

The Confessor's Tongue for November 30, 2008

24th Sunday After Pentecost: Apostle Andrew the First-Called

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.

November 30: Apostle Andrew

Born in Bethsaida, the brother of the Holy Apostle Peter, the disciple of St. John the Baptist, the first one called by the Lord for apostolic service, he was among His closest disciples and, after the descent of the Holy Spirit, he preached the Gospel in many different countries. (See about him: Jn. 1:35-42, 12:22; Mt. 4:18-19, 10:2; Mk. 13:3-5; Acts 15:28).

According to church tradition, the Holy Apostle Andrew preached the Gospel even to the Scythians living on Southern, Eastern and Northeastern coast of the Black Sea. Ven. Nestor the Chronicler records that the Apostle Andrew going to preach in various countries, was in Russia and went up the Dnieper River to the place where Kiev is now located (but according to other legends, he even reached Novgorod). Having climbed a mount, he set up a cross there and told his disciples accompanying him: "The grace of God will shine on this place, churches to Christ will be raised up and the true light will spread from here into all the country".

The apostolic labors of St. Andrew ended with the ascetic efforts of confessor and martyr in Achaia, in the city of Patras (about 62 A. D.), and he was crucified on a cross (crossed bars which according to tradition, was made slanting) by the Eparch Aegeates. How many caresses and threats Aegeates made to St. Andrew to get him to refrain from preaching Christ! The first-called apostle not only did not refrain from preaching but also disclosed to the eparch himself the mysteries of the Christian faith. How many different torments did Aegeates use, but St. Andrew did not refrain from confessing in a loud voice the all-holy name of the Lord Jesus and prayed only that the Lord through His grace would enlighten the torturer with the light of the Christian faith. Finally, crucified on the cross, the holy apostle for three days did not stop confessing Christ before the crowds of people gathering around him, teaching all not only the faith, but also the confession of faith and the endurance for the faith, saying: "No, there is not one torment that compares worthily with the reward earned by it".

The head of the Holy Apostle Andrew is now in Rome, but his right hand up to the elbow is in the Dormition Cathedral in Moscow.

The Rule For Attending To Oneself For One Dwelling In The World, part 2

By St. Ignatii Brianchaninov

Should there be any free moments during the course of the day, use them to read attentively some chosen prayers, or some chosen portions of Scripture; and, by means of these, fortify the powers of your soul, which have become exhausted through activity in the midst of a world of vanities.

Should there not be any such golden moments, it is necessary to regret their loss, as though it were the loss of a valuable treasure. What is wasted today

should not be lost on the day following, because our heart conveniently gives itself up to negligence and forgetfulness, which lead to that dismal ignorance, so ruinous of Divine activity, of the activity of man's salvation.

Should you chance to say or to do something that is contrary to God's commandments, immediately treat your fault with repentance; and, by means of sincere contrition, return to the Way of God, from which you stepped aside through your violation of God's will. Do not linger outside the Way of God! Respond with faith and humility to sinful thoughts, reveries and sensations by opposing to them the Gospel commandments, and saying, along with the holy patriarch Joseph:

How shall I speak this evil word and sin before God? (Gen. 30:9)

One who is vigilant toward oneself must refuse himself all reverie, in general—regardless of how attractive and well-appearing it might seem, for all reverie is the wandering of the mind, which flatters and deceives it, while being outside the truth, in the land of non-existent phantoms, and incapable of realization. The consequences of reverie are: loss of vigilance toward oneself, dissipation of the mind, and hardness of heart during prayer, whence comes distress of the soul.

In the evening, departing into slumber—which, in relation to the day just past, is death—examine your actions during the course of that day. Such [self-] examination is not difficult, since, in leading an attentive life, that forgetfulness which is so natural to a distracted man is destroyed through vigilance toward oneself. And so, having recollected all your sins, whether through act, or word, or thought, or sensation, offer your repentance to God for them, with both the disposition and the heart-felt pledge of self-amendment. Later, having read the rule of prayer, conclude the day which was begun by meditating upon God by meditating, once again, upon God. Whither do they depart—all the thoughts and feelings of a sleeping man? What mysterious state of being is this sleep, during which the soul and body are both alive and yet not alive, being alienated from the awareness of their life, as though dead? Sleep is as incomprehensible as death. In the course of it, one's soul reposes, forgetting the most-cruel earthly afflictions and calamities that have beset it, while it images its eternal repose; while one's body (!) ... if it rises from sleep will also arise, inevitably, from the dead.

