

SOBORNOST

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American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese

*ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE
OF CONSTANTINOPLE*

SERVICES

Wednesday: Lay Vespers 6:30 PM

Saturday: Confession 4:30 PM

Great Vespers 5:00 PM

Sunday: Matins (Orthros) 8:45 AM

Sunday School 9:30 AM

Divine Liturgy 10:00 AM

January 21, 2024 – 33rd Sunday After Pentecost

Saint Maximus the Confessor | Martyr Neophytus

By Protopresbyter Fr. George Papavarnavas

The venerable Maximus the Confessor was born in 580 A.D. in Constantinople to a noble family and made brilliant philosophical and theological studies. Around 610 Emperor Heraclius entrusted him with the position of his first secretary, which the Saint honored and brightened with honesty and integrity of character. After three or four years, however, he abandoned this much sought after position and became a monk at the Monastery in Chrysoupoli (Skoutari), on the other side of the Bosphorus, opposite Constantinople. In 618 he became a devoted disciple of Monk Anastasios, staying with him throughout his life and even was with him at his martyric death.

Saint Maximus spent all his life as a simple monk, although he was the most brilliant intellect of his time. He fought with bravery and zeal against the Monothelite heretics. The convening of the Lateran Synod in 649 by Pope Martin I condemned Monothelism, due to the struggle and efforts of Saint Maximus, who went to Rome for this purpose. The decisions of this Synod were sent throughout the world. Saint Maximus, however, was arrested, tortured and exiled to Vizye in



Thrace. Then they cut off his tongue and right hand and sent him to another exile to Lazica, on the eastern coast of the Black Sea. There he left his last breath at the age of 82, exhausted by his sufferings and old age. But he continues to teach and inspire through his writings, which exude the fragrance of the Holy Spirit. The most important of them are: "Ascetic Discourse", "400 Chapters on Love", "Questions and Responses", "100 Chapters on Knowledge", "Regarding Various Questions on Saints Dionysius and Gregory", "On the Our Father", "Mystagogy" and more.

His life and deeds give us the opportunity to emphasize the following:

First, important and noteworthy is all that Saint Maximus writes in the preface to his "400 Chapters on Love", which he addressed to "Elpidius the Presbyter", who, as it appears, asked him for this discourse: "I request that you not be annoyed by anything that is said; I have simply fulfilled an obligation."

At first he clarifies that everything mentioned in this text are not reflections of his intellect, but selections from the wisdom of the Holy Fathers, whose words he investigated, and then tells the recipient of this discourse the way it should be studied to be benefited spiritually. While studying it, he will need to look for the benefit which comes from the words, overlooking the style which lacks charm, and to pray for the author. Out of humility he adds that the author of this essay is bereft of spiritual profit. Further, he emphasizes that the study of this essay must not be out of curiosity, but with the fear of God and love, because without the Grace of God one cannot see the depth of what is read to benefit from it.

"Perhaps it might happen that something useful to the soul will be revealed out of them. This will happen completely by the Grace of God to the one who reads with an uncomplicated mind, with the fear of God and with love. But if someone reads this or any other book whatever not for the spiritual profit but to hunt for phrases to reproach the author so that he might then set himself up in his own opinion as wiser than he, such a person will never receive any profit of any kind."

The same, of course, happens with audiences of spiritual discourses. Those wishing to be fed spiritually, to be supported and comforted, should listen with humility and fear of God. Further, they should pray for enlightenment from above to the one giving the discourse, and that God may open their minds that they may understand everything they hear. Conversely, if you are trying to hunt for phrases to isolate and thus criticize the speaker, they will never be benefited.

Second, characteristic is all that Saint Maximus refers to regarding the word of God, at the end of the first hundred Chapters on Theology: "The manna which was given to the Israelite people in the desert is the word of God, which is sufficient for all those who delight to eat and changes taste depending on the difference of their

desires, because it had every quality of spiritual food. That is why to those who are regenerated spiritually it becomes reasonable guileless milk. To the sick it becomes cabbage and enhances the strength of the soul that is sick. And to those who have trained the senses of their souls to distinguish good and evil, they are given solid food." He concludes saying: "The gifts one receives in this present life, even if they receive it at a perfect level, still it is something minimal and modest compared to future goods."

