

The Confessor's Tongue for April 3, A. D. 2011

Fourth Sunday of the Fast: St. John of the Ladder

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.

Fourth Sunday of Lent: St. John Climacus

In the Church services for the fourth Sunday the Holy Church offers us a great example of the life of fasting in the person of the Venerable John of the Ladder.... Approving fasting with the example of the Venerable John, the Holy Church offers us a new consolation in the Gospel and Epistle readings of this Sunday. In the first she shows that fasting and prayer defeats the very spiritual enemy of the salvation of man, and predicted this victory in the circumstances of suffering, the death and the resurrection of Christ; and in the second she reminds us of the inalterability of God's will for the salvation of man, in order that we have a firm hope.

Besides the hymns praising the Venerable John, during the fourth week other hymns are chanted, in which the repentant soul resembles the man, who fell into the hands of the thieves, and whom both the priest and the Levite passed by, not offering help. Testing one's conscience the Holy Church inspires the soul to turn to the Lord with prayer: He cleans off the sinful scabs.

Having concentrated in the hymns of the fourth Sunday on the diverse motives for the zealous bearing of the lenten spiritual struggle, the Holy Church at the end of the Matins service with a tender voice appeals to her children:

"Come, let us work in the mystical vineyard, making fruits of repentance grow within it; let us not labor for the sake of food and drink, but through prayer and fasting let us gain the virtues. And the Lord of the vineyard, pleased by our labor, will provide the payment, whereby He redeemeth our souls from the debt of sin, or He alone is rich in mercy."

Bulgakov, Handbook for Church Servers, Translated by Archpriest Eugene D. Tarris © March 6, 2004. All rights reserved.

On Sickness

St. Isaac the Syrian, Homily 5

And whenever you are ill, say, "Blessed are those who discover the object which God has placed in what He brings upon us to profit us! For God administers sicknesses for the health of our soul.

On Boasting

St. Isaac the Syrian, Homily 5

Do not believe yourself to be strong, until you are tempted and find yourself superior to change....Never boast of your labors with your tongue, lest you be put to shame. In each matter about which a man boasts himself, God permits that he change, so that he should be humbled, and learn humility. This is why you must surrender all things to God's foreknowledge, and not believe that there is anything in this life unchanging.

On Coldness in Prayer

St. Theophan the Recluse

May the grace of God be with you! You write, "My prayer is somehow going poorly." That prayer is going poorly is not the fault of the prayer, but of the one who is praying. Try to pray as you should, and the prayer will go well. If someone writes carelessly, people reprimand and threaten him, and he begins writing meticulously. Reprimand yourself, if you will, and threaten yourself with Divine judgment, and you will begin praying properly. We conscientiously correct human affairs, because people would see and reproach us. We conduct the affairs of God haphazardly, however, because the Lord is silent and does not reproach us immediately, presenting His children, as many as are benefitted by Him, the opportunity to serve Him. Oh, how bitter it will be when we will have to plead guilt in this to the Lord Himself!

Where has your prayer gone? It was going well, you know, and you were already feeling its beneficial action in your heart. I will tell you where it has gone. You prayed once or twice diligently and with warmth, and received such quick help from St. Sergius as a consequence of your prayer, that you therefore thought your prayer was already established, and there was thus nothing more to worry about concerning it, that it would go along well on its own. By permitting this kind of thinking, you began reciting the prayers carelessly and hurriedly, and ceased guarding the thoughts. Because of this, your attention became dispersed, your thoughts were scattered in different directions, and there was no prayer in the prayer. This happened a couple of times, and then prayer totally vanished. Acquire prayer from the beginning again, and ask for it from the Lord Himself.

If you are not successful in prayer, do not expect success in anything else. It is the root of everything.

You will learn from this that you must never consider any spiritual activity to be established, especially prayer; always go about it as if you were going to carry it out for the first time. First zeal is given to something that is done for the first time. If when undertaking prayer, you go about it as if you have never prayed properly yet, and only now do you want to do so for the first time, you will always carry out your prayer with first zeal. And it will go well.

