

The Confessor's Tongue for January 17, 2010

32nd Sunday After Pentecost; St. Anthony the Great

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.

January 17: St. Anthony the Great

Anthony was an Egyptian and was born in about the year 250. Following the death of his noble and wealthy parents, he divided the inherited estate with his sister, who was a minor, and made sure that she was cared for. Anthony distributed his half of the estate to the poor, and in his twentieth year he dedicated himself to the ascetic life for which he had yearned from his childhood. In the beginning, Anthony lived a life of asceticism near his village, but in order to flee the disturbance of people, he withdrew into the wilderness on the shore of the Red Sea. There he spent twenty years as a recluse, not associating with anyone except God. Through constant prayer, reflection, and contemplation, he patiently endured unspeakable temptations from the devil. His fame spread throughout the entire world, and many disciples gathered around him, whom he set on the path of salvation by his example and words.

During the eighty-five years of his ascetic life, only twice did he go to Alexandria: the first time to seek martyrdom during a time of persecution and the second time at the invitation of St. Athanasius the Great to refute the claim of the Arians that he, too, adhered to their heresy.

Anthony reposed at the age of 105, leaving behind an army of disciples and emulators. Even though Anthony was not a scholar, he was nevertheless a counselor and teacher of the most learned men of his time, as was St. Athanasius. When certain Greek philosophers tempted him with literary wisdom, Anthony shamed them with the question: "Which is older, the understanding or the book? Which of these two was the cause of the other?" Ashamed, the philosophers dispersed, for they perceived that they had only literary knowledge without understanding, whereas Anthony had understanding. Here is a man who attained perfection insofar as man, in general, can attain it on earth. Here is an instructor of instructors and a teacher of teachers, who for eighty-five years perfected himself; and it was only in that way that he was able to perfect many others. Filled with many years of life and great works, Anthony reposed in the Lord in the year 356. *from the Prologue*

Zacchaeus Sunday

This Sunday, on which the Gospel lesson recounting the story of the tax-collector Zacchaeus's encounter with Christ is read, marks the end of the sequence of Sundays numbered from Pentecost and alerts us that the following Sunday will see the opening of the *Triodion* and the beginning of the preparatory period before the Great Fast. On upcoming Sundays, the themes, taken from the Gospel reading for the day, are the Publican and Pharisee, the Prodigal Son, and the Last Judgment.

The Sayings of St. Anthony the Great

It has been said by Fr. Thomas Hopko that the full teaching of Christian life can be found in the sayings of St. Anthony the Great in the classic *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*. This series of reflections originally ran in 2006-7 when after the author heard the remark. We shall revisit these sayings in the weeks ahead. *Fr. Justin Frederick*

When Abba Anthony thought about the depth of the judgments of God, he asked, 'Lord, how is it that some die when they are young, while others drag to extreme old age? Why are there those who are poor and those who are rich? Why do wicked men prosper, and why are the just in need?' He heard a voice answering him, 'Anthony, keep your attention on yourself; these things are according to the judgment of God, and it is not to your advantage to know anything about them.'

Anthony Saying 2 in the *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*

Questions of this sort often trouble us in this life, either concerning ourselves or others. Why does a good, all-powerful God allow innocent children to die young? Why tidal waves? wars? earthquakes? famines? Why is the world such a mess? Some people dwell on such questions and lose their faith in God, or murmur and complain against Him.

Jesus was asked such a question. When a tower in Siloam fell and killed eighteen people, Jesus responded, "Think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Lk 13:4-5).

With this answer, Christ challenges a prevalent notion, that good people are rewarded in this life and evil people are punished. Such a thought would lead one to judge that those on whom the tower fell were more evil than others, and God had judged them accordingly. Jesus denies this, and from this we should learn that God's judgments are inscrutable. Why does He allow one person to live to ripe old age and to die peacefully in sleep, while permitting another to die young in a car accident, another to suffer horribly from cancer, or thousands to die suddenly in a terrorist attack or earthquake? We cannot say why, though we can say God's judgments are just. In this world, though, there is usually no connection clear to us between good and reward, evil and punishment. Often, the good suffer greatly while the wicked live in peace.

Christ accordingly warns us, that we, too, will likewise (suddenly, unexpectedly) perish unless we repent. Because of our sins, we are all under condemnation of death. There is no "innocent" on the face of the earth past the age of accountability. When we speak of "innocent" victims, we mean "innocent" so far as we know before the law of the land that they die not having been convicted of any crime. But before God, no flesh is innocent, no flesh will be justified. All are guilty, all stand in jeopardy of

death, and all need to repent. We have no guarantees that death will not find us before what we consider to be "our time" or before we are prepared for it.

