

The Confessor's Tongue for December 13, 2009

27th Sunday after Pentecost; St. Herman of Alaska the Wonderworker

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.

On the World Economic Crisis

St. Nicholas of Zicha

You are asking me, man of God, about the reason and meaning of the present crisis. Who am I that you ask me about this great mystery? "Speak if you have something greater than silence," said St. Gregory the Theologian. And although I find that presently silence is higher than any word, I will, out of love for you, write what I think about this question.

"Crisis" is a Greek word, and in translation it means "judgment". In the Holy Scripture the word "judgment" is used many times. We read in the Psalms, Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment (Ps. 1:5). Later again, I will sing of mercy and judgment: unto thee, O Lord, will I sing. (Ps. 101:1). The wise king Solomon writes that the judgment will come to everyone from the Lord (Proverbs 29:26). The Savior himself said, "For the Father judges no man, but has committed all judgment unto the Son." (John 5:22). Apostle Peter writes, "For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God" (1 Pet. 4:17).

Replace the word "judgment" with the word "crisis" and read, "I will sing of mercy and crisis", "Crisis will come to everyone from the Lord", "The Father committed all crisis unto the Son", "For the time is come that crisis must begin at the house of God".

Previously the Europeans, when some trouble befell them, used the word "judgment" instead of the word "crisis". These days the word "judgment" is replaced with the word "crisis", a clear word with one less clear. The drought would come, people would say, "God's judgment!", flood - "God's judgment!". A war or epidemic would start, "God's judgment!", earthquakes, locust, other trials, always the same - "God's judgment!" Therefore, crisis is because of the drought, because of the flood, of the wars and epidemics. And people see the present financial, economic catastrophe as God's judgment, but they call it "crisis" rather than "judgment". So that the trouble would increase from lack of reason! Because when the clear word "judgment" was said, the reason that led to the trouble was clear, and the Judge who allowed the trouble was known, and so was the purpose for which the trouble was allowed. But after replacing the word "judgment" with the word "crisis", which is unclear for the most, no one can explain why it is, from whom, and for what. And this is the only thing in which this crisis differs from the crisis that happens from drought and flood, war or epidemic, locust or other tribulation.

You are asking about the reason of today's crisis, or God's judgment? The reason is always the same. The reason for all droughts, floods, epidemics and other troubles is the same as of today's crisis - the falling away from God. The sin of falling away from

God has resulted in this crisis as well, and the Lord allowed it so as to wake people, sober them, so that they would repent and come back to him. The crisis is commensurate to sins. And truly, the Lord used modern means to teach modern people: he struck the banks, the stock exchanges, the entire financial system. He overturned the tables of money-lenders just as he once did in the temple in Jerusalem. He created an unprecedented panic between merchants and money-lenders. Stirred up, brought down, mixed up, confused, bestowed fear. And all that so that proud European and American wise men would wake up, repent, remember God. So that they who are anchored in the haven of material comfort would remember their souls, acknowledge their trespassings and bow down before God the Highest, the living God.

How long will the crisis last? Until the proud culprits acknowledge the victory of the All-Powerful. Until the people would realize that they have to translate the unclear word "crisis" into their native language and would exclaim with the repentant sigh, "God's judgment!"

Therefore you, honest Father, should also call "crisis" "God's judgment", and you will understand everything.

Greetings to you and Lord's peace!

Written to Priest K. in 1929.

December 13: St. Herman of Alaska

St Herman came from a family of merchants of Serpukhov, a city of the Moscow Diocese. His name before he was tonsured, and his family name are not known. (The monastic name is given when a monk takes his vows). He had a great zeal for piety from youth, and at sixteen he entered monastic life. (This was in 1772, if we assume that Herman was born in 1756, although sometimes 1760 is given as the date of his birth.) First he entered the Trinity-Sergius Hermitage which was located near the Gulf of Finland on the Peterhof Road, about 15 versts (about 10 miles) from St Petersburg.