From the above it is clear that the word of God is spiritual manna, which has the potential to nourish all people without exception, having the ability to change milk into solid food, depending on the spiritual state of the one who listens to it or studies it. The Holy Fathers of our Church, who interpret Holy Scripture infallibly, we do not judge, but we listen to them or study their words with humility, fear of God and love. Thus we have the ability to feed ourselves spiritually, to support ourselves, and to gain spiritual antibodies that we may endure difficulties. (*from johnsanidopoulos.com*)

Neophytos rooted out the earthly tree, planting one new and beautiful even as a child.

The Holy Martyr Neophytos was born in Nicaea of Bithynia, to Christian parents who were named Theodore and Florentia, and lived during the reign of Diocletian (284-305). From early infancy he was full of the grace of God.

One day when he was nine years old he was in the company of other children who were all thirsty, and while praying at the door of a church he struck a rock with a finger, which caused a spring of water and milk to pour forth and quenched their thirst as well as that of a large crowd that came to see the wonder. Instead of becoming vainglorious over such a display of the power of God through his prayers, Neophytos was humbled and strove to conceal his virtuous way of life.

As much as the child sought to conceal his virtue, the Lord all the more sought to reveal His favor and make him known as a vessel of grace. Not long after this event, his mother Florentia was praying one night to know what God had in store for her son, and suddenly she saw a dove come down from heaven and perched on Neophytos's empty bed. When she asked why the dove had rested upon the bed of her son, the dove replied miraculously in a human voice, "The Holy Spirit sent me to hover over the bed of Neophytos, so that I should cast out every assault of the enemy and preserve his bedding pure and blameless." This was followed by an ineffable light that descended. Overwhelmed by the sights and sounds, the poor woman fell down dead. When Neophytos returned home and was informed by neighbors that his mother expired, he did not grieve as one without hope, but consoled his father who came running with tears from the field, then taking his dead mother by the hand, he said, "Rise up, O mother, forasmuch as the Lord has

willed it, you have slept enough." Thereupon her soul returned to her body, and after her recovery she told everyone present that she saw a dove over the bed of Neophytos, which they then all saw and heard say to Neophytos that he must depart from his home and live a life dedicated to God.

Taking to heart what he had heard from the dove, ten year old Neophytos went to Mount Olympus in Bithynia accompanied by the dove and became one of the earliest hermits in the region, which centuries later became a monastic stronghold. Guided by the dove, Neophytos reached a lofty height and entered a cave. There the youth encountered a fearsome lion, which departed the cave in peace when the child commanded it to do so. In this cave Neophytos lived a life of prayer, fasting and asceticism, contemplating the wonderful things of God, and sustained by heavenly bread brought by an angel. A year later, when he was eleven, he received a heavenly order to return to his homeland and assist his parents who were at the end of their lives. While in Nicaea he did not cease to live the life he lived as a hermit in Olympus. Upon the death of his parents, he distributed all of his inheritance to the poor and returned to his cave.

When Neophytos was fifteen years old, an angel of the Lord commanded Neophytos to return again to Nicaea in order to be perfected through glorious martyrdom. Eagerly he went and stood before the tyrannical governor Maximus in the amphitheater, whose persecution of Christians brought terror to the city. There he proclaimed Christ as the true God and the ignorance and vanity of worshiping idols. For this the radiant youth was seized and brought to be tortured. Stripped naked he was suspended by a rope and scraped and flayed. Then he received five hundred blows with rods and again was scraped and flayed. Taking him down the executioners applied vinegar and salt to his wounds to usher bitter pain. Meanwhile, Neophytos did not cease preaching the gospel of Christ to his executioners.

Enduring all his torments with a steadfast faith, Neophytos was then subjected to having all of his bodily members damaged and dismembered, leaving nothing without injury. However, the tyrant was in despair when he found out that even after such torment, he could not bring the beardless boy to renounce Christ and sacrifice to the idols. Then he was taken to the gymnasium of Hercules, where a great and terrifying furnace was lit, and he had Neophytos cast within the fiery furnace for three days in order to be thoroughly consumed. To the terror of all the pagans, however, Neophytos emerged from the furnace three days later healthy and uninjured, as well as completely unsinged.

