

The Confessor's Tongue for March 11, A. D. 2012

Second Sunday of Lent: 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.

St. Matrona of Moscow

The past few weeks, we have been anointing the faithful present at Vigil with oil from the relics of St. Matrona of Moscow. Here is material from her life that we may be better acquainted with her.

Matrona was born in 1881 into a poor family in the village of Sebino-Epifaniskaya (now Kimovski) in the Tula region of Russia. Blind from birth, she bore her infirmity with humility and patience, and God made her a vessel of grace. At the moment of her baptism, the priest saw a cloud above the child, which shed forth a sweet fragrance as a sign of divine favor.

From the age of six or seven, she exhibited an extraordinary gift of insight, discerning sicknesses of soul and body in the many people who visited her, revealing to them their secret sins and their problems, and healing them through prayer and wise counsel. Around the age of fourteen, she made a pilgrimage to the great holy places in Russia along with a devout benefactress. When they arrived at Kronstadt to receive the blessing of St. John, they became lost in the crowd. St. John suddenly cried out, "Matrona, come here! She will be my heir, and will become the eighth pillar of Russia." At that time, no one understood the meaning of this prophecy.

When she turned seventeen, Matrona became paralyzed and was unable to walk from then on. Knowing that this was God's will, she never complained but thanked the Lord. For the rest of her life – over fifty years – she lived in a room filled with icons, sitting cross legged on her bed. With a radiant face and a quiet voice, she received all who came to seek divine consolation through her presence. She foretold the great misfortunes that were to sweep down upon the country after the Bolshevik revolution, placing her gift of insight at the service of the people of God. One day when some visitors commiserated with her about her disablement, she replied: "A day came on which God opened my eyes, and I saw the light of the sun, the stars and all that exists in the world: the rivers, the forests, the sea and the whole of creation."

Around this same time, Matrona, who was already known throughout the region and whose requests were taken as blessings, asked that a certain icon of the Mother of God be painted for the village Church of the Dormition. This came about one day when the blind girl asked her mother to tell the priest that on a certain shelf in his library lay a book with a picture of the icon, "In Search of the Lost." The surprised priest found the picture of the icon just as she had described it. When she heard this, Matrona exclaimed, "Mama, I will have such an icon painted." Her mother was pensive. How could they ever pay for this? Some time later, Matrona again said to her mother, "Mama, I'm dreaming and dreaming about

this icon 'In Search of the Lost.' The Mother of God is asking to come to our church." At Matrona's request local village women began collecting money. Among those who contributed was one man who gave a ruble reluctantly and his brother who gave one small kopeck in fun. When they brought the money to Matrona, she spilled it out and, picking out the very same ruble and kopeck, told her mother, "Mama, give it back, it's spoiling all the money for me..."

When the necessary amount had been collected, they ordered the icon from an artist from the village of Epiphania. Matrona asked if he was able to paint such an icon, and he replied that for him it was an ordinary commission. She then asked him to go to confession and receive Holy Communion. Later she asked again, "Do you know for sure that you will paint this icon?" The artist answered affirmatively and began his work. After some time, he told Matrona that nothing was coming of the painting. She replied: "Repent of your sins." With her spiritual vision, she saw that there was one sin that he had not yet confessed. Astounded that she knew this, he returned to the priest, confessed, communed, and asked Matrona's forgiveness. She replied, "Go. Now you will paint the icon of the Heavenly Queen." The icon was painted about 1915 and, after the revolution, Matrona kept it with her throughout her life. It is now enshrined in Moscow at the Monastery of the Protection of the Mother of God in Taganskaya, near Matrona's relics.

With Matrona's blessing, another collection of money was made in the villages and another icon "In Search of the Lost" was ordered for the village of Bogoroditske. This icon is now in Holy Dormition Monastery in the village of Novo-Moskovsk, in the province of Tula.

In 1925 she left her village to settle in Moscow and, after her mother's death in 1945, she moved frequently, welcomed secretly into the houses of the faithful. This was because the Communists, fearing her influence among the people, wanted to arrest her. But, every time, she had advance knowledge, and when the police arrived they learned that she had moved an hour or two earlier. One day, when a policeman arrived to arrest her, she advised him to return home as quickly as possible, promising him that she would not escape. When the man arrived home, he discovered that his wife was on fire, and was just in time to take her to the hospital.