MIRACULOUS HEALING OF HERMAN At the St Sergius Hermitage there occurred the following incident to Father Herman. On the right side of his throat under his chin there appeared an abscess. The swelling grew rapidly, disfiguring his face. It became difficult for him to swallow, and the odor was unbearable. In this critical condition Father Herman awaited death. He did not appeal to a physician of this world, but locking his cell he fell before an Icon of the Queen of Heaven. With fervent tears he prayed, asking of Her that he might be healed. He prayed the whole night. Then he took a wet towel and with it wiped the face of the Most Holy Mother, and with this towel he covered the swelling. He continued to pray with tears until he fell asleep from sheer exhaustion on the floor. In a dream

he saw the Virgin Mary healing him.

When Herman awoke in the morning, he found to his great surprise that he was fully healed. The swelling had disappeared, even though the abscess had not broken through, leaving behind but a small mark as though a reminder of the miracle. Physicians to whom this healing was described did not believe it, arguing that it was necessary for the abscess to have either broken through of its own accord or to have been cut open. But the words of the physicians were the words of human experience, for where the grace of God operates there the order of nature is overcome. Such occurrences humble human reason under the strong hand of God's Mercy.

HERMAN'S LIFE AT VALAAM For five or six years Father Herman continued to live in the St Sergius Hermitage, and then he transferred to the Valaam Monastery, which was widely scattered on the large islands in the waters of the great Lake Ladoga. He came to love the Valaam haven with all his soul, as he came to love its unforgettable Superior, the pious Elder Nazarius, and all the brethren. He wrote to Father Nazarius later from America, "Your fatherly goodness to me, humble one, will be erased out of my heart neither by the terrible, impassable Siberian lands, nor by the dark forests. Nor will it be wiped out by the swift flow of the great rivers; nor will the awful ocean quench these feelings. In my mind I imagine my beloved Valaam, looking to it beyond the great ocean." He praised the Elder Nazarius in his letters as "the most reverend, and my beloved father." (Batushka) and the brethren of Valaam he called, "my beloved and dearest." The place where he lived in America, deserted Spruce Island, he called "Now Valaam." And as we can see, he always remained in spiritual contact with his spiritual homeland, for as late as 1823, that is after thirty years of his life within the borders of America, he wrote letters to the successor of Father Nazarius, the Igumen Innocent.

Father Barlaam, later Igumen of Valaam, and a contemporary of Father Herman, who accepted his tonsure from Father Nazarius, wrote thus of the life of Father Herman.

"Father Herman went through the various obediences here, and being 'well disposed toward every thing' was in the course of events sent to Serdobol to oversee there the work of quarrying marble. The Brothers loved Father Herman, and awaited impatiently his return to the cloisters from Serdobol. Recognizing the zeal of the young hermit the wise elder, Father Nazarius, released him to take abode in the wilderness. This wilderness was in the deep forest about a mile from the cloister: to this day this place has retained the name 'Herman's.' On holy days, Father Herman returned to the monastery from the wilderness. Then it was that at Little Vespers he would stand in the choir and sing in his pleasant tenor the responses with the brethren from the Canon, 'O Sweetest Jesus, save us sinners. Most Holy Theotokos, Save us,' and tears would fall like hail

from his eyes."

THE FIRST MISSION TO AMERICA In the second half of the 18th century the borders of Holy Russia expanded to the north. In those years Russian merchants discovered the Aleutian Islands which formed in the Pacific Ocean a chain from the eastern shores of Kamchatka to the western shores of North America. With the opening of these islands there was revealed the sacred necessity to illumine with the light of the Gospel the native inhabitants. With the blessing of the Holy Synod, Metropolitan Gabriel gave to the Elder Nazarius the task of selecting capable persons from the brethren of Valaam for this holy endeavor. Ten men were selected, and among them was Father Herman. The chosen men left Valaam for the place of their great appointment in 1793. (The members of this historical mission were: Archimandrite Joseph (Bolotoff), the Hieromonks, Juvenal, Macarius, Athanasius, Stephan and Nectarius, Hierodeacons, Nectarius and Stephen, and the monks Joasaph, and Herman.)