Next the Holy Martyr was consigned to be mauled by three wild beasts that had not been fed for five days, but like Adam in Paradise Neophytos calmed the ferocity of

the bear, the leopard and the lion (which was the same lion he encountered in his cave). Then the tyrant, who was more mindless than the irrational beasts, commanded that the body of Neophytos be pierced with spits until he died. However, although filled with tormenting spits, Neophytos remained standing and fearless. This enraged Maximus to the extent that he took a spear himself and rushed against Maximus, penetrating his heart. After such unspeakable torments Neophytos obtained the crown of martyrdom. [*After being submerged by an earthquake in AD 740, the church built over his grave was lost until being rediscovered in 2014 in an aerial photograph of Lake Iznik – Ed.*] (from *johnsanidopoulos.com*)

Today's Epistle Lesson – St. Paul's Letter to the Colossians 1:12-18 EOB

Brethren, may you give thanks to the Father, who has granted us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has delivered us from the power of darkness, and translated us into the Kingdom of the Son of his love. In him, we have our redemption, the forgiveness of our sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For in him, all things were created, in the heavens and on earth, things visible and invisible, thrones, dominions, principalities and powers; all things have been created through him, and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the Church; [he is] the first cause, the firstborn from the dead, so that in all [things] he might have the first place.

Today's Gospel Lesson – Saint Matthew 22:1-14 EOB

At that time, Jesus addressed them with a parable, saying: “The Kingdom of Heaven is like a king who planned a wedding feast for his son. He then sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding feast, but they refused to come. Again, the king sent out other servants, saying: ‘Tell those who are invited, “Behold, I have prepared my dinner! My cattle and my fatted calves have been killed and everything is ready. Come to the wedding feast!”’ But those who were invited made light of it and went off, one to his own farm, another to his merchandise, and the others seized the king's servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them. When the king heard about it, he was furious. He sent out his soldiers to destroy those murderers and to burn their city. Then, the king said to his servants, ‘The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. Go therefore to the crossroads of the highways, and as many people as you may find, invite to the wedding feast.’ Those servants went out into the highways and gathered as many people as they could find, both good and bad. Thus, the wedding [hall] was filled with guests. But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man who was not wearing a wedding garment. He asked him, ‘Friend, how did

you come in here, not wearing a wedding garment?’ And the man was speechless. Then the king said to the servants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and throw him into the outer darkness where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth.’ For many are called, but few chosen.”

A Word From the Holy Fathers

The Lord Jesus not only gave his martyrs their instructions, he also strengthened them by his example. I mean, that they might have something to follow when they were about to suffer, he first suffered for them; he pointed out the journey to be made, he made the road along which to make it.

Death comes either to the soul or the body. But the soul cannot die, and it can die; it cannot die, because its consciousness is never lost; but it can die, if it loses God. You see, just as the soul itself is the life of the body, so in the same way God is the life of the soul. So, as the body dies when the soul abandons it, that is its life, in the same way when God abandons it the soul dies. To make sure, however, that God does not abandon the soul, it must always have enough faith not to fear death for God's sake; and then it isn't abandoned by God, and doesn't die.

So it remains that the death which is feared, is feared for the body. But even on this point the Lord Christ reassured his martyrs. After all, how could they be unsure of the integrity of their bodies, when they had been reassured about the number of their hairs? *Your hairs*, he said, *have all been counted* (Mt 10:30; Lk 12:7). In another place he says even more plainly, *For I tell you, that not a hair of your head shall perish* (Lk 21:18). Truth speaks, does weakness hesitate?

Blessed are the saints in whose memory we are celebrating the day they suffered on; they have received an eternal crown, immortality without end, in exchange for temporal well-being; in these solemn celebrations they have left us lessons of encouragement. When we hear how the martyrs suffered, we rejoice and glorify God in them, nor do we grieve because they are dead. Even if they hadn't died for Christ, would they still be alive today? Why should confession of faith not do what sickness would eventually do in any case?

You heard the interrogations of the persecutors, you heard the replies of the confessors, when the passion of these saints was being read. Among other things, what was that remark of the blessed Fructuosus the bishop? When someone spoke to him, and asked him to keep him in mind and pray for him, he answered, "I have to pray for the Catholic Church, spread as it is from the east to the west." Who, after all, can pray for every single individual? But the one who prays for all doesn't overlook any single individual. No individual member is passed over by one whose prayers are poured out for the whole body. So what advice do you think he was giving this man who asked him to pray for him? What's your opinion?