We love to ask "why?", even to the point of subjecting God to our judgment. But as Anthony was told, so must we: it is most often not to our advantage to know why. We walk by faith, not by sight, and our faith is in the God who loves mankind so much that He became man and humbled Himself to an unjust, humiliating death at the hands of His rebellious people. We live by our faith in the Crucified One who demonstrates God's implacable love for man. We may not understand the particular sufferings of the race of man, but we know God loves us and is not indifferent to our suffering.

On Idle Curiosity

We all know the saying "Curiosity killed the cat." The cat, which is viewed as a curious creature sticking its nose into all matters, in this case did so to its disadvantage. We say this when our curiosity gets us into trouble, when it leads us not to mind our own business but that of others.

In his book *Path of Salvation*, St. Theophan the Recluse defines 'curiosity' as "an irresistible inclination to see and hear without purpose". It "consists of trying to know everything without order, without aim, without distinguishing whether it is needful or not" (pp. 54-55).

Curiosity is a gift from God. It helps us to live and learn in our world. Without curiosity, there would be little innovation, little advance of knowledge. Asking why things are this way and how they work and then investigating guided by such questions leads to much knowledge.

The curiosity that kills the cat and that of which St. Theophan writes might be termed "idle curiosity" to distinguish it from curiosity purposefully directed towards an end. "Idle curiosity" seeks to see and hear and know things without aim, without purpose, without need. It pokes its nose unabashedly into the business of others. The tabloids are full of material that panders to our idle curiosity. The internet and Google make indulging in idle curiosity easier than it has ever been.

Idle curiosity will inevitably get us, like the cat, into trouble. Curiosity properly used will bring us to knowledge of God.

Fr. Justin Frederick

On Offerings of Temple Wine & Oil

Another way of making offerings to God for the sake both of loved ones and enemies, both of the living and the departed, is offering wine or oil for use in the Church in their name.

Typically, those who make use of this custom remember loved ones on namedays, birthdays, or anniversaries, in time of blessing or in time of sickness, need, or danger. The departed may be remembered at any time, but especially at the anniversaries of their departure. For the living, we ask for God's blessing on them, particularly for their

health and salvation. For the departed, we ask blessed eternal memory (that God will ever know them and not say to them, "I don't know you").

Making an offering for others is a way to intensify our prayers for them. We demonstrate the importance of our request by making a material gift to God in addition to the words of prayer we offer. Making an offering for enemies or those who have wronged us can be especially effective for overcoming our anger, bitterness, and unforgiveness towards them. It is a way of fulfilling Christ's command, "Do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who despitefully use you and persecute you."

To make an offering, take a slip for it from the candle table and fill it out. Circle whether the offering is for oil (\$5) or wine (\$10), include the name of the person to be commemorated, your name, and the occasion of the offering. The offering itself may be left in the basket on the candle table. Gifts in kind may be brought also: regular olive oil or port wine. Please note that the number of names to be commemorated per offering should normally be limited to one person or a family. If you have questions, see Fr. Justin.

Please take a moment to pray for those for whom temple wine and oil are offered when you see their names in the bulletin, or pray for them throughout the week.

The offering of temple wine and oil has been a sporadic practice here at St. Maximus

Upcoming Events 2010

- 20-21 January: Feast of St. Maximus Vigil 7:00 p.m., Divine Liturgy 9:00 a.m.
- 22 January, 5:30 p.m. A new class will be offered most Friday evenings: a reading and discussion of the abridged version of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago*. This class could be titled "A Preparation for Martyrdom", for besides the historical and literary interest of Solzhenitsyn's work, he gives us important insight as to how we might stand in the face of unjust persecution.
- 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.
- 29 January, Friday: Open House at Rectory, 6:00 p.m.
- 6-7 February: Elder Zacharias of St. John's Monastery, Essex, England at St. Serapim's & Sava's: Saturday morning at St Serapim's 7:00 Liturgy, 9:30 Talk with Q&A; St. Sava's 5:00 p.m. Vespers, 6:00 Talk with Youth. Highly recommended!
- 14 February 2010, 6:00 p.m. Forgiveness Vespers, Great Lent Begins. If you attend this parish, you should consider this service to be mandatory.
- 26-27 February 2010 Metropolitan Jonah visits.
- 4 April 2010, Holy Pascha, the Feast of Feasts.

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!