As a result of the holy zeal of the preachers the light of the evangelic sermon quickly poured out among the sons of Russia, and several thousand pagans accepted Christianity. A school for the education of newly-baptized children was organized, and a church was built at the place where the missionaries lived. But by the inscrutable providence of God the general progress of the mission was unsatisfactory. After five years of very productive labor, Archimandrite Joasaph, who had just been elevated to the rank of bishop, was drowned with his party. (This occurred on the Pacific Ocean near Kamchatka and the Aleutian Islands. The ship, Phoenix, one of the first sea-going ships built in Alaska, sailed from Okhotsk carrying the first Bishop for the American Mission and his party. The Phoenix was caught in one of the many storms which periodically sweep the northern Pacific, and the ship and all hands perished together with Bishop Joasaph and his party.) Before this the zealous Hieromonk Juvenal was granted the martyr's crown. The others died one after another until in the end only Father Herman remained. The Lord permitted him to labor longer than any of his brethren in the apostolic task of enlightening the Aleutians.

THE NEW VALAAM - SPRUCE ISLAND In America Father Herman chose as his place of habitation Spruce Island, which he called New Valaam. This island is separated by a strait about a mile and a quarter wide from Kodiak Island on which had been built a wooden monastery for the residence of the members of the mission, and a wooden church dedicated to the Resurrection of the Savior. (New Valaam was named for Valaam on Lake Ladoga, the monastery from which Father Herman came to America. It is interesting to note that Valaam is also located on an island, although, this island is in a fresh water lake, whereas, Spruce Island is on the Pacific Ocean, although near other islands and the Alaskan mainland.)

Spruce Island is not large, and is almost completely covered by a forest. Almost through its middle a small brook flows to the sea. Herman selected this picturesque island for the location of his hermitage. He dug a cave out of the ground with his own hands, and in it he lived his first full summer. For winter there was built for him a cell near the cave, in which he lived until his death. The cave was converted by him into a place for his burial. A wooden chapel, and a wooden house to be used as a schoolhouse and a guest house were built not too distant from his cell. A garden was laid out in front of his cell. For more than forty years Father Herman lived here.

FATHER HERMAN'S WAY OF LIFE Father Herman himself spaded the garden, planted potatoes and cabbage and various vegetables in it. For winter, he preserved mushrooms, salting or drying them. The salt was obtained by him from ocean water. It is said that a wicker basket in which the Elder carried seaweed from the shore, was so large that it was difficult for one person to carry. The seaweed was used for fertilizing the soil. But to the astonishment of all, Father Herman carried a basket filled with seaweed for a long distance without any help at all. By chance his disciple, Gerasim, saw him one winter night carrying a large log which normally would be carried by four men; and he was bare footed. Thus worked the Elder, and everything that he acquired as a result of his immeasurable labors was used for the feeding and clothing of orphans and also for books for his students.

His clothes were the same for winter as for summer. He did not wear a shirt; instead he wore a smock of deer skin, which he did not take off for several years at a time, nor did he change it, so that the fur in it was completely worn away, and the leather became glossy. Then there were his boots or shoes, cassock (*podrasnik*), an ancient and faded out cassock (*riasa*) full of patchwork, and his headdress (*klobuk*). He went everywhere in these clothes, and at all times; in the rain, in snowstorms, and during the coldest freezing weather. In this, Father Herman followed the example of many Eastern Ascetic Fathers and Monks who showed the greatest concern for the welfare and needs of others. Yet, they themselves wore the oldest possible clothes to show their great humility before God, and their contempt for worldly things.

A small bench covered with a time-worn deerskin served as Father Herman's bed. He used two bricks for a pillow; these were hidden from visitors by a skin or a shirt. There was no blanket. Instead, he covered himself with a wooden board which lay on the stove. This board Father Herman, himself called his blanket, and he willed that it be used to cover his remains; it was as long as he was tall. "During my stay in the cell of Father Herman," writes the creole Constantine Larionov, "I, a sinner, sat on his 'blanket'— and I consider this the acme of my fortune!" ('creole' is the name by which the Russians

referred to the children of mixed marriages of native Indians of Alaska, Eskimo and Aleuts with Russians.)

