

The Confessor's Tongue for July 16, A. D. 2017

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost: Fathers of the First Six Ecumenical Councils

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.

Homily: On How the Love of God is Shed into Men's Hearts

St. Nicholas of Zicha (+1956)

"Because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us." Romans 5:5

Love is joy, and anoints the human heart with joy. Love is strength, and anoints the human heart with strength. Love is peace, and anoints the heart with peace. And from joy, strength, and peace is born fortitude, and love anoints the human heart with fortitude.

The love of God, like a fragrant oil, is shed upon our hearts in no other way than by the Holy Spirit, the all-good and all-powerful Spirit. Though we are utterly undeserving of it, the Spirit of God pours the divine Law of God into our hearts in the Mystery of Chrismation. But we sometimes neglect this love and estrange ourselves from God by sin, and fall into spiritual weakness. And the Holy Spirit, unable to dwell in an unclean vessel, departs from our hearts. When the Holy Spirit departs from us, joy and strength, peace and fortitude depart at once with Him, and we become miserable, enfeebled, disturbed, and afraid. But the all-good Spirit of God only puts Himself at a distance from us; He does not abandon us completely. He does not abandon us, but rather offers us, as to sick men, medicines through the Mysteries of Repentance and Holy Communion. And when we have cleansed ourselves anew by repentance and Communion, then God the Holy Spirit makes His abode in us again and pours the love of God into our hearts. We fall down and get up; we fall down again and get up again. When we fall, the Spirit of God stands beside us and lifts us up, if we desire to be so lifted. And when we are on our feet, the Spirit of God stands in us until, through our sinfulness and stupidity, we fall again. And so we are by turns a fruitful meadow and a wasteland, sons of repentance and of perdition, of fullness and emptiness, of light and darkness.

O all-good Holy Spirit, our God, do not depart from us either when we need Thee or when we do not feel the need of Thee. Abide with us until our death, and save us for life eternal. To Thee be glory and praise forever. Amen.

Children in Church

From the beginning of life, the Church concerns itself with children. We pray for them at birth, on the eighth day after birth, and on the fortieth day. Then we catechize, baptize, and chrismate them, and welcome them to Holy Communion. We seek to fulfill Christ's admonition to His disciples when they tried to keep mothers from bringing their children to Him: "Suffer [let, permit] the little children to come
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unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God." The Divine Liturgy is for all baptized faithful, and it is in the Liturgy that our children learn much about our common Faith. We err greatly when we do not bring our children to church, do not commune them, and do not train them how to conduct themselves in the household of God.

This welcome into the Church of our youngest brethren can create a few problems. Babies fuss, cry, and scream. Young children fidget, wander about, talk, and try to play. This behavior, while natural and understandable, can create distractions for others. Crying and screaming keep people from hearing the reader or the priest and can even interfere with the choir's ability to stay on pitch. People who have come to worship find their ability to do so impaired and are led into temptation.

All the faithful must work together to welcome the children in the church and train them how to conduct themselves therein. Brethren without small children must patiently bear (suffer!) a certain amount of noise, fidgeting, and childish behavior as a labor of love in suffering long with the weaknesses of others. The faithful must help parents whenever possible and pray for them when they struggle with their children rather than criticizing them inwardly or outwardly. They must remember they came to worship, to give their attention to Christ despite every distraction and relentlessly fight that good fight to give their attention to Him, no matter what happens around them. This means that if not actively helping a parent with a child they keep their eyes and attention forward. (It also means not playing with children, talking to them unnecessarily, making eye contact with them, or responding to their cute ways. Adults must set an example of focused attention in worship, showing that conversation and playful flirtation do not belong in church.)

Parents, on the other hand, must accept that children should not become the focus for others during worship. A screaming or misbehaving child draws attention to itself and distracts others from Christ. A few seconds of crying may be endured, but if crying, screaming, fussing, or defiantly rebellious behavior continues, the parent must remove the child from the church to quiet the child or correct the child. When the child is calm, he may be brought back.