Undoubtedly you know what I'm getting at. I'm just reminding you. He asked him to pray for him. "And I," he said, "am praying for the Catholic Church, spread as it is from east to west. Don't you, if you want me to pray for you, withdraw from the Church for which I am praying."

What kind of remark, too, was that of the holy deacon, who suffered and was crowned with his bishop? The judge said to him, "Do you too worship Fructuosus?" And he answered, "I do not worship Fructuosus, but I worship God, whom Fructuosus also worships." In this way he admonished us to honor the martyrs, and with the martyrs to worship God.

After all, we ought not to be the sort of people we grieve over the pagans for being. And indeed, they do worship dead human beings. As a matter of fact, all those whose names you hear, for whom temples have been built, were human beings; and in human affairs several of them, practically all of them indeed, exercised royal power. You hear of Jupiter, you hear of Hercules, you hear of Neptune, you hear of Pluto, Mercury, Liber, and the rest; they were all men. This is slated in national histories, as well as in the tales of the poets. Those who have read them know this; those who haven't, should believe those who have.

So those men, by conferring temporal benefits of some kind or other on mankind, managed human affairs to their own credit, and began to be worshiped in such a way, by empty-headed people pursuing empty goals, as to be called gods, to be regarded as gods; to have temples built for them as gods, to be prayed to as gods, to have altars set up to them as gods, priests ordained for them as gods, victims sacrificed to them as gods.

But only the true God ought to have a temple, only to the true God should sacrifice be offered. So these things which are fittingly and correctly owed to the one true God, wretched humanity was seduced into offering to many false gods. Human wretchedness, as a result, was haunted by a perverse error; as a result, the minds of all humanity were laid low, and battered on by the devil. But when the Savior's grace and God's mercy finally looked kindly on unworthy humanity, what had been prophetically foretold in the Song of Songs was fulfilled: *Get up, North Wind; and come, South Wind. and breathe upon my garden, and the scents will flow* (Sg 4: 16).

As much as to say, "Get up and be off, North Wind!" The North, after all, is the cold part of the world. Under the devil souls have grown cold as under the North Wind, and having lost the warmth of charity, they have turned to ice. But what is he told? *"Get up and be off, North Wind! You've battered on them long enough, possessed them long enough, crouched long enough over their prostrate forms. Get up and be off!" "Come, South Wind, wind from the region of light and warmth;*

And breathe upon my garden, and the scents will flow. "These scents were being read to us just a moment ago.

What are these scents? The ones about which the Lord's bride herself says, *We will run after the odor of your ointments* (Sg 1:3). Recalling this odor, the apostle Paul says, *We are the good odor of Christ in every place, both in those who are being saved, and in those who are being lost.* A great mystery. *We are the good odor of Christ in every place, both in those who are being saved, and in those who are being lost. For some indeed the odor of life unto life, for some the odor of death unto death. And for understanding these things, who is sufficient?* (2 Cor 2:14-16).

How can a good odor animate some, kill others? A good odor, not a bad one. You see, he didn't say, "For some indeed we are a good odor unto life, for others a bad odor unto death." He didn't say that, but, *We are the good odor of Christ in every place.* Woe to the wretches who are slain by a good odor! So if you are a good odor, Paul, why does this odor slay some, animate others? That it should animate some I hear, I understand; that it should slay others, I find it difficult to follow; especially because you said, *And for this who is sufficient?* It's not surprising that we are not sufficient; may the one whose odor the man was of whom we are speaking make us sufficient.

The apostle, after all, promptly answers me, "Understand the meaning of, *We are the good odor of Christ in every place, both for those who are being saved and for those who are being lost.* All the same, we are a good odor, *for some the odor of life unto life, for others the odor of death unto death.* This odor animates the loving, kills the envious. You see, if there were no glory for the saints, no feelings of envy would arise in the ungodly. That's how the odor of the saints began to suffer persecution; but like jars of ointment, the more they were broken, the further spread the sweet odor."