On the occasions when Father Herman was the guest of administrators of the American Company and in the course of their soul-saving talks he sat up with them until midnight. He never spent the night with them, but regardless of the weather he always returned to his hermitage. If for some extraordinary reason it was necessary for him to spend the night away from his cell, then in the morning the bed which had been prepared for him would be found untouched; the Elder not having slept at all. The same was true in his hermitage where having spent the night in talks, he never rested.

The Elder ate very little. As a guest, he scarcely tasted the food, and remained without dinner. In his cell his dinner consisted of a very small portion of a small fish or some vegetables.

His body, emaciated as a result of his labors, his vigils, and fasting, was crushed by chains which weighed about sixteen pounds. These chains are kept to this day in the chapel.

Telling of these deeds of Father Herman, his disciple, the Aleut Ignaty Aligyaga, added, "Yes, Apa led a very hard life, and no one can imitate his life!" (Apa, Aleutian word means Elder or grandfather, and it is a name indicative of the great affection in which he was held).

Our writing of the incidents in the life of the Elder deal, so to speak, with the external aspects of his labor. "His most important works," says the Bishop Peter, "were his exercises in spiritual endeavor in his isolated cell where no one saw him, but outside the cell they heard him singing and celebrating services to God according to the monastic rule." This witness of the Bishop is supported by the following answers of Father Herman, himself, "How do you manage to live alone in the forest, Father Herman? Don't you ever become lonesome?" He answered, "No I am not there alone! God is here, as God is everywhere. The Holy Angels are there. With whom is it better to talk, with people, or with Angels? Most certainly with Angels."

FATHER HERMAN AND THE NATIVES
The way in which Father Herman looked upon the natives of America, how he understood his own relations with them, and how he was concerned for their needs he expressed himself in one of his letters to the former administrator of the colony, Simeon Yanovsky.

He wrote, "Our Creator granted to our beloved homeland this land which like a newly-born babe does not yet have the strength for knowledge or understanding. It requires not only protection, because of its infantile weakness and impotence, but also his sustenance. Even for this it does not yet have the ability to make an appeal on its own behalf. And since the welfare of this nation by the Providence of God, it is not known for how long, is dependent on and has been entrusted into the hands of the Russian government which has now been given into your own

power, therefore I, the most humble servant of these people, and their nurse (nyanka) stand before you in their behalf, write this petition with tears of blood. Be our Father and our Protector. Certainly we do not know how to be eloquent, so with an inarticulate infant's tongue we say: Wipe away the tears of the defenseless orphans, cool the hearts melting away in the fire of sorrow. Help us to know what consolation means."

The Elder acted the way he felt. He always interceded before the governors in behalf of those who had transgressed. He defended those who had been offended. He helped those who were in need with whatever means he had available. The Aleuts, men, women and children, often visited him. Some asked for advice, others complained of oppression, others sought out defense, and still others desired help. Each one received the greatest possible satisfaction from the Elder. He discussed their mutual difficulties, and he tried to settle these peacefully. He was especially concerned about reestablishing understanding in families. If he did not succeed in reconciling a husband and wife, the Elder prevailed upon them to separate temporarily. The need for such a procedure he explained thus, "it is better to let them live apart, or believe me, it can be terrible if they are not separated. There have been incidents when a husband killed his wife, or when a wife destroyed her husband."

Father Herman especially loved children. He made large quantities of biscuits for them, and he baked cookies (krendelki) for them; and the children were fond of the Elder. Father Herman's love for the Aleuts reached the point of self-denial.

FATHER HERMAN AS A SPIRITUAL TEACHER The Elder was concerned in particular for the moral growth of the Aleuts. With this end in mind a school was built for children-the orphans of the Aleuts. He himself taught them the Law of God and church music. For this same purpose he gathered the Aleuts on Sunday and Holy Days for prayer in the chapel near his cell. Here his disciple read the Hours and the various prayers while the Elder himself read the Epistle and Gospel. He also preached to them. His students sang, and they sang very well. The Aleuts loved to hear his sermons, gathering around him in large numbers. The Elder's talks were captivating, and his listeners were moved by their wondrous power. He himself writes of one example of the beneficial results of his words.

