

The Confessor's Tongue for April 10, A. D. 2011

Fifth Sunday of the Fast: St. Mary of Egypt

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.

Fifth Sunday of Lent: St. Mary of Egypt

The church service for this Sunday is devoted to the memory and glorification of the spiritual efforts of Saint Mary of Egypt (See Apr. 1): thou hast "cut down with the sword of abstinence the desires of thy soul and the passions of thy flesh. Thou hast choked thy sinful thoughts with the silence of the ascetic life, and thou hast watered all the wilderness with the streams of thy tears, and caused the fruits of repentance to spring up for us" and "with works of Lenten fasting", "as the sun, she shines revealed as a guide to all who have sinned".

In her life the Holy Church pays attention to two contrasts: on the depth of her sinful falling and on the height of her graceful rising, that it points out that true repentance wipes away the very heaviest sins, and can uplift the repenting trespasser to a high degree of spiritual perfection.

The Canons open the parable about "the rich man and Lazarus". This parable through its imagery gives a lesson on the efforts of fasting that they, fasting physically, fasted also spiritually, that is, they helped their needy brothers and eased the portion of the suffering; but the suffering and the deprived are inspired by patience and magnanimity, by the example of Lazarus who for these virtues "was worthy of Paradise of sweetness". Inspiring those who fast with the necessity of charity, the Holy Church sings: "The Kingdom of God is not food and drink, but righteousness and abstinence with holiness; therefore the rich shall not enter into it, but those who entrust their treasures into the hands of the needy. This is what David the prophet teaches us saying: the righteous man shows mercy all day, his delight is in the Lord, and walking in the light he will not stumble. All this was written for our admonition, that we should fast and do good, and the Lord will reward us with heavenly things instead of earthly things".

The Resurrection gospel proclaims the approaching time of the coming Passion of Christ, and the Epistle reading explains the saving actions of the offering of the Savior on the cross. With these reminders of the parable about the rich man and Lazarus and suffering, death and resurrection of the Savior, the Holy Church relates the fifth Sunday to a relationship of the coming end of the Lenten effort with the memory connected to Him.

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

St. Isaac the Syrian

God's commandments excel all the treasures of the world. A man who has gained inward possession of them finds the Lord in them. The man who always goes to bed with rumination upon God has gained Him as his Chamberlain; and he who desires the

fulfilment of God's will, will have the angels of heaven as his guides. A man who fears sins will traverse a terrible passage without stumbling, and at a time of darkness he will find light before Him and within himself. The Lord carefully watches the steps of the man who fears sins, and God's mercy forestalls him when he slips. A man who considers his transgressions to be slight, falls into worse sins than he formerly committed, and he will pay his penalty sevenfold. Sow our alms in humility, and you will reap mercy at the judgment. *Homily 5*

How To Attain Undistracted Prayer

St. Theophan the Recluse

You write that you cannot manage your thoughts at all, they constantly wander off, your prayer is not going as you would like it, and you scarcely think about God as you go about your daily affairs and deal with other people.

This is straight away forbidden. You must put a fair amount of labor into this so that the thoughts may be settled to even a small degree. You expected that all you had to do was begin, and everything would fall into place. It never happens that way. Even the success you began noticing should be considered as out of place. Indeed, this has happened previously, but you experienced little grief over it; now you not only notice the disorder of your thoughts, but you are disturbed by it and express the desire to cope with them, as if that were possible. Resolve to continue stirring up this anxiety, and intensify your effort in correcting this fault.

I have already written that steadfastness and continuity of labor over oneself is an essential condition for success in the spiritual life. Lasting pacification of the thoughts is a gift from God, but this gift is not given without intensifying one's personal labors. While you will not achieve anything just by your own labor, God will not give you anything if you do not labor with all your might. This is the fundamental law. You have St. Macarius the Great's *Homilies*. Try to read the nineteenth homily, which tells who the Christian must force himself in every good thing. It is written that "It is necessary to force oneself even in prayer, if one does not have spiritual prayer," and that "In this case, God, seeing that a man is calling with effort and restraining himself (that is, his thoughts) against the will of the heart, grants him true prayer," that is, undistracted, collected, absorbed, when the mind stands continually with God during prayer, it does not want to leave Him afterward, for this is attended by such sweetness that once it has been tasted, it does not want to taste anything else.

