

The Confessor's Tongue for October 1, A. D. 2017

Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost: Protection of the Theotokos

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.

October 1: Pokrov (Protection of Theotokos)

In the standard opinion, this feast was established in memory of the vision of St. Andrew (see Oct. 2 about it) of the Mother of God covering Christians with her Omophorion in the Blachernae temple in Constantinople. In the life of St. Andrew it so speaks about this wonderful vision:

"Once, Blessed Andrew went to an all-night vigil that was being celebrated in the temple of Blachernae (where the robe of the Mother of God with an Omophorion and part of her belt was kept). Epiphanius was there (a famous youth, disciple of St. Andrew, according to some, he subsequently accepted monasticism with the name Polyeuctus and became a Patriarch of Constantinople, see Feb. 5 and Oct. 2) and was one of his servants. As was his custom Andrew stood, as it gave him strength, sometimes until midnight, sometimes until morning. At the fourth hour of the night [ten o'clock] the Blessed One with his own eyes saw a most majestic woman, coming from the Royal Doors (the doors the Greeks call the main entrance to the temple) with an awesome entourage, among whom was the honorable Forerunner and the Son of Thunder (John the Theologian) holding her hands, and many saints dressed in white going before her, while others followed singing hymns and spiritual songs. When she approached the Ambo, the Venerable One went to Epiphanius and asked: "Did you see the Lady and Queen of the world"? "Yes, my spiritual father", he answered. And as they watched, She bent her knees and prayed for a long time, shedding tears down her godlike and immaculate face. Having completed her prayer here, She went to the holy altar table, and prayed there for the people present. After completing her prayer, She removed her veil which was flashing like great and awesome lightening which she wore on her immaculate head and, holding it in her immaculate hands with great reverence, spread it over all the people standing there. These wonderful men (Andrew and Epiphanius) for a long time observed this protecting veil spreading over the people and shining with flashes similar to lightening of the glory of the Lord; and as long as the All-Holy Theotokos was there, it was visible and covering. After her departure it also became invisible. But, having taken it with her, She left grace behind for those who were present there".

This feast is celebrated on the level a great feast in the Russian Church, but is not one of the twelve.

Why Some Christians Fall Away

St. Nicholas of Zicha (+1956)

Why do some people, well-educated, baptized as Christians, fall away from Christianity into philosophy or learned theories, alleging them to be

something truer than Christianity? For two main reasons: either from an utterly superficial knowledge of Christianity, or from sin. A superficial knowledge of Christ rejects Him, and sin flees from Christ like a felon from judgment. Superficial and guilty Christians have often become as bitter enemies of Christianity as are pagans. To the superficial and the guilty it is more comfortable to bathe in the shallow pool of human thought than in the dangerous depths of Christ. Those who sincerely set themselves to follow Christ are constantly invited by Christ to a greater and greater depth, as He once said to the Apostle Peter, "Launch out into the deep." St. Mark the Ascetic writes that one understands the Law of God insofar as one fulfills His commandments. 'Ignorance urges man to speak against that which is helpful, and insolence breeds vice.'

The Commandments of Christ

"If ye love Me, keep My commandments." (John 14:15)
Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, 'Let me pull the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye. Thou hypocrite! First cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye. Matthew 7:1-5

Nearly everyone struggles with judging others: passing judgment on their actions, motives, and character without having all the facts. Indeed, the life of another person is like an iceberg: ten percent is seen, ninety percent is hidden from us. No human can know another fully, and we certainly do not completely know even ourselves. Thus to pass a harsh judgment on another is fraught with the peril of serious error to the hurt of others and oneself.

Notice that by keeping the command not to judge, we avoid judgment ourselves. St. Nikolai of Zicha recounts the story of a monk in this vein.

This monk was lazy, careless, and lacking in his prayer life; but throughout all of his life, he did not judge anyone. While dying, he was happy. When the brethren asked how it is that with so many sins, you die happy? He replied, "I now see angels who are showing me a letter with my numerous sins. I said to them, 'Our Lord said: "Judge not, and you will not be judged." I have never judged anyone, and I hope in the mercy of God that He will not judge me.' And the angels tore up the paper." Upon hearing this, the monks were astonished and learned from it."

What power for our salvation lies in not judging others!