Yanovsky writes about the character and the eloquence of the talks of the Elder thus:

"When I met Father Herman I was thirty years old. I must say that I was educated in the naval corps school; that I knew many sciences having read extensively. But to my regret, the Science of sciences, that is the Law of God, I barely remembered the externals - and these only theoretically, not applying them to life. I was a Christian in name only, but in my soul and in reality, I was a freethinker. Furthermore, I did not admit the divinity and

holiness of our religion, for I had read through many atheistic works. Father Herman recognized this immediately and he desired to reconvert me. To my great surprise he spoke so convincingly, wisely — and he argued with such conviction — that it seemed to me that no learning or worldly wisdom could stand one's ground before his words. We conversed with him daily until midnight, and even later, of God's love, of eternity, of the salvation of souls, and of Christian living. From his lips flowed a ceaseless stream of sweet words! By these continual talks and by the prayers of the holy Elder the Lord returned me completely to the way of Truth, and I became a real Christian. I am indebted for all this to Father Herman he is my true benefactor."

"Several years ago," continues Yanovsky, "Father Herman converted a certain naval captain G. to Orthodoxy from the Lutheran Faith. This captain was well educated. Besides many sciences, he was well versed in languages. He knew Russian, English, German, French, Italian and also some Spanish. But for all this he could not resist the convictions and proofs of Father Herman. He changed his faith and was united to the Orthodox Church through Chrismation. When he was leaving America, the Elder said to him while they were parting, "Be on guard, if the Lord should take your wife from you then do not marry a German woman under any circumstance. If you do marry a German woman, undoubtedly she will damage your Orthodoxy." The Captain gave his word, but he failed to keep it. The warning of the Elder was prophetic. Indeed, after several years the Captain's wife did die, and he married a German woman. There is no doubt that his faith weakened or that he left it; for he died suddenly without penance."

Further on Yanovsky writes, "Once the Elder was invited aboard a frigate which came from St Petersburg. The Captain of the frigate was a highly educated man, who had been sent to America by order of the Emperor to make an inspection of all the colonies. There were more than twenty-five officers with the Captain, and they also were educated men. In the company of this group sat a monk of a hermitage, small in stature and wearing very old clothes. All these educated conversationalists were placed in such a position by his wise talks that they did not know how to answer him. The Captain himself used to say, 'We were lost for an answer before him.'

"Father Herman gave them all one general question: 'Gentlemen, What do you love above all, and what will each of you wish for your happiness?' Various answers were offered ... Some desired wealth, others glory, some a beautiful wife, and still others a beautiful ship he would captain; and so forth in the same vein. 'It is not true,' Father Herman said to them concerning this, 'that all your various wishes can bring us to one conclusion - that each of you desires that which in his own understanding he considers the best, and which is most worthy of his

love?' They all answered, 'Yes, that is so!' He then continued, 'Would you not say, Is not that which is best, above all, and surpassing all, and that which by preference is most worthy of love, the Very Lord, our Jesus Christ, who created us, adorned us with such ideals, gave life to all, sustains everything, nurtures and loves all, who is Himself Love and most beautiful of all men? Should we not then love God above every thing, desire Him more than anything, and search Him out?' "

All said, "Why, yes! That's self-evident!" Then the Elder asked, "But do you love God?" They all answered, "Certainly, we love God. How can we not love God?" "And I a sinner have been trying for more than forty years to love God, I cannot say that I love Him completely," Father Herman protested to them. He then began to demonstrate to them the way in which we should love God. "if we love someone," he said, "we always remember them; we try to please them. Day and night our heart is concerned with the subject. Is that the way you gentlemen love God? Do you turn to Him often? Do you always remember Him? Do you always pray to Him and fulfill His holy commandments?" They had to admit that they had not! "For our own good, and for our own fortune," concluded the Elder, "let us at least promise ourselves that from this very minute we will try to love God more than anything and to fulfill His Holy Will!" Without any doubt this conversation was imprinted in the hearts of the listeners for the rest of their lives.

"In general, Father Herman liked to talk of eternity, of salvation of the future life, of our destinies under God. He often talked on the lives of the Saints, on the Prologue, but he never spoke about anything frivolous. It was so pleasant to hear him that those who conversed with him, the Aleuts and their wives, were so captivated by his talks that often they did not leave him until dawn, and then they left him with reluctance;" thus witnesses the creole, Constantine Larionov.