Blessed are those whose passion has been related; blessed too is Saint Agnes, who also suffered on this same day; a virgin who was what she was called. Agnes means "lamb" in Latin, "chaste" in Greek. She was what she was called; she was deservedly rewarded with a martyr's crown. So then what, my brothers and sisters, what am I to say to you about those men whom the pagans have worshiped as gods, for whom they have instituted temples, priesthoods, altars, sacrifices? What am I to say to you? That they are not to be compared to our martyrs? Even that's an insult, that I should so much as say it. God forbid that those impious people should be compared to any of the faithful at all, however weak, however worldly still, and needing to be nurtured on milk, not solid food.

What's Juno worth, as against one little old faithful Christian woman? As against one weak old Christian man, trembling in all his limbs, what's Hercules worth?

Yes, he overcame Cacus, Hercules overcame the lion, Hercules overcame the hound Cerberus; Fructuosus overcame the whole world. Compare a man with a man. Agnes, a thirteen-year-old girl, overcame the devil. This girl defeated the one who deceived so many about Hercules.

And yet, dearly beloved, while those gods are in no way at all to be compared to our martyrs, we don't regard our martyrs as gods, or worship them as gods. We don't provide them with temples, with altars, with sacrifices. Priests don't make offerings to them; perish the thought! These things are provided for God; or rather these things are offered to God, by whom all things are provided for us. Even when we make the offering" at the shrines of the holy martyrs, don't we offer it to God? The holy martyrs have their place of honor. Notice, please; in the recitation of names at the altar of Christ, their names are recited in the most honored place;" but for all that, they are not worshiped instead of Christ.

When did you ever hear it said by me at the shrine of Saint Theogenes, or by any of my brethren and colleagues, or by any priest, "I am offering to you, Saint Theogenes"? Or, "I am offering to you, Peter," or "I am offering to you, Paul"? You never did; it doesn't happen, it is not permitted. And if you should be asked, "Do you, then, worship Peter?" answer what Eulogius answered about Fructuosus: "I do not worship Peter, but I worship God, whom Peter also worships... Then Peter loves you. Because if you want to treat Peter as God, you stumble over the rock, and take care you don't break your foot by stumbling over the rock.

To show you that what I'm saying is true, let me urge you to listen to this. In the Acts of the Apostles, when the apostle Paul had performed a great miracle in Lycaonia, the citizens of that region or province imagined that gods had come down to them, and thought Barnabas was Jupiter, while Paul was Mercury, because he was the readiest speaker. With these thoughts they brought garlands and victims, and proposed to offer them sacrifice. Their immediate reaction was not amusement but horror; at once they tore their garments and said to the people, *Brothers, what are you doing? We too, just like you, are men who can suffer; but we are proclaiming the true God to you. Be converted from these vain ways* (Acts 14:10.14). You see how the saints were horrified at being worshiped for gods.

Again, blessed John the evangelist, who wrote the Apocalypse, astounded at the wonderful things that were being shown him, in one place was so awestruck that he fell at the feet of the angel, by whom it was all being pointed out to him. But the angel, whom no mere man can be compared with, said to him, *Get up; what are you doing? Adore God. I, you see, am the fellow servant of you and your brothers* (Rv 19: 10).

The martyrs hate your flagons, the martyrs hate your roasting pans, the martyrs hate your drunken revels. I am saying this without wishing to insult those who are not that sort; those who do such things can apply what I'm saying to themselves. The martyrs hate these things, they don't love those who go in for them. But they hate it much more if they are themselves worshiped.

Therefore, dearly beloved, exult and rejoice on the days of the holy martyrs; pray that you may be able to follow in the footsteps of the martyrs. It isn't, after all, the case that you are human beings and they weren't; not, after all, the case that you were born, and they were born quite differently; I mean, they didn't carry around flesh of a different kind from what you do. We are all from Adam, we are all trying to be in Christ.

Our Lord himself, the very head of the Church, the only-begotten Son of God, the Word of the Father through which all things were made, did not have flesh of a different kind from ours. That's why he wished take on a man from the virgin, to be born in the flesh from one of the human race. I mean, if he had made himself a body from somewhere else, who would believe that he carried the same flesh as we do? And yet he had flesh *In the likeness of the flesh of sin* (Rom 8:3), we have the flesh of sin. After all, he did not spring from male seed, or from the lust of male and female; but from what? From a message of the Father. And yet, though he was born in a marvelous way, he was willing to be born mortal, and to die for us, and to redeem us with his blood, insofar as he was a man.

