

The Confessor's Tongue for July 9, A. D. 2017

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost: St. Pancratius

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.

Why Pray?

Fr. Georges Florovsky

Pray Alone—Pray Together

There are, in the Gospel, two passages concerning prayer, and they seem to guide us in opposite directions. On one hand, in the Sermon on the Mount, Our Lord was teaching the multitudes to pray "in secret." It had to be a solitary prayer "when thou hast shut thy door"—man alone with his Heavenly Father (Mt 6:5ff). Yet on the other hand, on another occasion, Our Lord was stressing the strength of a joint and corporate prayer: "If two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask..." (Mt. 18:19-20).

Is there any conflict or contradiction between these two different praying attitudes? Or rather do they belong together and are only possible together? Paradoxically, they presuppose each other. One has to learn to pray alone, bringing all his needs and infirmities before his Heavenly Father, his Lord, and his God, in an intimate and personal intercourse. And only those who are trained by thus praying this solitary prayer can meet each other spiritually and join together in what they are going to ask for each other and from their common Father in heaven. Common prayer presupposes personal training.

Solitary Prayer Can Be Dangerous

Personal prayer is possible only in the context of the community. Nobody is Christian by himself, but only as a member of the body. Even in solitude, "in the chamber," a Christian prays as a member of the redeemed community, of the Church. It is in the Church that he learns his devotional practice and the rules of prayer. Both forms of prayer are more than complementary. They are organically linked together as two inseparable aspects of the same devotional act. Each without the other may even be dangerous and misleading. Solitary prayer can degenerate into individualistic pietism, ecstatic and disruptive. When those without any previous personal training try to join with others, the result may be not a true community prayer. It becomes rather a sectarian prayer or a crowd prayer, not the prayer of a community of persons, but of an impersonal multitude—or else, a mere formality and show.

It is, therefore, the rule of the Church that the faithful should prepare themselves for corporate prayer by their personal devotions "in the chamber."

Begin to Pray at Home

One begins to pray at home and then goes to the Church. There praying persons discover and find each other and spontaneously join in the act of common adoration or humble petition, in common. Strictly speaking, the term "private devotion," which is commonly and persistently used in our days, is an unfortunate and misleading term. It may give an

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impression that it is, as it were, a private affair left to each one's discretion. In fact, it is an obligatory preparation which enables individuals to meet each other and join together as a community and to offer their common supplications "with one heart and with one mouth." Private devotions must follow definite rules with little room for improvisation. Of course, it is more than mere preparation. Even "in the chamber" a Christian must not pray only for himself. He is never alone on his knees before the Father. The Father is not only his Father, but the Father of us all. He is to be aware of the fact that many others are also on their knees at the same time before the same Heavenly Father, and each must bring before God not only his private and personal needs or requests or sorrows.

Personal prayer itself is to be "catholic," i.e., inclusive and universal. The praying heart is to be enlarged in order to embrace all needs and sorrows of the whole of suffering humanity. It is only in this spirit that individuals can truly meet each other as "brethren" and "agree" concerning things they are about to ask from the Lord. On the other hand, it can be said that corporate prayer is also a personal obligation. It is the personal responsibility of everyone who shares in the common life of the redeemed. This corporate character of all Christian worship and prayer was vigorously stressed already by St. Cyprian of Carthage, in his admirable explanation of the Lord's Prayer. It should be read by all Christians.

Theology as a Liturgy of the Church: Selections

Archimandrite Vasileios

Those who think they know Christ outside the Church know very few things about Him; those who belong to the Church live "in Him." Thus, we can say that the Gospel is essentially a "private" book. It belongs to the Church, which has a world-wide mission. Or, to put it another way, outside the Church, the Gospel is a sealed and incomprehensible book. This is characteristically expressed in the way that it is placed on the altar in the Orthodox Church, for it is within the church that the ministry of the Gospel is accomplished.

The Gospel cannot be understood outside the Church, nor dogma outside worship.

The Gospel and dogma are expressions of the same Spirit of the Church. The Church is not producing literature when it writes the Gospel, nor engaging in philosophy when it formulates dogma, but in both cases it is expressing the fullness of the new life hidden within it. For this reason, the Gospel cannot be understood outside the Church, nor dogma outside worship.

