

The Confessor's Tongue for November 13, A. D. 2011

Twenty-Second Sunday After Pentecost: St. John Chrysostom

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.

November 13: St. John Chrysostom

Ordained (in 386) to the rank of priest in Antioch, Saint John tirelessly preached the word of God. He preached sermons at least once a week, for the most part twice, and quite often each day. In his sermons Saint John explained the Holy Scripture, rose up against false teachers, praised the ascetic exploits of the saints, censured unrighteousness and especially cruelty to poor. The inhabitants of Antioch, drawn by his eloquence, not only the Orthodox, but also the heretics and even those of Judea and the pagans, crowded about to hear him, interrupted his sermon by loud applause, and sometimes, touched to the depth of their souls, began to cry and to sob.... The sermons of Saint John thundered without tiring from the church cathedra and the fame of his eloquence was propagated to all corners of the empire. During one sermon, he received from one woman the name of Chrysostom, 'golden-tongue'.

In 397 Saint John was consecrated the archbishop of Constantinople. Pouring out «with a mouth of golden radiance» « the rivers of sweet teachings», he fervently made an effort to maintain his congregation «in holiness and truth». As «an earthly angel and celestial man», Saint John, being example of virtue, also taught others the holy life. He cared much for the improvement of the Constantinople clergy; was the trustee and advocate of the widows, the orphans and the poor, built hospitals and hospices. The activity of the caring bishop was not limited to only the Constantinople diocese, but reached even to the others, even to remote countries: he sent missionaries to Thrace, Arabia, Persia, and God blessed his apostolic work.

The flaming zeal for Orthodoxy, the unshakable steadfastness in faith, the fervent love for his neighbors, the spirit of meekness, the wise moderation and condescension for the fallen, the spirit of a living faith and the rare pastoral persistence demanding of all the true life of a Christian, - absorbed the entire life and activity of the great hierarch. Full of love and with strict words he boldly railed against the prevailing vices of his congregation, especially the passion for theatrical shows, the love of money and the cruelty of the rich, the women's passion for the latest fashion and dress, and the various superstitions of the simple people. The impartial sermon of Saint John, his strict accusation of the vices which he railed against, without any concessions to rank or position, soon rallied the wealthy, the elite and many others against him, and upon him came the denunciation of the Empress Eudoxia. The obvious slander, the spiteful misinterpretation of his words and his acts laid guilt on him, and the great teacher of Church in the sixth year of his episcopal service was condemned to exile.

A publication of St. Maximus Orthodox Church, 2026 West Oak, Denton, TX, 76201 (940) 565-6753

Because of the occurrence of an earthquake after his departure and the concern of the people, he returned from exile back to Constantinople, and continued as before to thunder against the vices of society and within six months was again sent into exile to the city of Cucusus (in Armenia), and then within two years still further to Abassia. But on the way to Abassia Saint John died in the city of Comana (407). The last words of Saint John - this great ecumenical teacher, the smooth speaking preacher, the strict charitable and loving pastor, were: «Glory to God for all things!» *V. Bulgakov, Handbook for Church Servers. Translated by Archpriest Eugene D. Tarris © All rights reserved.*

How To Partake of Food

St. Gregory of Sinai

What shall I say about the belly, the queen of the passions? If you can deaden or half-deaden it, do not relent. It has mastered me, beloved, and I worship it as a slave and vassal, this abettor of the demons and dwelling-place of the passions. Through it we fall and through it - when it is well-disciplined - we rise again. Through it we have lost both our original divine status and also our second divine status, that which was bestowed on us when after our initial corruption we are renewed in Christ through baptism, and from which we have lapsed once more, separating ourselves from God through our neglect of the commandments, even though in our ignorance we exalt ourselves. We think that we are with God, but it is only by keeping the commandments that we advance, guarding and increasing the grace bestowed upon us.

If you eat too much, repent and try again. Always act like this - lapsing and recovering again, and always blaming yourself and no one else - and you will be at peace, wisely converting such lapses into victories, as Scripture says.

As the fathers have pointed out, bodies vary greatly in their need for food. One person needs little, another much to sustain his physical strength, each according to his capacity and habit. A hesychast, however, should always eat too little, never too much. For when the stomach is heavy the intellect is clouded, and you cannot pray resolutely and with purity. On the contrary, made drowsy by the effects of too much food you are soon induced to sleep; and as you sleep the food produces countless fantasies in your mind. Thus in my opinion if you want to attain salvation and strive for the Lord's sake to lead a life of stillness, you should be satisfied with a pound of bread and three or four cups of water or wine daily, taking at appropriate times a little from whatever victuals happen to be at hand, but never eating to satiety. In this way you will avoid growing conceited, and by thanking God for everything you will show no

disdain for the excellent things He has made. This is the counsel of those who are wise in such matters. For those weak in faith and soul, abstinence from specific types of food is most beneficial; St Paul exhorts them to eat herbs (cf. Rom. 14:2), for they do not believe that God will preserve them.