When we judge others, we appropriate something that is not properly ours, or, to put it more pointedly, we commit a theft. The Scripture tells us, "The

Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son" (John 5:22). By the Father's will, judgment belongs to Christ alone, and we do well to remember that so that we take not for ourselves what is His, sin against Him, and burden ourselves with matters to weighty for us to bear. A saying of Isaac the Theban in *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers* reveals how weighty judgment is:

One day Abba Isaac went to a monastery. He saw a brother committing a sin and he condemned him. When he returned to the desert, an angel of the Lord came and stood in front of the door of his cell, and said, 'I will not let you enter.' But he persisted saying, 'What is the matter?' and the angel replied, 'God has sent me to ask you where you want to throw the guilty brother whom you have condemned.' Immediately he repented and said, 'I have sinned, forgive me.' Then the angel said, 'Get up, God has forgiven you. But from now on, be careful not to judge someone before God has done so.'

When we realize that God's judgment of man is inescapable and that every man will stand before Christ's judgment seat, the need to judge, to condemn, and to demand justice now dissipates. We think, "If God sees this man's sin and does not judge him now, who am I to do so?"

All along, we have assumed we know what it means "to judge", but perhaps the concept bears reflection. If we think of what a judge does, especially in the inquisitorial legal system of Continental Europe, we may grasp it. A judge hears testimony, questions witnesses and the accused, gathers the pertinent data, determines guilt or innocence, and passes sentence. (In the adversarial common law system such as we have, the jury determines guilt or innocence and the judge passes sentence.) Christ is such a judge and reserves the judgment for Himself. Indeed, He alone knows full the heart and circumstances of each man. He alone has all the relevant data and the ability to judge righteously without error.

Notice, however, that the command not to judge does not preclude us from addressing sin in one another, but only if we have first taken the beam out of our own eye. It is hypocrisy when we presume to help a brother by calling his attention to his sin when the same sin is present and unattended to in us. But if we have dealt with the sin in us, we may then address it (with love) in someone else. If it is present in us, then our repentant attention to ourselves will be more helpful to others than many words of correction.

Thus, we seen in Jude reference to the Archangel Michael disputing with the devil over the body of Moses that even the great Archangel did not speak an accusing judgment against the devil but said rather, "The Lord rebuke thee" in contrast certain evil men who speak evil about things they know not.

Speaking of Moses, Abbot Moses of Optina sets a good example in avoiding passing judgment. When a brother came to him with a complaint about another brother, he would listen carefully as the brother spoke his mind. Occasionally he would say something like,

"How could he say such a thing!" or "Wait a minute—now one cannot approve of that!" Then when the brother was done, he would send him to make up with his brother. If he as abbot needed to correct, he never did it in response to complaints from others. When he judged that someone needed correction or a scolding, his rule was first to pray to God in his heart for the one needing correction. He found that when he did this, even a brother who might be supposed to be closed to correction would receive it and seek to correct himself.

Here is one more aspect of Christ's command to consider:

One day, Abba Pachomius asked Abba Macarius: "When brothers do not submit to the rule, is it right to correct them?" Abba Macarius said to him, "Correct and judge justly those who are subject to you, but judge no one else. For truly it is written, "Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside."

We are to be subject to one another and open to correction from one another, with Bishop and Priest, fathers and mothers, teachers and employers having special responsibility 'to correct and judge' among those entrusted to them. As a civil judge has only limited jurisdiction and may not try every case he might wish, so, too, in these cases is the jurisdiction to judge and correct limited. As St. Paul remarks to the Corinthians, Christians have no business, no jurisdiction for judging those outside the Church, but they must exercise judgment in matters within the Church where all are united by one Faith and a common way of life. In the case of the man who took his father's wife, Paul writes, "For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within? But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person" (I Cor. 5:12-13). All judgment and correction in such cases must be done prayerfully in humility in remembrance that the one in authority has a Master in heaven to whom he must one day give account.

We may now, perhaps, also grasp the meaning of Christ's command to judge that is rarely cited: "Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment" (John 7:24). Man in passing judgment most often judges only by the little that appears on the outside without all the facts. This prevents him from judging justly. Christians are not to judge this way, but are to judge righteous judgment. Having an inkling of how difficult judging righteously is will motivate us in most cases to refrain from judgment at all.

Upcoming Events 2017

1 October Parish Octoberfest
12 November: Parish Thanksgiving Meal
15 November: Nativity Fast Begins

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!