I have reminded you more than once just what kind of labor must be performed here: You must not

allow the thoughts to wander voluntarily, but when they stray involuntarily, you must immediately turn them back, reproaching yourself, regretting and grieving over your weakness. St. John Climacus speaks about this, saying, "It takes effort to enclose the mind in the words of the prayer."

Thus, as I wrote last time, when you have memorized your prayers, things may go better. Best of all would be to go to church where the prayerful spirit is quickly manifested, because everything there is directed toward that end; but for you this is inconvenient. At least you labor at home to acquire prayer without distraction and spend as much of your other time as you can with God. When memorizing prayers, do not forget to grasp each word and feel it; then, at actual prayer time these words will engross your attending and kindle prayerful feeling.

There is something else for you to do. Do not stand at prayer immediately after household chores, conversations, or errands; instead, make some preparation for it, trying to collect your thoughts ahead of time and direct them toward standing worthily before God. Rouse within yourself the need for prayer at this particular time, because there may not be another time. Do not forget also to renew the consciousness of your spiritual needs and for the most immediate real need of all—the settling of your thoughts in prayer with the desire of finding satisfaction for them, namely in God. When there is this consciousness and the feeling for such needs in the heart, the heart itself will not allow your thoughts to wander off to something else, but will compel you to implore the Lord concerning them. Above all, you will feel more keenly your complete helplessness: without God, you are completely lost. If misfortune threatens someone, and if he is standing before a person who can save him from it with a single not of his head, is he going to stand there looking around? No, he is going to fall on his knees before him and implore him. That is how you should be at prayer, when you go to it with a feeling of total misfortune and the consciousness that there is no one who can deliver you from it except the One God.

There is to be found in all of us a great little sin. It is this; We undertake almost anything else, no matter how trivial it is, with some sort of preparation, but we set about prayer on the spur of the moment, and hurry to get through it as quickly as possible, as if it were just something to do in passing, something extra, and not the most important thing of all. How then can we expect to collect our thoughts and feelings in prayer? It is done haphazardly, in a disorderly manner. No, you must resolve to refuse yourself this sin, and in no way should you allow yourself to be frivolous with regard to prayer. Persuade yourself that such an attitude toward prayer is an offense, the most serious criminal offense. Consider prayer as your first priority in life, and keep it in your heart as such. Then set about it as your primary task, not as something that is by-the-way.

Labor. God will be a help to you. But see that you do as you have been told to do. Once you begin doing this, you will soon see the fruit of it. Strive to feel the sweetness of true prayer. When you feel it, then it will entice you toward prayer and inspire you to complete and attentive prayer. May the Lord bless you! From *The Spiritual Life and How To Be Attuned to It*, chapter 48.

On Almsgiving

St. Isaac the Syrian, Homily 4

If you have something above your daily needs, give it to the poor, and then go with boldness to offer your prayers, that is, to converse with God as a son with his Father. Nothing can bring the heart so near to God as almsgiving, and nothing brings such serenity to the mind as voluntary poverty. It is better for you to be called an ignoramus by the many because of the generosity of your hands and your measureless liberality because of your fear of God, that to be called wise and sound of mind by reason of your niggardliness. If someone on horseback should stretch out his hand and ask alms of your, do not refuse him, for at that moment he is certainly in need, just as one of the destitute. When you give, give generously, with a joyous countenance, and give more than you are asked for, since it is said: 'Send forth thy morsel of bread toward the face of the poor man, and soon you will find your recompense.' Do not separate the rich from the poor, nor try to discriminate the worthy from the unworthy, but let all men be equal in your eyes for a good deed. In this way you can draw even the unworthy toward the good, since the soul is easily led to the fear of God by means of bodily things. The Lord ate at table with publicans and harlots and did not alienate the unworthy, that He might in this way bring all to the fear of God, and that through bodily things they would approach the spiritual. For this reason, and especially because they are your brethren, of your very nature, and have erred from the truth unwittingly, deem every man equally worthy of benefaction and honor, be he a Jew, and unbeliever, or a murderer.

April Namedays

10 Terry (Terence) Stevenson (Martyr Terence)
16 Frieda Galina Gluschenko (Martyr Galina)
25 Mark Jackson (Evangelist Mark)

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!