The great Agafon said: "It is impossible to succeed in virtue without exerting vigilance toward oneself." (*The Patericon of Skete*) Amen.

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On the True Meaning of Living

Fr. Thomas Hopko

We are created to live. We are given life. We didn't ask for it. It is the very gift of God.

No one can claim a *right* to life, because the life we have is given to us by the Living God who is the *Source*, the *content*, and the *goal* of life. Life is senseless without God. Any kind of meaning in life without reference to God is, in fact, impossible.

Human life is essentially about God. "God is," to quote St. John Chrysostom, "the life of our life." *He is our life.*

We have no life without Jesus Christ, the eternally divine expression of God the Father's own life. Jesus Himself says, "I am the life of the world."

We humans are *images*, or reflections, of God. But we can choose to live in the image of something or someone else. As St. Athanasius said, "By ourselves, without reference to God, we are nothing." We are created out of nothing by the loving will of God; unless we are in communion with God, we deteriorate and decompose back to nothingness. There is no living of life—certainly no life that can be called human—without God.

But it had better be God as He *really* is, however. The real problem is not the endless debate as to whether or not there is a God; the real problem is discovering the *true* God. We either have the true God—in whose image and likeness we are made—or we have a god who is created in our own image, which is nothing. Psalm 113 (115) says that every idol is made in the image of its maker. The whole point is to find the one true God who is the true source of life.

According to Scripture, any human being who is hungering and thirsting for the true God—and is willing to pay the price to seek Him—has already found life. The person who does not hunger and thirst for truth, reality, righteousness—which mean God Himself—is, in biblical imagery, a fool who is already dead. Psalm 118 (119) says, "Blessed are they who seek Him with their whole heart." *This* is life. A person who is doing this is already alive, already saved. St. Augustine says that those who seek God have already been found by Him. *Seeking* is proof that we have found Him. "Blessed are those who seek Him with their whole heart."

There are those who may seek God but fail to do so with their whole heart. They may be very religious, giving talks on theology, spending hours at Liturgy, defending propositional truths left and right, quoting the Bible backwards. If they are not really hungering and thirsting for the face of God, if they are not genuinely concerned with glorifying Him and finding life in Him, then they are seeking God in vain; in Orthodox liturgical language, they seek Him unto judgment and condemnation.

This point was made very strongly by the 19th century Orthodox bishop, Theophan the Recluse. A woman asked Bishop Theophan why it was that so many people went to church, prayed, kissed icons, and so on, yet grew worse instead of better. Rather than becoming more humble, many people become more judgmental. Instead of being grateful, they become bitter. Instead of being merciful, kind, and generous, they become suspicious. Instead of being peaceful, they become irritated. They even looked worse. Why, the woman asked, does this happen?

Theophan replied that a person can go through all the motions and still not truly be interested in God. It is possible to be interested in theology, even to the point of criticizing others for apostasy and God knows what, without being interested in finding God and becoming God-like. Theophan went on to say that it is a horrifying thing to fall into the hands of the Living God. God is a consuming fire, and one cannot safely play with fire. In other words, if one comes to church and says, "Thy Kingdom come," one had better mean it. When one says, "Blessed art Thou, O Lord, teach me Thy statutes," one had better want to be taught. And if one wants to be taught, it must be in order that one might live the lessons one has learned! A lot of people want to learn the commandments, *not* because they want to follow them, but because they want to check out those who *don't*—and then condemn them!

Seeking God with our whole being is basic and absolutely crucial. It is the very basis of our relationship with God, with doing His will, with finding Him, and with glorifying Him. It's about finding life and saving it through communion with God. This is what human life is about; without it, nothing else matters. I would even go so far as to say this: If that hunger and thirst is there, with the blood that has to be spent, the price that has to be paid, with the humility and courage that are needed to go into this, then nothing else is needed. Everything else will fall into place. God will see to it.

We can end our discussion right here with a single line from the Psalms: "Seek God and your soul shall live." Fail to do this, and it's over; you're already dead. Our life is to hunger and thirst for the Living God, for God as He really is. This is human life.

Upcoming Events 2008

- 12-13 December: All-Night Vigil & Liturgy for St. Herman of Alaska.
16 December, Tuesday, 7:30 p.m. Holy Unction
24 December Nativity Eve: 8:00 a.m. Royal Hours, noon Vesperal Liturgy of St. Basil, 5:30 p.m. Vigil, 7:30 p.m. Holy Supper
25 December Nativity of Our Lord: 8:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy
27 December – January 2: Winter Service Retreat at St. George's, Pharr, TX.
31 December New Year's Eve Feast at Rectory

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!