

The Confessor's Tongue for May 16, 2010

Seventh Sunday of Pascha: Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council

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.

The Sayings of St. Anthony the Great

Some brothers came to find Abba Anthony to tell him about the visions they were having, and to find out from him if they were true or if they came from the demons. They had a donkey which died on the way. When they reached the place where the old man was, he said to them before they could ask him anything, 'How was it that the little donkey died on the way here?' They said, 'How do you know about that, Father?' And he told them, 'The demons showed me what happened.' So they said, 'That was what we came to question you about, for fear we were being deceived, for we have visions which often turn out to be true.' Thus the old man convinced them, by the example of the donkey, that their visions came from the demons. Saying 12 in The Sayings of the Desert Fathers

Commentary: The devil is a "liar and the father of lies", but he and his demons will often mislead men, setting them up for greater deception by telling them the truth to get them to put initial trust in him and by appealing to their vanity. His program for man is nothing "but to kill, to steal, and destroy". That a vision turns out to be true is no guarantee that it is from God. Because of the danger of deception, we are instructed to disregard dreams and visions. We are to seek God, not visions. Sometimes the demons even foretell the future, which is generally a matter of curiosity to men. St. Anthony explains that they do not know the things that do not yet exist; rather, they see things beginning to happen and run on ahead to tell it to those who have not yet seen, thus appearing to tell the future. Sometimes even those 'predictions' fail as things turn out differently from the initial indication.

Fr. Justin Frederick

Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council

Devoting this Sunday to the memory of the Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council, the Holy Church sings:

Let us, the pious assembly of true believers, celebrate today in prayerful memory the God-bearing Fathers from every part of the world who assembled in the brilliant city of the Nicaea. For these pious wise ones put down the godless teachings of the terrible Arius, and expelled him from the unity of the Catholic Church, and clearly taught everyone to profess their faith in the consubstantial and coeternal Son of God, existing before the ages, expressing this clearly in the symbol of faith.

The heresy of Arius was one of the most destructive heresies. It denied the divinity of the Son of God, i.e. that main doctrine of Christianity on which all our faith and the whole Church of Christ is founded, which makes it the unique basis for all hope of our salvation. The Holy Fathers at the First Ecumenical Council laid down the Orthodox teaching in opposition to Arius' error, establishing it universally. And the Holy Church glorifies these same

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Holy Fathers of Nicaea on the Sunday after the Ascension because the most glorious Ascension of the Lord serves as clear proof of the inseparable connection of the two natures in Jesus Christ, the divine and the human.

May 16: St. Theodore the Sanctified

Born in Egypt of wealthy Christian parents and "wise from youth" Venerable Theodore was not greatly interested in earthly subjects, but aspired to the heights above the earthly. Exercising himself in prayer, abstinence and the asceticism of piety, he dared to leave his parental blood and refused the care of father and mother, he secretly first of all ran away to one of the Egyptian monasteries, but he entered the Tabennesis Monastery of Venerable Pachomius the Great. Neither youth, nor the belief of his parents and relatives, nor any kind of hope for the well-being and joys of earthly life distracted him from his chosen way. His mother, having found the location of her son, came to ask her son to return home, but "in unbowed virtue" Theodore refused to see his mother, not considering her tears or her request. Then his mother herself left the world and settled in the monastery founded by the sister of St. Pachomius. Abiding in the obedience of Ven. Pachomius, Ven. Theodore, after the death of his guide, was elected the rector of the monastery where, "piously passing through" "the bright way of life pleasing to God" died at an extreme old age in 368.

The Prayer of an Orthodox Christian

What level did the saints reach?

"There is a loftier prayer of the perfect, a certain rapture of mind, a complete detachment from everything felt with the senses, when through unutterable groanings of the spirit man becomes closer to God, who sees the heart open like a book and expressing its will through innumerable images." (St. Nilus of Sinai, *Philokalia*)

In this form of prayer, which is impossible for the mind alone to attain, one's whole being enters into blessed and ceaseless repentance.

Does Holy Scripture provide any examples of oral prayer addressing God with the heart and mind together?

The Savior Himself, entering His great moment of trial as He and the disciples were heading to the Garden of Gethsemane, gave us an example of prayer aloud: *And when thy had sung a hymn, they went out into the Mount of Olives* (Matt 26:30). The Lord gave thanks to God the Father in the hearing of all when He had raised Lazarus (John 6:41-42). Likewise, St. Anna, the mother of the prophet Samuel, prayed with her lips: *Now Anna, she spake in her heart; only her lips moved; then Eli answered and said, Go in peace, and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of Him... I*

Kings 1:13-18. *By Him, therefore, let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His name* (Hebrews 13:15).

