

# The Confessor's Tongue for January 25, A. D. 2015

33<sup>rd</sup> Sunday After Pentecost; St. Gregory Theologian; New Martyrs of Russia

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**

*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" (Luke 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 and His burning desire to save 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 and will save us through them.

*To reflect further on St. Anthony's point, consider the following:*

## **A Narrative on the Manifold Judgments of God** *St. Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain*

A certain abba of the monastics, with great boldness and with tears, asked God that He reveal to him some of His judgments on men: judgments which they do not recognize, but mistake for extraordinary events. For a long time, God did not show him anything (for men can never fully know and understand the mysteries of God), but the ascetic did not cease from that prayer day and night. One day, God, wishing to satisfy fully the monk's prayer, put into his heart the thought that he visit an ascetic elder who lived a many-days' journey away.

As the ascetic began his journey, God sent an angel in the form of a young monk, who met the elder and greeted him, "Bless, Father." The elder answered, "May God give you forgiveness, child." And the angel said to the elder, "Where do you go, Abba?" The elder said, "I go to see such-and-such, an ascetic." The angel exclaimed, "I also go there; let us two go in company."

They walked on together until a pious man took them into his home, and, at dinner, he brought a silver platter to the table. When they were about to depart the next morning, the angel took the platter, tossed it into the air, and it disappeared. The elder was troubled at seeing this, but he said nothing.

The second day, they journeyed until they raised the dust in another village, where a very pious Christian was friendly and hospitable to the travellers. He had an only son, whom he brought for the monks to pray over and bless. But when they were to continue their journey, the angel suddenly grasped the child by the neck and strangled him. The elder, seeing this, was shaken and astonished, but he stood silent.

And walking on, the third day they rested in another place, but because they found no one to

receive them, they sat in a courtyard. The courtyard had a wall that was leaning over and about to fall. The angle loosened the stones by pounding and tore it down; then he rebuilt it from the foundation.

At this, the elder could bear it no longer and cried out: "I adjure you by the Most High God, tell me the truth! What are these things you have done? These works are not human works." The angel asked, "What did I do?" The elder said, "Yesterday and the day before, those lovers of Christ received us and were hospitable to us; you took the silver platter of the one, tossed it into the air, and it disappeared; you strangled the son of the other; we come here, and they did not give us any consolation or hospitality, but you took hold and built and benefited them."

The angel said to him: "Hearken, Abba, and I shall reveal the truth of these matters. The first one who received us is a God-loving and righteous man, and he manages and governs his property according to God. But that silver platter was an inheritance from an iniquitous person, and, so that he would not lose the wages of the righteous, God ordered that I destroy it, so his hospitality would be pure and without guile. And the other one who was hospitable to us is pious and a man of excellent virtues, but if his son had lived, he would have become an instrument of Satan and done many things to bring the works of his father to oblivion. Because of this, God appointed that he die while he was still young, so that his soul and his father's be saved."

"You have done well in all these things," the elder responded, "but what have you to say about here?"

The angel answered, "Know, Abba, about this also. The householder of this courtyard is a wicked man and iniquitous. He would do wickedness to many, but he cannot because of his poverty. His grandfather, when he built the wall, hid much money in it. If I had allowed it to continue falling over, that malicious man whose domain it is would have tumbled it down in order to rebuild it. Thus he would find the treasure and use it for his wicked desires and the harm of men. God has a time when He will reveal it to a man who will use it for good works.

"These are some of the judgments of God, which you sought to learn. Therefore, go to your cell and be not concerned about the things of the world, as to how and why they are done, because the judgments of God are a great abyss. As the prophet said, 'His ways are unsearchable and beyond understanding,' and man cannot know all things with exactness. Therefore, Abba, believe that God is just and does not do any iniquity, but that all He permits to be done is righteously done."

Having heard these things from the angel, the ascetic glorified God and returned to his cell and no longer made inquiries into anything.

