

The Confessor's Tongue for July 17, A. D. 2011

Fifth Sunday After Pentecost: Fathers of the First Six Councils, Martyr Marina

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.

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 guilty 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 than to recite all of them haphazardly. It is better even to fall down on your knees and recite one of the prayers
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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 you 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*

The Church Porch 22-34 *Grub, Gold, Gambling*

George Herbert

George Herbert's poem, The Church Porch, describes the catechumenate, the time of repentance in preparation to entering the Church proper. This is offered here in the poet's original hope that "a verse may find him who a sermon flies". It is best to read poetry aloud.

Look to thy moth; diseases enter there.
Thou hast two sconces, if thy stomach call;
Carve, or discourse, do not a famine fear.
Who carves, is kind to two; who talks, to all.
Look on meat, think it dirt, then eat a bit;
And say withal, Earth to earth I commit.

Slight those who say amidst their sickly healths,
thou liv'st by rule. What doth not so, but man?
Houses are built by rule, and common-wealths.
Entice the trusty sun, if that you can,
From his Ecliptic line: beckon the sky.
Who lives by rule then, keeps good company.

Who keeps no guard upon himself, is slack,
And rots to nothing at the next great thaw.
Man is a shop of rules, a well trussed pack,
Whose every parcel underwrites a law.
Lose not thyself, nor give thy humors way:
God gave them to thee under lock and key.

By all means use sometimes to be alone.
Salute thyself: see what thy soul doth wear.
Dare to look in thy chest; for'tis thine own:
And tumble up and down what thou find'st there.
Who cannot rest till he good fellows find,
He breaks up house, turns out of doors his mind.

Be thrifty, but not covetous: therefore give
Thy need, thine honor, and thy friend his due.
Never was scraper brave man. Get to live;
Then live, and use it: else, it is not true
That thou hast gotten. Surely use alone
Makes money not a contemptible stone.

Never exceed thy income. Youth may make
Ev'n with the year: but age, if it will hit,
Shoots a bow short, and lessens still his stake,

As the day lessens, and his life with it.
Thy children, kindred, friends upon thee call;
Before thy journey fairly part with all.

Yet in thy thriving still misdoubt some evil;
Lest gaining gain on thee, and make thee dim
To all things else. Wealth is the conjurer's devil;
Whom when he thinks he hath, the devil hath him.
Gold thou mayst safely touch; but if it stick
Unto thy hands, it woundeth to the quick.

What skills it, if a bag of stones or gold
About thy neck do drown thee? raise thy head;
Take stars for money; stars not to be told
By any art, yet to be purchased.
None is so wasteful as the scraping dame.
She loveth three for one; her soul, rest, fame.

By no means run in debt: take thine own measure.
Who cannot live on twenty pound a year,
Cannot of forty: he's a man of pleasure,
A kind of thing that's for itself too dear.
The curious unthrift makes his cloth too wide,
And spares himself, but would his tailor chide.

Spend not on hopes. They that by pleading clothes
Do fortunes seek, when worth and service fail,
Would have their tale believed for their oaths,
And are like empty vessels under sail.
Old courtiers know this; there set out so,
As all the day thou mayst hold out to go.

In clothes, cheap handsomeness doth bear the bell.
Wisdom's a trimmer thing, than shop e'er gave.
Say not then, This with that lace will do well;
But, This with my discretion will be brave.
Much curiousness is perpetual wooing
Nothing with labor; folly long a-doing.

Play not for gain, but sport. Who plays for more,
Than he can lose with pleasure, stakes his heart;
Perhaps his wife's too, and whom she hath bore;
Servants and churches also play their part.
Only a herald, who that way doth pass,
Finds his cracked name at length in the church glass.

If yet thou love game at so dear a rate,
Learn this, that hath old gamesters dearly cost:
Dost lose? rise up: doest win? rise in that state.
Who strive to sit out losing hands, are lost.
Game is a civil gunpowder, in peace
Blowing up houses with their whole increase.

Upcoming Events 2011

29 July, 8:00 p.m. Chantus Maximus Concert.
29-31 July: Ten-Year Anniversary Celebration with
Metropolitan Jonah, Archbishop Dmitri, and
Bishop Nikon. Tickets on sale now.
31 July: Deadline for submitting names of candidates
to the episcopacy of the Diocese of the South
16 August-15 September: Fr. Justin vacation

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!