A DESCRIPTION OF FATHER HERMAN Yanovsky writes a detailed description of Father Herman. "I have a vivid memory," he said, "Of all the features of the Elder's face reflecting goodness; his pleasant smile, his meek and attractive mien, his humble and quiet behavior, and his gracious word. He was short of stature. His face was pale and covered with wrinkles. His eyes were greyish-blue, full of sparkle, and on his head there were a few gray hairs. His voice was not powerful, but it was very pleasant." Yanovsky relates two incidents from his conversations with the Elder. "Once," he writes, "I read to Father Herman the ode, 'God,' by Derzhavin. The Elder was surprised, and entranced. He asked me to read it again. I read it once more, "Is it possible that a simple, educated man wrote this?" he asked. "Yes, a learned poet," I answered. "This has been written under God's inspiration," said the Elder.

THE MARTYRDOM OF PETER "On another occasion I was relating to him how the Spanish in California had imprisoned fourteen Aleuts, and how

the Jesuits were forcing all of them to accept the Catholic Faith. But this Aleut would not agree under any circumstances, saying, 'We are Christians.' The Jesuits protested, 'That's not true; you are heretics and schismatics. If you do not agree to accept our faith then we will torture all of you.' Then the Aleuts were placed in cells until evening; two to a cell. At night the Jesuits came to the prison with lanterns and lighted candles. They began to persuade the Aleuts in the cell once again to accept the Catholic Faith. 'We are Christians,' was the answer of the Aleuts, 'and we will not change our Faith.' Then the Jesuits began to torture them, at first the one while his companion was the witness. They cut the toes off his feet, first one joint and then the other joint. And then they cut the first joint on the fingers of the hands, and then the other joint. Afterwards they cut off his feet, and his hands; the blood flowed. The martyr endured all and steadfastly insisted on one thing: "I am a Christian.' In such suffering, he bled to death. The Jesuit promised to torture to death his comrades also on the next day.

But that night an order was received from Monterey stating that the imprisoned Aleuts were to be released immediately, and sent there under escort. Therefore, in the morning all were dispatched to Monterey with the exception of the martyred Aleut. This was related to me by a witness, the same Aleut who was the comrade of the tortured Aleut. Afterwards he escaped from imprisonment, and I reported this incident to the supreme authorities in St Petersburg. When I finished my story, Father Herman asked, 'And how did they call the martyred Aleut?' I answered, 'Peter; I do not remember his family name.' The Elder stood up before an icon reverently, made the sign of the Cross and pronounced, "Holy newly-martyred Peter, pray to God for us!"

THE SPIRIT OF FATHER HERMAN'S TEACHING In order to express the spirit of Father Herman's teaching, we present here a quotation from a letter that was written by his own hand.

"The empty years of these desires separate us from our heavenly homeland, and our Love for these desires and our habits clothe us, as it were, in an odious dress; it is called by the Apostle 'the external (earthly) man.' (I Corinthians 15:47). We who are wanderers in the journey of this life call to God for aid. We must divest ourselves of this repulsiveness, and put on new desires, and a new love for the coming age. Thus, through this we will know either an attraction or a repulsion for the heavenly homeland. It is possible to do this quickly, but we must follow the example of the sick, who wishing for desired health, do not stop searching for means of curing themselves. But I am not speaking clearly."

Not desiring anything for himself in life; long ago when he first came to America having refused, because of his humility, the dignity of hieromonk and archimandrite; and deciding to remain forever a common monk, Father Herman, without the least

fear before the, powerful, strove with all sincerity for God. With gentle love, and disregarding the person, he criticized many for intemperate living, for unworthy behavior, and for oppressing the Aleuts. Evil armed itself against him and gave him all sorts of trouble and sorrow. But God protected the Elder. The Administrator of the Colony, Yanovsky, not having yet seen Father Herman, after receiving one of those complaints, had already written to St Petersburg of the necessity of his removal. He explained that it seemed that he was arousing the Aleuts against the administration. But this accusation turned out to be unjust, and in the end Yanovsky was numbered among the admirers of Father Herman.