*copyright © George Rallis, 1982*

### **January 25: St. Gregory the Theologian**

St. Gregory was born about 326-328 in Arianzus near Nazianzus in Cappadocia where his father was at first the town mayor and then Bishop (see Jan. 1). As the son of promise, St. Gregory was dedicated to God from his very childhood by his own pious mother Nonna and very early began to find love for the ascetics of piety and remained as a virgin all his life.

At first he received his formation in Neocaesarea from Amphilocius, the famous teacher of rhetoric, then in Alexandria and, finally, in Athens where he became friends with St. Basil the Great. The saintly friends in Athens had a single room and one way of life. Only two roads were known to them: one is to the holy temples and the trainers in the Word of God and the other is to the school where they heard the teachers of the external sciences. They did not know the streets leading to the shows, considering them unworthy of their attention

and which does not lead to virtue. In 356 St. Gregory was baptized and with no less zeal continued to study the

Holy Scriptures and practice the asceticism of meditation on God, fasting and prayer.

The desert strongly attracted St. Gregory, but he decided to remain in the home of his parents to personally serve them and at the same time to live as a strict ascetic. His clothes were rough, he ate bread with salt, drank water, his bed was the bare ground and his regular occupation was exercise in the Word of God.

Known for his special love for his parents and always treating them with true filial respect and moving care, St. Gregory, at the insistence of his father, was ordained a presbyter. Being weighed down with this rank, which he did not want; St. Gregory left for the desert to St. Basil the Great. Having returned from there reconciled in soul, he also began to reconcile others: he reconciled the Nazianzians to his father, who according to them signed a clever symbol of faith of the half-Arian.

In 372 St. Basil the Great used a few strong measures to incline his friend to accept the rank of bishop. St. Gregory considered himself, in deep humility, unworthy of this dignity, but, convinced by his father and although not willingly, accepted from St. Basil consecration as the bishop of the city of Sasima. Meanwhile due to the intrigues of the enemies of St. Basil, another bishop was assigned to Sasima and St. Gregory conceded the Sasimian See to him.

The father of Gregory, feeling his infirmity, made St. Gregory his assistant, and St. Gregory, sharing the episcopal labors of his father, preached the Word of God and enlightened the presbyters. Together with this lovingness and special feelings of tenderness, St. Gregory was a feeder of the needy, minister of the sick, repose of strangers, comfort of those living in misery and protector of the unfortunate. After the

death of his father, St. Gregory left for solitude in the Seleucian Monastery of St. Thecla.

In 379 St. Gregory, as most experienced in the affairs of faith, was invited by the Orthodox to Constantinople where the heretics dominated for forty six years for the building up of the church. St. Gregory could preach only in one private house when he was in the capital, and at first only before a small number of the Orthodox. Observing in the Orthodox a tendency for excessive talk and disputes on the subjects of faith, St. Gregory tried to convince them of how useless these debates were and that far more important was the fulfillment of the commandments of God for those interested to be confirmed in the lofty truths of the faith.

At the same time St. Gregory with his irresistible power of persuasiveness seeded all the objections of the heretics (Arians, Eunomians, Macedonians, Novatians and Apollinarians) and with inimitable skill revealed the true teaching of the Church. As the inhabitants of the capital, enemies of Orthodoxy, being seduced only by the external glamour of luxury, at first looked contemptuously at the holy elder, stooping under the burden of years, with his simple and poor clothes, his bare head and his face exhausted by tears of repentance. They laughed at his origins from an unknown poor village. St. Gregory with the power of his mind and eloquence turned to shame the malicious attacks of his enemies. The fame of the inspired orator grew quickly and his sermons flowed out for the heretics, but also Jews and Pagans, to hear. He surprised all with his profound knowledge of Holy Scripture, with right judgment and authority, with fruitful and brilliant expression, with warmth and depth of feeling, with an unusual easiness of explanations and precise and concise speech. The hearers were agitated like rough seas about the cathedra as he preached, loudly expressing signs of approval by applause and exclamation, and they wrote down his words. Fierce and persistent enemies of Orthodoxy slandered Gregory for this; rushing with sticks among his hearers, they tried to disperse them with threats; they roused the people against him; they extended their hatred even to threaten the life of St. Gregory. But the courageous advocate of Orthodoxy took all this with remarkable calmness and patience and, disregarding the danger that threatened the entire Orthodox world at that time, he did not lose courage, but courageously and incessantly continued to be on guard for the faith of the Orthodox, as "the most respectable shepherd".