Notice what I'm saying, brothers and sisters: even Christ himself, though he is God, though he is one God with the Father, though he is the Word of the Father, only-begotten, equal and coeternal with the Father; yet insofar as he was prepared to be a man, he preferred to be called a priest rather than to require a priest's services; he preferred to be a sacrifice rather than to demand sacrifice, insofar as he is a man. Because insofar as he is God, everything that is owed to the Father is also owed to the only-begotten Son. For that reason, dearly beloved, venerate the martyrs, praise, love, proclaim, honor them. But worship the God of the martyrs.

– St. Augustine of Hippo, *On the Birthday of the Martyrs Fructuosus, Bishop, and Augurinus and Eulogius, Deacons*

Pleasure and Pain According to St. Maximus the Confessor

Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos and Agiou Vlasiou

In his *Centuries on Theology* St. Maximus the Confessor refers to the nexus of the dualism of pleasure and pain, which, by any standard, is an important subject. This means that we cannot discuss Orthodox Theology if we fail to face this crucial point, because the transcendence of pleasure and pain is, precisely, a prerequisite

for correct Orthodox Theology. As St. Maximus the Confessor says, the transcendence of pleasure and pain proves that man has cleansed his heart from the passions.

As we pointed out above, the whole of modern life is governed by pleasure and pain, since, in our age, enjoyment and the gratification of the senses dominate, while at the same time deep grief, an inner pain, prevails. In reality, modern man tries to escape pain through the satisfaction of sensual pleasure. All contemporary problems, such as AIDS and drugs, are to be found in this connection. This is why I believe it is extremely important to see this link between pleasure and pain, as elaborated by St. Maximus the Confessor.

a) The origin of pleasure and pain

The world was created by God in Trinity. The most perfect creature is man, for he is the apex of creation, the microcosm in the macrocosm. Analyzing the issue of the creation of man and its relation to the birth and the origin of pleasure and pain, St. Maximus says that God the Word who created man's nature, made it without pleasure and pain. "He did not make the senses susceptible to either pleasure or pain." He insists on this point by saying: "Pleasure and pain were not created simultaneously with the flesh."

While there was no pleasure and pain in man before the fall, there was a noetic faculty towards pleasure, through which man could enjoy God ineffably. But he misused this natural faculty. Man oriented the "the natural longing of the nous for God" to sensible things and thus "by the initial movement towards sensible things, the first man transferred this longing to his senses, and through them began to experience this pleasure in a way contrary to nature". The words "according to nature" and "contrary to nature" show the complete ontological change that took place in man and depict his fallen state clearly.

Of course, man did not invent this mode of operation of the faculties of the soul on his own, but with the advice of the devil. The devil was motivated by jealousy against man, for whom God had shown special care and attention. It is interesting that the devil envied not only man but God Himself: "Since the devil is jealous of both us and god, he persuaded man by guile that God was jealous of him, and so made him break the commandment".

After the unnatural movement of the noetic capacity of the soul to sensible things and the birth of pleasure, God, being interested in man's salvation "implanted pain, as a kind of chastising force". Pain, which God, in His love for man, tied to sensual pleasure, is the whole complex of the mortal and passible body, that is the law of death, which has, ever since then, been very closely connected to human nature. In

this way, the "manic longing of the nous" which incites the unnatural inclination of the soul to sensible things, is restrained.

This whole analysis by St. Maximus the Confessor in no way reminds us of Platonic teaching about the movement of the immortal soul from the unborn realm of the ideas, and its confinement to a mortal body which is the prison of the soul. This is simply because St. Maximus the Confessor, being an integral member of the entire Orthodox tradition, makes no distinction between a naturally immortal soul and a naturally mortal body, he does not believe in an immortal and unborn realm of ideas, and, obviously, does not adopt a dualistic view of man, according to which salvation consists in his liberation from the prison of the soul, which is the body. In St. Maximus' teaching there is a clear reference to the unnatural movement of the faculties of the soul and to the "manic longing of the nous", which draws the body into situations and acts which are against nature.