Once an inspector came to Spruce Island with the Administrator of the Colony N. and with company employees to search through Father Herman's call.

This party expected to find property of great value in Father Herman's call. But when they found nothing of value, an employee (of the American Company), Ponomarkhov, began to tear up the floor with an axe, undoubtedly with the consent of his seniors. Then Father Herman said to him, "My friend, you have lifted the axe in vain; this weapon shall deprive you of your life." Some time later people were needed at Fort Nicholas, and for that reason several Russian employees were sent there from Kodiak; among them was Ponomarkhov; there the natives of Kenai cut off his head while he slept.

St. Herman reposed on Spruce Island, December 13, 1837. He was canonized August 9, 1970. *From OCA.org*

In all cases let us hasten to humility; for the humble one lies on the ground, and where can one fall who lies on the ground? But it is evident that one who is in a high place easily falls.

SS Barsanuphius & John

The proud man thinks he can comprehend everything with his mind, but God does not grant this.

St. Silouan of Athos

December 13: Virgin Martyr Lucy of Syracuse

Saint Lucy was born in Syracuse, Sicily during the reign of Diocletian. She distributed her wealth to the poor, and made a vow of virginity. Since she refused to marry him, a rejected suitor denounced her to the prefect Paschasius as a Christian, and she was arrested. She was sentenced to be defiled in a brothel, but with God's help she preserved her purity.

Then the pagans attempted to burn her alive, but she was not harmed by the fire. Finally, she was killed by a sword thrust to the throat.

The name Lucy (Lucia) is derived for the Latin word for light (lux), and so she is often invoked for afflictions of the eyes. There is a tradition that she was blinded by her torturers, and the church of San Giovanni Maggiore in Naples even claims to possess her eyes.

The Way Of A Christian

St. Herman of Alaska

Without exalting myself to the rank of teacher, nonetheless, fulfilling my duty and obligation as an obedient servant for the benefit of my neighbor, I will speak my mind, founded on the commandments of Holy Scripture, to those who thirst and seek for their eternal heavenly homeland.

A true Christian is made by faith and love of Christ. Our sins do not in the least hinder our Christianity, according to the word of the Savior Himself. He said: I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance; there is more joy in heaven over one who repents than over ninety and nine just ones. Likewise concerning the sinful woman who touched His feet, He said to the Pharisee Simon: to one who has love, a great debt is forgiven, but from one who has no love, even a small debt will be demanded. From these judgments a Christian should bring himself to hope and joy, and not in the least accept the torment of despair. Here one needs the shield of faith.

Sin, to one who loves God, is nothing other than an arrow from the enemy in battle. The true Christian is a warrior fighting his way through the regiments of the unseen enemy to his heavenly homeland. According to the word of the Apostle, our homeland is in heaven; and about the warrior he says: we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places (Eph.6: 12)].

The vain desires of this world separate us from our homeland; love of them and habit clothe our soul as if in a hideous garment. This is called by the Apostles the outward man. We, traveling on the journey of this life and calling on God to help us, ought to be divesting ourselves of this hideous garment and clothing ourselves in new desires, in a new love of the age to come, and thereby to receive knowledge of how near or how far we are from our heavenly homeland. But it is not possible to do this quickly; rather one must follow the example of sick people, who, wishing the desired health, do not leave off seeking means to cure themselves.

Upcoming Events 2009-2010

- 24 December, Thursday, 5:30 p.m. Nativity Eve Vigil, 7:30 p.m. Holy Supper.
- 28 December – 2 January: 5th Annual Orthodox Service Retreat at St. George, Pharr, Texas, for teens and college-age adults.
- 23 January, 2010, North Texas Orthodox Mission (NTOM) Pre-Lenten Retreat at Holy Trinity with Fr. Joseph Honeycutt, 8:45 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.
- 13 February 2010, 6:00 p.m. Forgiveness Vespers, Great Lent Begins.
- 26-27 February 2010 Metropolitan Jonah visits.
- 4 April 2010, Holy Pascha, the Feast of Feasts.

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!