The very private life of St. Gregory involuntarily inspired special respect for him even by his fierce enemies. He frequented neither public assemblies nor the chambers of the aristocrats; he ate little food, wore poor clothes, did not engage in the intrigues of secular society, avoided every external limelight, and did not change the simplicity of his manner even after the unusual success which crowned his labors in building up of the holy actions of the Church.

"Preserving the flock in tranquility" with his "unsinkable ark of orations", he "with the streams of wise teaching dried up the mind of Arius" and over all "taught that the Trinity is to be worshipped in a way pleasing to God".

In 381 at the Second Ecumenical Council St. Gregory was assigned to the see of Constantinople and presided over the Council after the death of Meletius of Antioch. Meanwhile other bishops began to challenge the assignment of St. Gregory to the see. The humbly wise, gentle and peace loving Gregory offered himself for peace in the Church and asked the bishops who have gathered at the Council Cathedral to dismiss him from Constantinople.

The rest of his life (about eight years) St. Gregory spent in his native land. Continuing to care about Church affairs and with the struggle against the heretics in writing, St. Gregory led a strict ascetic way of life: he walked barefooted, wore only tattered clothes, slept on the bare ground or on a bed made from wood branches under the covering of sackcloth and never lit a fire that warms the body; bread with salt and garden vegetables served him for food and water in which he sometimes added a little vinegar served him for drink. The holy ascetic extended his deprivations even to sometimes refuse to use his gift for speaking. He kept such a vow of silence during one of the Holy Forty Day fasts.

St. Gregory was honored by the Church for his sermons with the name of Theologian similarly to the Holy Apostle and Evangelist John: St. Gregory in his research of true Christianity, in the light of the book of Revelation, so deeply comprehended and expressed so fully and precisely the depths of the Divinity as only as this is possible for a human being.

Five Theological Orations, Panegyrics on Saints, Festal Orations on the Feasts, defensive and accusatory orations and besides these, dogmatic treatises and historical sketches and verses distinguished with lofty poetry came down to us.

In 389 St. Gregory died. In church hymnography he is glorified, as "the advocate of piety" "the sower of the all-wonderful right teaching, the driver away of those very much holding the strongest heretical opinions", "great teacher of the Church of Christ", "the bright candlestick of the universe, the glory of Orthodoxy".

In 950 his relics were transferred from Nazianzus to Constantinople. Part of them was transferred to Rome.

*Bulgakov Handbook, Fr. Eugene Tarris, translator.*

### **How to Greet a Nun or Abbess**

*Protopresbyter Alexander Lebedeff*

1) In the Russian Church: Only tonsured nuns are addressed as "Mother"—the others are addressed as "Sister." This is exactly the same as the practice regarding monks, who are called "Father" only if tonsured. The clue is whether they wear the "klobuk"—the cylindrical black hat with the veil—if

they wear a klobuk, they are called "Father" or "Mother." The problem with this clue is that the klobuk is worn only in church or at formal occasions—the rest of the time monks and nuns wear "skufias"—soft, usually velvet, pointy hats. Abbesses, of course, are always addressed as "Mother"—in Russian, the greeting is usually the diminutive "Matushka" [pronounced with accent on the first syllable].