It is clear, then, that ancestral sin consists of the "initial movement of the soul" toward sensible things and in the "law of death" granted by God's love for man. Therefore, pleasure and pain constitute so-called original sin. Pleasure is the soul's initial movement toward sensible things, while pain is the whole law of death which took roots in man's existence and constitutes the law of the mortal flesh.

St. Maximus makes some marvellous observations. He states that the transgression (of the commandment) devised pleasure "in order to corrupt the will", i.e. man's freedom, and also imposed pain (death) "to cause the dissolution of man's nature". This means that pleasure causes sin, which is a voluntary death of the soul, while pain, through the separation of soul and body, causes the disintegration of the flesh. This was, actually, the work and objective of the devil, but God allowed the link between pleasure and pain. That is, He allowed death to come into man's existence on grounds of love and philanthropy, for pain is the refutation of pleasure. Thus, "God has providentially given man pain he has not chosen, together with death that follows from it, in order to chasten him for the pleasure he has chosen."

On several occasions, St. Maximus refers to "voluntary pleasure" and "irrational pleasure", as well as to "involuntary" and "sensible" pain. Pain balances the results of pleasure, that is, it subtracts pain, but does not completely revoke it.

Therefore, pleasure precedes pain, since all pain is caused by pleasure, and this is why it is called natural pain. For Adam and Eve, pleasure was without cause, that is, it was not preceded by pain, while pain, which is a natural consequence of pleasure, is an obligation, a debt, paid by all men who have the same human nature. This is what happened to Adam and Eve. For their descendants, things are a little different; the experience of pain leads them to the enjoyment of pleasure.

After the Fall and the entry of the law of sin and death into his existence, man is in a tragic state, because, even though pain reverses pleasure and annuls its active movement, man cannot reverse and eliminate the law of death which is found within his being, and this law brings a new experience of pleasure. "Philosophy towards virtue", namely man's whole ascetic struggle brings dispassion not in his will but in his nature, because asceticism cannot defeat death, which is found as a powerful law within man's being. Herein lies the tragedy of man, who may cure pleasure and obtain inner balance through voluntary pain (asceticism) and involuntary events (external grief, death) but is unable to liberate himself from pain, which is determined by the law of death.

b) The purpose of Christ's incarnation

So far we have described how the link between pleasure and pain was established after the Fall. Pleasure was a result of the irrational movement of the faculty of the soul, with its natural consequence the coming of pain, along with the entire law of death. This combination of pleasure and pain became a law of human nature. Obviously, while living a life contrary to nature, man could not be delivered from this state which had become natural. Christ's incarnation contributed to man's liberation from this connection between pleasure and pain. St. Maximus the Confessor also makes some marvelous observations on this point too.

It was absolutely impossible for human nature which had fallen to voluntary pleasure and involuntary pain to return to the former state "had the Creator not become man". The mystery of incarnation lies in the fact that Christ was born human, but the beginning and cause of His birth was not sensual pleasure, for He was born of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, outside the human way of generation, and He embraced pain and death by His own free choice. For man, pain came as a result of sin, it was involuntary. While for Christ, who was born without sensual pleasure, pain was received by choice.

All humans born after the transgression, are born with sensual pleasure, which precedes their birth, because man is an offspring of his parents' pleasure and, of course, no one is free, by nature, from impassioned generation provoked by pleasure. Thus man had the origin of his birth "in the corruption that comes from pleasure" and would finish his life "in the corruption that comes through death". Therefore, he was a complete slave to pleasure and pain "and he could not find the way to freedom". Humans are tortured by unjust pleasure and just pain and, of course, by their outcome which is death.

For man to return to his previous state and to be deified, an unjust pain and death without cause had to be invented. Death had to be without cause, not to be caused by pleasure, and unjust, not following an impassioned life. In this way, most unjust

death would cure unjust pleasure which had caused just death and just pain. In this way mankind would enjoy freedom again, delivered from pleasure and pain. Christ became perfect man, having a noetic soul and a passible body, like ours, but without sin. He was born as a man by an immaculate conception and, thus, did not have any sensual pleasure whatsoever, but voluntarily accepted pain and death and suffered unjustly, out of love for man, in order to revoke the principle of human generation from unjust pleasure, which dominates human nature, and in order to eliminate nature's just termination by death. Thus, Christ's immaculate conception as man and His voluntary assumption of the passibility of human nature, as well as His unjust death, liberated mankind from sensual pleasure, pain and death.