Going out and coming back in with a child can be a difficult cross for parents to bear, for it means that the parents of small children will have their worship interrupted. They may have to go out and come back in several times during a service. They may even have to spend the bulk of the service outside the nave. Parents, prayed for by the rest, must bear this patiently as part of the responsibility of their parenthood. They show their love for their children

by making the effort to instruct them in proper behavior in church and correcting them when they err. They show their love for the rest of the brethren by removing a noisy or misbehaving child so he does not become a distraction to them and a source of temptation.

At least two things may be used to mitigate this cross. First, parents can take turns going in and out. Godparents, also, can take a hand here. Second, parents of small children, knowing that they are likely to be interrupted, do well to cultivate the Jesus Prayer during services (as should we all). When they must go out to calm or correct a child, they may continue the prayer in the hearts or even at a whisper to help keep them connected to the prayer and worship of the Church even when they are outside the service. Moreover, the prayer should be prayed attentively to not allow the mind to wander aimlessly or to be filled with thoughts of anger and irritation towards the child. Parents should remind themselves that monks and nuns often "pray the services on the prayer rope" when an obedience keeps them from attending. Parents can thus use the Jesus Prayer to keep frustration and anger at bay and to keep worshipping in spirit despite having to step out.

From Elder Ephraim of Katounakia
In Obedience Is Life

The fatal wound of fallen man is self-reliance, self-rule, self will.

Obedience is humility in practice, and God 'giveth Grace unto the humble.'

The most powerful weapon the enemy has against us is obliviousness—forgetfulness—the door of death. If this cursed attitude prevails, it becomes the tombstone. *Note: the forgetfulness to which he refers is the forgetting of God and who we are as members of Christ.*
Elder Ephrem of Katounakia in *Obedience is Life*

Soul-Profiting Instructions of the Elder Vicent of Secu Monastery, Romania (+1945)

Two Kinds of Prayer: There are two kinds of prayer: one of glorification of God, with humbleness of mind, and the second of requesting from God needful things. When you pray, do not come right away to requests. Put aside yourself and your needs at the beginning of prayer. Leave the earth and rise up towards the heavens. When you pray, do not let your mind wander here and there, but admit your insignificance and weakness, and the narrowness of your understanding.

The Holy Bible: There does not exist under the sun a thing more grievous than a Christian who knows how to read but doesn't have a Bible in his house and doesn't read it daily in order to gain grace and strength.

Frequent Confession weakens the power of the devils.

Preparing for Confession: Before going to Confession, search your conscience for a long time and see if there are small sins, which are often able to become more harmful than big ones. Then write on paper everything in which you have sinned...If [the priest] gives you permission to have Holy Communion, still don't be in a hurry, since it is fire and burns. But search your conscience some more, and then, with great fear take Communion.

Talking in Church: Talking and laughter in church are sins against the Holy Spirit, that is to say, against the divine power, since through this the holiness of the Church is scorned and an occasion for the temptation of people arises.

About Putting Off Spiritual Things: This is the most sure snare of the devil. He says, "You'll have time later to pray and make prostrations, and to fast tonight or tomorrow!" And you put off everything spiritually profitable until death. Behold, in this way a man loses himself, by his own will, unrepentant. Whose fault is it?

Concerning Perseverance: Without good deeds and perseverance, you will not take the Kingdom of God. Since it is necessary first of all to desire those things that you want to receive and to ask with faith, with patience, and with labors. For everything gained by labors you keep attentively, so as not to lose it, since you know how much you have labored for it. What would the Prophet Solomon have profited if he had received the gift of wisdom without labors?

From St. Theophan the Recluse on Prayer

Prayer is the test of everything; prayer is also the source of everything; prayer is the driving force of everything; prayer is also the director of everything. If prayer is right, everything is right. For prayer will not allow anything to go wrong.

Every prayer must come from the heart, and any other prayer is no prayer at all. Prayer-book prayers, your own prayers, and very short prayers, all must issue forth from the heart to God, seen before you. And still more must this be so with the Jesus Prayer.

The principal thing is to stand with the mind in the heart before God, and to go on standing before Him unceasingly day and night, until the end of life.

You must never regard any spiritual work as firmly established, and this is especially true of prayer; but always pray as if beginning for the first time.

Upcoming Events 2017

25-28 July Diocese of the South Assembly,
Chattanooga
1-14 August Dormition Fast

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!