How do we learn to pray with our lips, and then with our mind?

1. If our childhood habits have been forgotten, then it is possible to learn to pray aloud (that is, step onto the first level of prayer) by using a prayerbook and paying close attention to the standard Church prayers. "The church wisely established hymns and various troparia on account of the weakness of our mind, so that we, although foolish, might be attracted by the sweetness of the singing and thus praise God even against our will" (St. Peter of Damascus). The Church accepted hymns and troparia so that we would be humbled and rise to excellent thoughts as if upon a ladder.

2. Christ's teaching demands that our faith and our way of living be inseparable. For this reason, every Christian, in order to live in constant prayer, must have a daily order of prayer; that is, to establish under the guidance of a spiritual father a prayer rule. As St. Augustine said, "Once we were cleansed by baptism; but every day by prayer."

3. "Every established prayer, be it for home or church use, merely imparts to prayer an outer form; the soul or essence of prayer, however, is born by every person within, in the mind and heart. Our entire cycle of church prayers, as well as every prayer designed for home use, is filled with invocations to God...it is impossible to argue with the fact that mental prayer is necessary for all Christians; and if it is necessary, then no one can say that it is impossible, for God does not force us to do the impossible. That it is difficult—certainly. But then everything worth doing is difficult; and all the more so should prayer be, since it is the source of everything good in our lives...(St. Theophan the Recluse, *Letters to Various Persons*, Letter 66).

The Kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force (Matt. 11:12).

What is the practical significance of a prayer rule?

"A prayer rule is an arrangement of several prayers written by holy and God-inspired Fathers, which are adapted to a specific time and circumstances" (St. Ignatius Brianchaninov).

"The purpose of a rule is to increase the number of prayerful thoughts and feelings...and so that they be correct, holy, and perfectly pleasing to God." "The soul, left to her own devices, would not be able to follow the correct path of prayer. She would become distorted: either through daydreaming, or through illusions of lofty visions, inspired by vainglory."

"Thus, the soul, filled and nurtured by prayerful thoughts and feelings selected from a ready-made prayerbook, begins of its own accord to live these thoughts and feelings" (St. Theophan).

How long should a prayer rule be?

The rule of prayer is for the person, not the person for the rule. When determining a rule, it is necessary to adapt it to, and not exceed, the individual's strength. A rule is meant to further spiritual advancement, and not to serve as an excuse for self-opinion. "It is better to alter parts of a rule, or even invent an entirely new one, lest prayer become a mere ritual" (St. Theophan).

"I prefer a brief rule that is continually performed to a long rule that is quickly abandoned: (St. Matoes, *Alphabetical Patericon of Scetis*).

"In the day of His judgment, God will not condemn us for leaving off psalms or abandoning prayers, but for allowing demons to enter us because we ceased our rule" (St. Isaac the Syrian, Homily 71).

From "How to Live a Holy Life" What To Do During Sleeplessness at Night

If you cannot fall asleep for a long time after you go to bed, then, after lying down, try to imagine the Lord Jesus Christ in His sufferings on the cross and pray to Him in our heart about everything that comes into your heart: pray that the Lord God may deliver you and your family from all sins, from every evil will, and from every sinful impurity, from every deadly plague, from hunger, from lightning and storms, from sudden death, and especially from eternal death.

Pray that the Lord God may bring all sinners to heartfelt repentance and correction, that He may give to His Church faithful pastors who will zealously care for its purity, firmness, and glory; that He may subdue the enemies of His Church and persuade everyone of its purity and holiness, and that He may dispose everyone to sincere acceptance of its truth and principles.

Or try to imagine yourself at your death and think something like this: "If I were to die right now, what would become of me...? Now I lie in bed and find it annoying that I have not been able to fall asleep; but how hard will it be to lie in hell if I go there because of my sins. In hell there is never any sleep, not even for a moment."

When you happen to wake up in the night, always turn your thoughts immediately to the Lord God, taking care lest some foolish thought enter your heart, signing yourself with the sign of the Cross.

If you still do not sleep, it is better to get out of bed, stand before the holy icons, and read psalms with full attention, make full prostrations, or do prostrations with the Jesus Prayer until you are tired and peace enters your soul and you can go to bed.

Upcoming Events 2010

- 22 May Saturday, 10:00 a.m. Baptisms (Moses, Davis, Betz, Evangeline Lyda); 5:00 p.m. Vigil for Pentecost
- 23 May Sunday, Holy Pentecost, Kneeling Prayers
- 29 May, Saturday 2:00 p.m. Baptism of Thomas Jackson
- 30 May, Sunday, Pre-Memorial Day Picnic, 3:00 p.m.

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!