

The Confessor's Tongue for June 6, 2010

2nd Sunday After Pentecost: All Saints of North America

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: Insults

The brothers praised a monk before Abba Anthony. When the monk came to see him, Anthony wanted to know how he would bear insults, and seeing that he could not bear them at all, he said to him, "You are like a village magnificently decorated on the outside, but destroyed from within by robbers."

Saying 15 in *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*

Commentary: Outward appearances can be deceiving, and oft men praise and are impressed for weak cause. Here a monk had impressed some of the brethren in the desert. No doubt he fasted more strictly than most, prayed longer, prostrated more frequently, knew more scriptures by heart, lived more austerely. The brethren were taken in by these outward signs of possible sanctity and praised him. St. Anthony was not taken in, but tested him by offering insults and found him far from perfect when he thereby was grieved and angered.

Like St. Silouan's test of love for enemies, the insult test is an important one for distinguishing between those who are nearing perfection and those who yet have far to go, regardless of how good they otherwise appear (tests we normally apply to ourselves only, not intentionally to others). To bear insults well, without grief or anger, i.e., with meekness, is an important mark of true sanctity.

An insult intentionally or unintentionally degrades the object of it, reduces its worth, "puts it down," creates a sense of psychological hurt. Thus a person feels insulted when others in their words or actions do not accord him the respect or recognition he thinks he merits, delivering a blow to his sense of self-respect and self-worth. The common response to insult is anger or grief, a feeling of being hurt.

The Christian is to bear insults without hurt or anger because he knows that God is the only judge and that human judgments are usually mistaken. Moreover, he has gained humility, so he can respond in accordance with the Stoic philosopher Epictetus' advice:

"If you are told that such an one speaks ill of you, make no defense against what was said, but answer, 'He surely knew not my other faults, else he would not have mentioned these only!'"

Knowing his own sins, the Christian accepts the sting of insult as a deserved correction and means of acquiring humility.

Knowing that God is the only judge, the Christian learns to indifferent both to insult and to praise (which generally is more dangerous spiritually).

"A brother came to see Abba Macarius the Egyptian and said to him, 'Abba, give me a word, that I may be saved.' So the old man said, 'Go to the cemetery and abuse the dead.' The brother went there, abused them, and threw stones at them; then he returned and told the old man about it. The latter

said to him, 'Didn't they say anything to you?' he replied, 'No.' The old man said, 'God back tomorrow and praise them.' So the brother went away and praised them, calling them 'Apostles, saints, and righteous men.' He returned to the old man and said to him, 'I have complimented them.' And the old man said to him, 'Did they not answer you?' The brother said, 'No.' The old man said to him, 'You know how you insulted them and they did not reply, and how you praised them and they did not speak; so you too, if you wish to be saved, must do the same and become a dead man. Like the dead, take no account of either the scorn of men or their praises, and you can be saved.'"

Those who learn to bear insult patiently must still learn to bear the greater challenge of praise, which, by feeding vainglory and pride, poses a subtler and greater danger. The Christian is called to be as indifferent to both as the dead are.

If we find ourselves oft insulted, we may gain great benefit. Abba Isaiah said, 'Nothing is so useful to the beginner as insults. The beginner who bears insults is like a tree that is watered every day.' Here is a stiff test of faith, of love, of forgiveness; a compulsion to pray for those persecuting with words in accordance with Christ's command to pray for and do good to those who speak ill of us. Here, too, is a powerful antidote to pride and vainglory, to our inclination to think more highly of ourselves than we should.

Abba Agathon of the Desert Fathers offers us an example of bearing insults. "It was said concerning Abba Agathon that some monks came to find him having heard tell of his great discernment. Wanting to see if he would lose his temper, they said to him, 'Aren't you that Agathon who is said to be a fornicator and an proud man?' 'Yes, it is very true,' he answered. They resumed, 'Aren't you that Agathon who is always talking nonsense?' 'I am.' Again they said, 'Aren't you Agathon the heretic?' But at that he replied, 'I am not a heretic.' So they asked him, 'Tell us why you accepted everything we cast you, but repudiated this last insult?' He replied, 'The first accusations I take to myself, for that is good for my soul. But heresy is separation from God. Now I have not wish to be separated from God.' At this saying, they were astonished at his discernment and returned, edified."

Some people rather than struggling with their response to real insult, are quick to find insult where none is intended. Such readily turn a compliment "You look nice today" into an insult "You're saying I look bad on other days." Here the deadly thoughts are produced by reading between the lines. This habit must be cut off, or the person will become a torment both to himself and to everyone else. Needless to say, to be finding insult in this fashion is spiritually destructive.