Dogma is the expression of the mystical life of the Church, the formulation in the Holy Spirit of the trinitarian experience into which the whole man is baptized through the Church. Dogmas do not concern just the experts; they give guidance and are a prerequisite for life; they lead unerringly to the fullness of life in the Holy Spirit, in whom "the Word reveals all dogmas from the Father." Dogma is not a matter of scientific elaboration or legal codification but of a charismatic formulation "in brief words and with great understanding" of terms of faith taught by God.

In the same way, faithfulness to the tradition and the dogmatic teaching of the Church means not only that the right formulations of terms are not altered, but also that our lives are altered and renewed by the truth and regenerative power latent in these terms. Then man acquires senses and is able to see; he becomes conscious of the deeper meaning and value of the Orthodox faith as a force in life. A characteristic expression of this is the inclusion among the credal and dogmatic monuments of the Orthodox Catholic Church of the liturgies of St. John Chrysostom and St. Basil the Great complete with their *typon* or liturgical rubrics and the actual manner of their celebration. For it is not only prayers with dogmatic content but the whole liturgical action and life of the Church that constitutes a unique theological witness and grace.

Why God Allows Temptations *from Various Fathers*

God allows man to fall into sin because of his pride, self-opinion, or self-trust. Thus, where there does not exist such self-opinion or self-trust, a corrective fall does not occur. Therefore, when you experience a fall, your thoughts should hasten towards humbled understanding and a disparaging self-opinion. Seek out God through prayer so that you do not fall anew. I must add that not only when one has fallen into some sort of sin, but also when one experience some misfortune, distress, or sorrow, especially physical illness—he must understand that he suffers thus so that he may come to self-knowledge; particularly the knowledge of his own helplessness and humility. For this purpose does God allow all manner of temptation from the devil (*Bishop Theophan the Recluse*).

God allows temptations for the best and wisest of purposes, namely:

- a) for the testing of our will, to see which way it is more inclined—towards virtues or to sinful pleasures.
- b) to uncover hidden traits and inclinations which we ourselves are not aware of.
- c) to grow in virtues.

By hearing the Holy Gospels and holding them dear, and being in constant contemplation of them, many temptations and wiles of the devil will be dispersed. You will recognize his slanderous

entrapments and arrogant flattery, and you will escape his grasp (*St. Hippolytus*).

The Holy Fathers of Scetis (a desert region in Egypt where many monks lived) prophesied of the last generation. The brothers asked, "What have we accomplished?" In reply, one of them, of holy life, named Isychrion, said: "We have fulfilled God's commandments." They asked further: "And after us, will they accomplish anything?" He said: "They will achieve half of what we did." "And after them, what?" He said, "They of that generation will be completely without deeds, for temptations will come upon them. Those who prove themselves worthy in these temptations will be regarded higher than we and than our fathers."

When you set out to do God's work, prepare your heart for temptations and sorrows.

We cannot otherwise become heirs of the heavenly Kingdom than through many sorrows and temptations.

Those who love God experience diverse and most difficult temptations.

In the present times, do not seek virtues; seek only to withstand the temptations that beset you, and in the age to come this will be considered a great deed, equal to the struggles of even St. Anthony the Great (*Elder Dionysius the Athonite*).

Whosoever is not inclined to discover how to avoid temptation and the snares of the enemy will be caught in them and never escape them. Even on the day of your repose you must be aware of the cunning of the unseen enemy.

He who suffers temptation good-naturedly is more pleasing to God than he who achieves great virtues.

The soul cannot free itself from temptation other than by calling on the Lord Jesus Christ and hurrying to his spiritual father (*St. Symeon the New Theologian*).

It happens that when the enemy sees that someone with burning faith has undertaken a good beginning, he usually will meet him with many severe temptations in order to frighten him away and thereby cool his good intentions.

Benefits are derived from temptations by those who endure them without complaint, but with courage and gratitude.

God allows His servants to fall into difficult temptations so that they would learn to resist evil and be strengthened in good. How do we increase in spiritual strength? —By overcoming temptations.

In temptations of anger, pray for those with whom you are angry: "Save, O Lord, and have mercy on N., and by his holy prayers help me, the sinful and unrepentant one."

No matter what kind of temptation befalls a person, he must say, "This is by God's mercy" (*St. Sisoies*).

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!