wisdom and reason, the Spirit of council and fortress, the Spirit of knowledge and piety, the Spirit of the fear of God. The teaching on the subject of essence is mysterious and incomprehensible for the natural mind, but is convincing, immutable for the believing heart! *S. V. Bulgakov, Handbook for Church Servers, 2nd ed., 1274 pp. (Kharkov, 1900) pp 516-517. Translated by Archpriest Eugene D. Tarris © March 6, 2004. All rights reserved.*

A Homily on the Prayer Before Communion

Met. Anthony of Surozh, 18 September 1988

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. Every time we come to Communion we say to the Lord that we come to Him Who is the Saviour of sinners, but we also state that we consider ourselves as the greatest of all. How much truth is there in such a statement when we make it? Or how can we make such a statement? Is it true? Can we truly say that we do consider ourselves the worst of all sinners? John of Kronstadt in his "Diary" makes a point which I believe is very important; he says that he also asks himself this very question, and he can answer it in all honesty, because, he says, if others had been given so much love, so much grace, so much Divine revelation

as was given to him, they would have borne fruit which he proved unable to bear.

And so, this is a way in which we can ask ourselves questions when we come up to Communion, and say the words of the prayer before Communion. Is it simply that we repeat them because they are written in the books? Or is it that we are aware - but aware of what? Aware of being sinners? Yes, we all are aware of being sinners, more or less; but are we aware of how much we have received from God and how little fruit we have borne? It is only if we see vividly, clearly, the contrast between all that was possible, indeed - all that IS possible, and all that we are, that we can honestly say such words.

Let us reflect on them, because we cannot speak words of courtesy, words of empty politeness to God when we pray. What we say must be true, and we must make of every prayer a test of the truth of our conscience and of our lives.

Let us take this with us until we receive Communion again, so that one day, perhaps not at our next Communion, but after a long life of searching, of praying, of passing judgement on ourselves, we can say truly, "God, O God! How much you have given me, and how little fruit I have borne! If anyone had been given what you gave me, he would already be a Saint of God". Amen.

A Homily On Mutual Love *Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh*

A couple of weeks ago in my address I said that many find it difficult to use the prayer of the Prayer books, that they are beyond them, that they are the prayers of Saints and we are sinners, that there are so many words that we don't understand and cannot pronounce from all our heart — what shall we do? And I suggested something which I was given by my spiritual Father: if you can't pray, if you can pray only partly the words of the Saints — pray what you can; but then, if you feel that you are dried out, dead inwardly, make a sign of the cross, kneel down and say, Lord, at the prayers of those who love me, save me — and go to bed; and begin to think: who are those who love me in such a way that I can count on my salvation only on their love for me?..

After this sermon some people came to me and said: How easy you have made things for me; I can now count on other's people love, indeed secure in their love, in my future, in my salvation! And I said, Yes, this is true; but the people who surround you, those on whose love you count, and those who are around you, around us, including me indeed! — they also count on their neighbour's love for their salvation; sit down and ask yourself: who have been part of your life? Who have crossed your path in the course of many years, or the few years that you have lived, and ask yourself: when they turn to God and say, Lord, at the prayers of those who love me save me! — am I one of those? How strange that this

question must be asked, and how frightening it is that the answer may be, No — he, or she cannot count on me; they passed through my life, and I have forgotten them long since; they passed through my life and I never loved them when we were neighbours, when we were so-called friends; they can no longer count on my love to open the gates of Paradise for them. And if that is what we feel, we must sit down and ask ourselves: who are those who have passed through my life, whom I have forgotten because I didn't care much for them? whom I have allegedly loved, been friends with, but also forgotten the minute we were no longer side by side? Who are those with whom I was friend, whom I loved, and whom I stopped loving, because they offended me in a minute way — and I turned away? I closed my heart to them, I excluded them from my prayers, I excluded them from my love — and resurrect them in your heart; resurrect them, think of everyone who have ever passed through your life, and ask yourself: where do I stand now with regard to this person? Let us kneel down before this person and ask for forgiveness that I have forgotten or that I have rejected, that I have renounced, or that I have turned in anger and hatred against this person? Can this person ask God to save him or her at the prayers of those who love them? Think of me — and discover that there is nothing but rejection and hatred.

But what will also God's reaction be: I have given My life for this person, and you are rejecting this person, you don't want ever to meet in time or eternity — and who will be excluded? Is it the person that has been rejected, or is it the one who rejects this person? Think of it, because we all, all need one another's love, compassion, charity, support, memory. Try to remember all the people who have passed through your life, and re-think your relationship, and restore, even if they are dead, if you don't meet them any more — restore a relationship of mutual love! And then — then the Gates of Paradise will open both for you and for them. Amen

Upcoming Events 2011

- 22 March, Tuesday: Bishop Mark visits us for Vespers at 7:00 p.m.
- 29 March, Tuesday: St. Maria Study Group meets at Anna Stokes' to read St. Basil the Great's Homily "I Will Tear Down My Barns", 8:00 p.m.
- 13 April, Wednesday, 9:30 – 1:30 St. Maximus's next time to work at "Our Daily Bread" the local soup kitchen.
- 24 April: Holy Pascha: The Feast of Feasts!
- 30 April: Church Yard Sale
- 30 May: Memorial Day Picnic
- 28-31 July: Ten-Year Anniversary Celebration

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!