Christ's birth as man took place in a way contrary to that of humans. After the Fall, human nature has its principle of generation in "pleasure-provoked conception by sperm" from the father. A direct consequence of this sensual birth is the end, namely "painful death through corruption." But Christ could not possibly be ruled over by death, because He was not born in this pleasure-provoked way. With His incarnation, Christ offered a different principle of generation to man, the pleasure of the life to come, by means of pain. Adam, with his transgression, introduced a different way of generation, a generation originating in sensual pleasure and ending in pain, grief and death. Thus, everyone who descends from Adam according to the flesh, justly and painfully suffers the end from death. Christ offered a different way of generation, because, through His seedless generation (birth) and His voluntary and unjust death, He eliminated the principle of generation according to Adam (sensual pleasure) and the end which Adam came to (pain-death). In this way "he liberated from all those reborn spiritually in him".

The way by which Christ became incarnate and cured human nature reveals indisputably that He is wise, just and powerful. He is wise because He became a true man according to nature without being subjected to any change. He is just, because He voluntarily assumed passible human flesh, out of great condescension and love for man. This is also why He did not make man's salvation tortuous. He is also powerful, because He created eternal life and unchangeable dispassion in nature, through suffering and death, and in this way He did not show Himself to be at all incapable of achieving the cure of human nature. (*from johnsanidopoulos.com*)

Also Commemorated Today

Martyrs [Eugene](#), Candidus, Valerian, and Aquila at Trebizond (303).

Venerable [Maximus](#) the Greek of Russia (1556).

New Hieromartyr priest [Alexis](#) (Yasenev) in Orenburg (1930)

New Hieromartyr [Elijah](#) priest (1938).

Virgin-martyr [Agnes](#) (Oanez) of Rome (304).
Martyr [Anastasius](#), disciple of St. Maximus the Confessor (662).
Wonderworking Icon of the Most Holy Theotokos of [Paramythia](#) (Vatopedi, Mt. Athos).
Venerable Neophytes of Vatopedi on Mt Athos (Greek).
St. Zosimas, bishop of Syracuse (662).
Synaxis of the Church of Holy Peace by the Sea in Constantinople.
St. Timon, monk of Nadeyev and Kostroma (1840).
St. Vimin of Holywood, Bishop (Vivian, Wynnin, Gwynnin) (6th c.)
St. Brigid (Briga) of Kilbride, Virgin (6th c.)
St. Lawdog (Laudog) of Wales (6th c.)
St. Maccallin of Waulsort, Abbot (Malcallan, Maolcalain) (978)
Hieromartyrs bishop Fructueux (Fructuosus), and deacons Augure (Augurius) and Euloge (Eulogius), Martyrs in Tarragon, (Natalice in 259 A.D.) (Gaul)
St. Patroclus of Troyes, martyr (259) (Gaul)
Martyr Meinrad, hermit-monk (861) (Germany)
Hieromartyr Publius of Malta, second bishop of Athens (c. 112)
St. Avit, bishop of Clermont (689)

Social Team for January 28

Team 3 is up next week – Pani Stacy, Victor Barzykin, Tatiana Chumak. Thank you!

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In Your Prayers – Please Remember... His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch BARTHOLOMEW, His Eminence Metropolitan GREGORY, Fr. Joseph & Family, His Grace Bishop Neofitos of Nyeri & Mt. Kenya, Bennett family, Tatyana & Slava Chumak & family, Luke & Marlena Cooper, Roberta Corson, Jon Church, Tina Crull, Mary Diane David, Marlene Doukas, Linda A. Georgiev, Sandi Hebel, Howl family, Helen P. Janowiak, John M. Janowiak, Andrew Kinn, Kopan family, Helen, Brian, Luke and Mia Mahony, Valentina Makowelski, Susan Matula, Anna Meinhold, David & Kathryn Newman, Bobby Nutter & family, Nicholas Pavlik, Weston Perry & family, John Reece, Mary Reed, Marge Rusnak, Rose Song, Fr. Nectarios & Ia, Mother Virginia Marie & the Carmelite Nuns of Port Tobacco, the suffering people of Ukraine, and those in need of our prayers. (Please advise Fr. Joseph of changes.)