2) Only Abbesses (or in rare cases their chief assistants) can wear a pectoral cross. Laypeople should approach an Abbess for a blessing the same as they would a Priest—they bow and hold their hands, palms up, right over left—and after receiving the blessing (which the Abbess makes holding her fingers the same as when one makes the sign of the cross—not the "Name of the Lord" configuration of fingers used by priests when blessing)—they kiss the Abbess's hand.

3) When a Priest greets an Abbess, he blesses her as usual, but they kiss each other's hand, exactly as two Priests meeting (or two Bishops) do. Abbesses stand in a throne and hold their staff, which looks like a Bishop's staff, except it is made of wood.

4) In her convent, the Abbess is the Rector. The Priests who serve in the convent do nothing without her knowledge and blessing. The serving Priest bows to the Abbess when beginning the services, and he censes her before anyone else. The Abbess is commemorated by name at all the major litanies and at the Great Entrance. In many ways, the Abbess is given respect by the serving clergy similar to that given to Bishops present at the service, except that she is censed only three times, not three-times-three.

5) Abbesses can enter the altar at any time. In larger convents, certain nuns are appointed by the Abbess (with the approval of the Bishop) to enter the altar to maintain it and the vestments of the clergy, and even to assist the serving priest if no male altar servers are available—but it should be known that other nuns cannot enter the altar. Nuns appointed to help in the altar are usually chosen from those who have been in the convent from a young age.

The Russian approach is usually rather easy: if they're wearing a pectoral cross, you can get a blessing from them. Unless, of course, they're outside of the church and not wearing their cross...

### **Why Do We Worship Toward the East?**

We worship towards the East in conformity with unwritten apostolic Tradition (in other words, it is not recorded in the Scriptures) for three reasons.

First, Christ is Light, the Sun of Righteousness, and the Dayspring from on high. Just as the Sun rises in the East to enlighten a darkened world, so Christ enters the dark world to bring us light.

Second, Eden was planted in the East. When man sinned, he was expelled. We worship towards the East in recognition of our loss of Paradise and our desire to return thereto.

Third, we await the coming of the Lord from the East, as it is written 'just as the lightning flashes from the east to the west, so shall the coming of the Son of man be.'

As man is composed of a visible and an invisible nature, so all our worship has visible and invisible aspects: we sing with our lips and our spirit; we are baptized with water and the spirit; we partake of the Mysteries bodily and in the grace of the Spirit. So the visible worship towards the East has its spiritual side too.

### **St. Nicholas of Zicha** From *Prayers by the Lake*

**Are there days** gone by, O man, to which you would wish to return? They all attracted you like silk, and now remain behind you like a cobweb. Like honey they greeted you, like stench you bade them farewell. All were totally filled with illusion and sin.

See how all the pools of water in the moonlight resemble mirrors; and how all the days that were lit up with you levity resemble mirrors. But as you stepped from one day to the next, the false mirrors cracked like thin ice, and you waded through the water and mud.

Can a day that has a morning and an evening as doorways be a day?

O luminous Lord, my soul is burdened with illusions and longs for one day—for the day without doorways, the day from which my soul has departed and sunk into the shifting shadows—for Your day, which I used to call my day, when I was one with You.

Is there any happiness gone by, O man, to which you would wish to return? Of two morsels of the same sweetness, the second is the more trite. You would turn your head away in boredom from yesterday's happiness, if it were set out on today's table.

Moments of happiness are given to you only in order to leave you longing for true happiness in the bosom of the every-happy Lord; and ages of unhappiness are given to you, to waken you out of the drowsy dream of illusions.

O Lord, Lord, my only happiness, will You provide shelter for Your injured pilgrim?

O Lord, my ageless youth, my eyes shall bathe in You and shine more radiantly than the sun.

You carefully collect the tears of the righteous, and with them You rejuvenate worlds.

### **Upcoming Events 2015**

2 February: Meeting of the Lord in the Temple

22 February: Forgiveness Sunday. Forgiveness Vespers, 6:00 p.m. All members should plan now on attending this service.

12 April: Holy Pascha, Feast of Feasts

**GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!**