What shall I say? You are old, yet have asked for a rule, and an extremely severe one at that. Younger people cannot keep to a strict rule by weight and measure, so how will you keep to it? Because you are ill, you should be entirely free in partaking of food. If you eat too much, repent and try again. Always act like this – lapsing and recovering again, and always blaming yourself and no one else – and you will be at peace, wisely converting such lapses into victories, as Scripture says. But do not exceed the limit I set down above, and this will be enough, for no other food strengthens the body as much as bread and water. That is why the prophet disregarded everything else and simply said, 'Son of man, by weight you will eat your bread and by measure you will drink water' (cf. Ezek. 4:16).

There are three degrees of eating: self-control, sufficiency and satiety. Self-control is to be hungry after having eaten. Sufficiency is to be neither hungry nor weighed down. Satiety is to be slightly weighed down. To eat again after reaching the point of satiety is to open the door of gluttony, through which unchastity comes in. Attentive to these distinctions, choose what is best for you according to your powers, not overstepping the limits. For according to St Paul only the perfect can be both hungry and full, and at the same time be strong in all things (cf. Phil. 4:12).

From St. Theophan the Recluse (+1894)

For what reason were the martyrs tormented? Because, having believed in the Lord and been united with Him, they did not want to worship false gods. The false gods were the spirits of passions and evil deeds. He who refuses to give in to passions and sinful desires does the same as he who refuses to bow down and worship idols. He who refused to worship idols was given over to external sufferings, while he who refuses to satisfy the passions actually wounds himself and forces his heart to suffer until the passions quiet down in him. Victory over passions is a self-inflicted spiritual martyrdom, which is performed invisibly in the heart but is nevertheless very painful....But if there is a lot of pain, there are a lot of rewards.... The more the sorrows, the more intense the consolations.

St. Theophan on Wandering Thoughts

Thoughts wander when one is reading spiritual works and during prayer. What should one do? No one is free from this. There is no sin in it, only vexation. Having wandering thoughts becomes a sin when one willingly allows flightiness of mind. But if thoughts scatter involuntarily, what fault can there be? there is fault, though, when one notices thoughts wandering and, taking no action, one wanders along

with them. When we catch our thoughts wandering off, we must bring them back to their proper place at once.

From St. John Chrysostom

“For which of you is there, a father, of whom if his son shall ask bread, will he give him a stone?” So that if thou receive not, thy asking a stone is the cause of thy not receiving. For though thou be a son, this suffices not for thy receiving, that being a son, thou askest what is not profitable. Do thou also therefore ask nothing worldly, but all things spiritual, and thou wilt surely receive.

Homily XXIII on St. Matthew's Gospel

Let us catch them then by our mode of life; and by these souls let us build up the Church, and of these let us amass our wealth. There is nothing to weigh against a soul, not even the whole world. So that although thou give countless treasure unto the poor, thou wilt do no such work as he who converteth one soul. “For he that taketh forth the precious from the vile shall be as my mouth.” [Jer 15:19] A great good it is, I grant, to have pity on the poor; but it is nothing equal to the with-drawing them from error.”

Homily 3 on I Corinthians

St. Symeon the New Theologian

[The Apostle Paul] proclaims, “Strive for peace with all men, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord” (Hebrews 12:14). Why did he say, “Strive”? Because it is not possible for us to become holy and to be saints in an hour! We must therefore progress from modest beginnings toward holiness and purity. Even were we to spend a thousand years in this life, we should never perfectly attain to it. Rather, we must always struggle for it every day, as if mere beginners. This again Paul has shown us by saying, “Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect” (Philippians 3:12). *Discourse 5*

Sayings of the Desert Fathers

Abba John the Dwarf prayed God to take his passions away from him so that he might become free from care. He went and told an old man this: ‘I find myself in peace, without an enemy,’ he said. The old man said to him, ‘Go, beseech God to stir up warfare so that you may regain the affliction and humility that you used to have, for it is by warfare that we make progress.’ So he besought God, and when warfare came, he no longer prayed that it might be taken away, but said, ‘Lord, give me strength for the fight.’

Upcoming Events 2011-2012

15 November, Tuesday: Nativity Fast Begins, Pan-Orthodox Unction at St. Seraphim's, Dallas
26 February: Forgiveness Sunday (all parishioners are expected to attend) Great Lent Begins
15 April: Pascha

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!