Fr. Justin Frederick

The Prayer of the Third Hour

O Lord who at the third hour didst send down Thine all-holy Spirit upon thine apostles, take not the Same from us, O Good One, but renew Him in us who pray unto Thee.

At the third hour, according to Acts 2, the Holy Spirit descended upon the waiting Apostles in the upper room in tongues of fire and with the noise of a rushing wind. His descent transformed them. No longer a cowardly, doubting, confused, fearful band of followers, they became bold, courageous, confident in faith and went out to turn the world upside down.

The service of the Third Hour recalls this descent of the Spirit at Pentecost. It does not however, permit us to dwell in the fond recollection of events long past but calls us to participate in the same actively. We remember the historical event that we might be aware of the same Spirit in us given at Baptism and to be renewed in Him.

Though we contain the heavenly treasure, we as earthly vessels leak. Through our sins and indifference and forgetfulness, we quench and grieve the Spirit so that He withdraws—not leaving us, but being still and quiet. He requires a holy and willingly submitted vessel in which to operate, and if we defile ourselves or resist, He withdraws. Hence, we have nearly a constant need to be renewed in the Spirit, to have His presence and power renewed and made manifest afresh in us. That renewal requires our humility, our repentance, our desire, our choice. The Spirit will not use us unwilling and uncleansed.

Hence, we come to Confession, confessing ours in sins in humility. We come to Holy Communion to have Christ's blood which washes away our sins applied to us and thereby to be renewed. We seek to preserve that grace given until our next Communion (but how quickly in practice do we squander it, frequently before the day is out)

The prayer not only recognizes our need for renewal in the Spirit, but also the danger of so grieving the Spirit that He departs. When the temple in Jerusalem was completed and dedicated, the glory of God descended upon it as a cloud so that those gathered and ministering could not stand. God's presence had descended and He now dwelt among His people in the Holy Place. Centuries later, the Prophet Ezekiel saw a vision in which the Spirit progressively left the Holy of Holies, the Holy Place, the temple building, and finally the outer court and departed. So, too, we, grateful for the great gift given us, should conduct ourselves with fear lest we so grieve the Spirit by our incorrigibility and resistance and impurity that He be taken from us.

The preventative is not to dwell on exactly what this means and at what point it might happen. The point is that we abide in Christ, holding fast to His gift, seeking constantly to be renewed in the Spirit, praying this prayer and "O Heavenly King" with zeal and compunction that the Spirit would ever be with us and manifest His power and presence to us. "O Heavenly King, Comforter, Spirit of Truth, who art

everywhere present and fillest all things, Treasury of good things and Giver of life: come and abide in us, cleanse us from every stain, and save our souls, O Good One." *Fr. Justin Frederick*

From Epictetus

The Stoic philosopher Epictetus (A.D. 55-135), although a pagan, has much to say that may profit us. Here is a selection:

Exceed due measure, and the most delightful things become the least delightful.

No man is free who is not master of himself.

Let no man think that he is loved by any who loveth none.

At feasts, remembering that you are entertaining two guests, body and soul. What you give to the body, you presently lose; what you give to the soul, you keep forever.

It is a shame that one who sweetens his drink with the gifts of the bee, should embitter God's gift Reason with vice.

Freedom is the name of virtue: Slavery, of vice . . . None is a slave whose acts are free.

Laughter should not be much, nor frequent, nor unrestrained.

Remember that thou art an actor in a play, and of such sort as the Author chooses, whether long or short. If it be his good pleasure to assign thee the part of a beggar, a ruler, or a simple citizen, thine it is to play it fitly. For thy business is to act the part assigned thee, well: to choose it, is another's.

Banquets of the unlearned and of them that are without, avoid. But if you have occasion to take part in them, let not your attention be relaxed for a moment, lest you slip after all into evil ways. For you may rest assured that be a man ever so pure himself, he cannot escape defilement if his associates are impure.

Asked, "Who is the rich man?" Epictetus replied, "He who is content."

My brother ought not to have treated me thus.' True: but he must see to that. However he may treat me, I must deal rightly by him. This is what lies with me, what none can hinder.

If a man has frequent intercourse with others, either in the way of conversation, entertainment, or simple familiarity, he must either become like them, or change them to his own fashion. A live coal placed next a dead one will either kindle that or be quenched by it. Such being the risk, it is well to be cautious in admitting intimacies of this sort, remembering that one cannot rub shoulders with a soot-stained man without sharing the soot oneself.

Upcoming Events 2010

31 May – 28 June Apostles Fast

4, 11 July: Fr. Justin gone; Fr. Christopher Allen here

1-15 August: Dormition Fast

6 September: Labor Day Picnic

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!