St. Matrona led an ascetic life on her bed of pain. She fasted constantly, slept little, her head resting on her chest, and her forehead was dented by the innumerable signs of the Cross that she made. Not only the Muscovites but also people from afar, of all ages and conditions, thronged around her to ask her advice and her prayers. In this way she truly became the support of afflicted people, especially during

World War II. To those who came to ask her for news of their relatives in battle, she reassured some and counseled others to hold memorial services. She spoke to some directly, and to others in parables, having in view their spiritual edification and recommending them to keep the Church's laws, to marry in the Church and to regularly attend Confession and take Communion. When the sick and possessed were brought to her, she placed her hands on their heads, saying several prayers or driving the demons out with authority, always insisting that she was doing nothing of herself but that God was healing by her mediation. When asked why the Church was undergoing such great persecutions, she replied that it was because of the sins of the Christians and their lack of faith. "All the peoples who have turned away from God have disappeared from off the face of the earth," she affirmed. "Difficult times are our lot, but we Christians must choose the Cross. Christ has placed us on His sleigh, and he will take us where He will."

In an even more remarkable example of her clairvoyance, Zenaida recalled, "Matushka was completely unlearned, but at the same time knew everything. In 1946, I was to defend my thesis project on an architectural design for the Ministry of the Navy (I was then studying at an architectural institute in Moscow). I did not understand why, but my thesis advisor had taken a dislike to me and my project. For five months he would not consult with me once, and he had already decided to fail my project. Two weeks before the defense he informed me, "The commission will arrive tomorrow and declare the worthlessness of your work! You won't even defend it."

I returned home in tears – father was in prison, there was no one to help, mama depended on me. Our only hope was that I would successfully complete my university education and get a job.

That afternoon Matrona listened to me attentively and said, "Don't worry, don't worry, you will pass your exam! Tonight, we'll have tea and talk about it." I could hardly wait for evening to come and when I joined her, she said, "I will go with you to Italy, to Florence, to Rome and we will see the works of the great masters." Then she began to enumerate the streets, the buildings! She paused at one point: "Behold, the Plazzio Pitti... and here's another palace with archways, similar to the one in your work – a building with three lower levels of massive stonework and two arched entryways." She spoke in detail about the architectural elements of the building, and I was shocked at her knowledge of the subject. In the morning I ran to the institute, put tracing paper over my project and using brown ink I made corrections based on what she had said. The commission came at ten o'clock. They looked over my project and said, "And so, your project came out well, it looks excellent – go ahead and defend it!"...

When she was quite young, Matrona foretold the 1917 Russian Revolution. "There will be pillaging, destruction of churches, and everyone will be persecuted." She graphically described how the land would be divided up and how parcels of land would be grabbed by people intent on getting something for themselves. "Then, they will throw away the land and run off in every direction. In the end, the land will be useless for anyone." Thus, Matrona saw beforehand the revolutionary "program" of land redistribution, which dispossessed even the poor.

Before the revolution, Matrona advised Yankov, the landowner of their village of Sebino, to sell everything and go abroad. If he had listened to her, he would not have had to witness the plundering of his estate, he would have avoided his own untimely death, and he would have spared his daughter Lydia a life of homeless wandering.

In her memoirs, Zenaida Zhdanova writes: "Who was Matrona, exactly? Matushka was an angel incarnate – a warrior, doing battle with evil powers as if she held a flaming sword in her hands. She healed by her prayers, with holy water..."

"She was small, like a child, and often lay on her side, on her clenched fist. She also slept this way, never really lying down completely. When she received people, she sat cross-legged, her legs beneath her. She would put her hands on the head of the person kneeling in front of her, make the sign of the Cross over them, pray, and then say whatever was needful for their soul. "It seems that Matushka knew everything that was going to happen ahead of time. Every day of her life was a stream of grief and sorrow from those who came to her. She would hold the head of a weeping person in both hands, suffering with them, warming them with her holiness. The person would leave as if on wings, and many healings occurred as a result of her prayers. Matrona herself was often exhausted; she sighed heavily and prayed all night long. She had a small depression on her forehead from her fingers because she had crossed herself so very often. She crossed herself slowly, carefully, her fingers searching for this place on her forehead."

Having foretold the day of her death, she gave instructions for her funeral. Before falling asleep in peace on April 19, 1952, she cried out, "Come close, all of you, and tell me of your troubles as though I were alive! I'll see you, I'll hear you, and I'll come to your aid." Miracles were multiplied at her tomb and, ever since her translation to the women's monastery of the Protecting Veil of the Mother of God (March 13, 1998), the faithful who, in their thousands, line up to venerate Moscow's new protectress, turn to her icon and bring her their various problems as though St. Matrona were alive in front of them." <http://full-of-grace-and-truth.blogspot.com/2009/05/st-matrona-of-moscow.html>

Upcoming Events 2012

15 April Pascha, the Feast of Feasts

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!