I suppose you began carrying out your prayer rule hurriedly—and haphazardly—just so you would finish it. Make it a rule for yourself from now on, that you will never prayer haphazardly. Nothing offends the Lord more than this. It is better to recite a few of the set prayers with the fear of God and reverence that to recite all of them haphazardly. It is better even to fall down on your knees and recite one of the prayers or

even use your own words than to do the other thing. You began praying that other way, and there are no results. Scold yourself thoroughly for such carelessness. Know that no one who prays attentively and diligently ever departs from prayer without having received its action. Oh, what good we deprive ourselves of when we permit ourselves to pray carelessly!

How does haste come about in prayer? It is not clear. We spend hours on other tasks, and it never seems long; but hardly have we begun our prayer than it seems we have been praying for who knows how long. We hurry ourselves along in order to finish sooner. There is no benefit from the prayer.

What should be done then? Some people do the following, so as not to be subject to this self-deception: They set aside a quarter of an hour for prayer, or half an hour, whatever is more convenient for them, and thus adjust their prayer time so that when the clock strikes, whether on the half hour or hour, they will know when it is time to end. While they are at prayer, they do not worry about reading a certain number of prayers, but only that they rise up to the Lord in a worthy manner for the entire set time. Others do this: Once they have established a prayer time for themselves, they find out how many times they can go around the prayer rope during that period, moving the beads in an unhurried manner. Then when they are at prayer, they move the beads unhurriedly for the set number of times, and during that period they pray to the Lord in their mind, speaking to Him in their own words or reciting set prayers, or bowing with reverence to His boundless majesty without either of those. There are others who get so accustomed to praying that the times they spend at prayer are moments of delight for them. It rarely happens that they stand at prayer for the set time only; instead, they double and triple it. Select whichever method pleases you most. Maintain it without fail. We cannot get along without a precise prayer rule for you. Those who are zealous about prayer do not need any rules.

I have already written you about memorizing the prayers and reciting them by heart when you are at prayer, without opening your prayer book. This is nothing to boast about! When you are at prayer, recite the prayer or psalm from memory, and embrace each word, not just with thought, but with feeling. If during this your own prayerful cries arise from some word of the psalm or prayer, do not cut them off, but let them come. You see, you will not worry about reciting a certain number of prayers, but only being at prayer for the allotted time, which will make itself known either by beads on the prayer rope or by the clock.

Rush through the recitation of prayers and nothing will happen. Recite one psalm or one prayer for the whole time. Someone was saying that often he will recite a single prayer, the *Our Father*, for the entire allotted time. This is because he considers

each word in the entire prayer. Another person said that when someone explained to him that one could pray in this way, he stood in reverential prayer for the entire Matins, reciting *Have mercy on me, O God*, and did not manage to complete the entire psalm.

Get accustomed to praying in this manner if your will, and God granting, you will soon cultivate prayer within yourself. Then you will no longer need any rules. Labor, for nothing will come from you otherwise. If you are not successful in prayer, do not expect success in anything else. It is the root of everything. May the Lord bless you.

From *The Spiritual Life and How To Be Attuned to It*

On Almsgiving

St. Isaac the Syrian, Homily 5

Deem him to be a man of God who by reason of much compassion has mortified himself even with regard to necessary wants; for he who gives alms to a poor man has God to take care of him. And a man who has become poor for His sake has found inexhaustible treasures.

God has no need of anything. But He is gladdened whenever He sees a man comforting His image [another person] and honoring it for His sake. When someone asks you for something you have, do not say in our heart, "I shall keep this for myself, that I may be comforted by it, and God will supply him with his need from elsewhere"; for these are the words of the unrighteous and of those who do not know God. A righteous and kindly man does not give his honor to another, nor does he permit an occasion for charity to pass him by unused. The poor and indigent man is provided for by God (because God abandons no one); but as for you, you have shunned the honor given you by God and have estranged His grace from you by turning a beggar away. So, whenever you give, be glad and say, "Glory be unto Thee, O God, for Thou hast deemed me worthy to find a man to comfort!" But if you do not have anything to give, rejoice the more and say, offering great thanks to God, "I thank Thee, my God that Thou hast granted me this grace and honor, to go in want for Thy Name's sake, and hast deemed me worthy to taste the affliction that is set in the path of Thy commandments, with sickness and want, such as Thy saints who walked this path did also taste."

Upcoming Events 2011

- 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!
- 7 May: Church Yard Sale for Hall Expansion
- 30 May: Memorial Day Picnic
- 28-31 July: Ten-Year Anniversary Celebration

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!