

# The Confessor's Tongue for February 1, A. D. 2015

Sunday of the Publican and Pharisee: Prefeast of the Meeting, Martyr Tryphon

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.

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## Opening of the Triodion

Today, the Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee, marks the opening of the *Lenten Triodion*, the liturgical book that largely replaces the *Octoechos* (Book of the Eight Tones) during the Great Fast. This means that we are entering the period before the Great Fast in which we prepare for the Fast.

We begin singing "Open to Me to Doors of Repentance" at Vigil as well as hymns that reflect on the Parable of the Publican and Pharisee and the example therein for us to follow. This coming week, in preparation for the Fast, is a fast-free week.

If you do not usually attend Vigil, this is a good season to make the effort to attend at least part of it. If you already attend but don't stay for all of it, it is a good time to come for more of it. You'll be glad you did.

## The Sayings of St. Anthony the Great

*Someone asked Abba Anthony, "What must one do in order to please God?" The old man replied, "Pay attention to what I tell you: whoever you may be, always have God before your eyes; whatever you do, do it according to the testimony of the holy Scriptures; in whatever place you live, do not easily leave it. Keep these precepts and you will be saved."* Antony Saying 3 in *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*.

*Commentary:* These three words are not quite what one might expect as an answer to such a question. So what is their significance?

"*Always have God before your eyes.*" We are to live in such a way that we always remember God, always think of Him present and observing us in all that we do. This is not so easy. It is easy to confess faith in Christ and then live great portions of our life as 'practical atheists', thinking not of God, asking not His help and blessing on all that we do, seeking not to know Him and please Him in all, carelessly falling repeatedly into sin. But He is our Creator who is "everywhere present" and who fills all things. In Him we live, and move, and have our being. Without Him, we can do nothing. Keeping God always before our eyes, doing all the we do for the sake of Christ, and giving thanks to God always for all things keeps us from sin and keeps our lives focused on their true end and sanctifies all that we do. If we achieve this, we shall have made significant progress toward the fullness of life in Christ. St. Justin of Chelije puts it this way: "For someone to believe in Christ entails his waiting on Christ, and only on Christ, with every event of his life." There is no area of life which is exclusively man's to the exclusion of Christ, no area of which Christ as Lord and King does not say, "Mine." When we say 'mine' and shut God out as irrelevant, we do not have Him before our eyes.

"*Do everything according to the testimony of the holy Scripture.*" In holy Scripture, inspired by the Holy Spirit, we find God's will for us revealed. If we are truly His children, we shall seek to do His will. But how can we do it if we don't know it, or are indifferent to it? As St. John Chrysostom says, "This is the cause of all evils, the not knowing the Scriptures." How many sins and mistakes we would avoid, how much unnecessary suffering would not be ours if only we would "take heed to our ways according to His word." Hence at every Vespers and Matins we pray, "Blessed art Thou, O Lord, teach me Thy statutes; blessed art Thou, O Master, make me to understand Thy statutes; blessed art Thou, O Holy One, enlighten me with Thy statutes. We cannot do what we do not know; to do rightly, we must understand; and in the keeping of Christ's commandments, we gain enlightenment. In this we demonstrate our love for God: "If you love Me, keep My commandments." The Christian who neglects holy Scripture puts himself in the position of going into the daily spiritual battle without guidance and unarmed—not a recipe for victory.

"*In whatever place you live, do not easily leave it.*" A whole book could be written on the spiritual harm in moving from place to place frequently and without good reason. Consider the man who attends a local parish for a time while he enjoys it and the people, and then begins to feel dissatisfaction with it. "The priest doesn't affirm me enough, and the people irritate me and don't understand me," he says. "I need to find another parish with a better priest and people who will understand me and not annoy me." He then leaves his parish to go to another. All too often, a pattern of such behavior develops. Notice that, in his mind, all the problems lie outside of him. It is the priest or it is the people, never himself. But moving to a new parish when things get difficult or unpleasant delivers him from ever having to take a hard look at himself. God sets in a parish to build into His temple made of living stones—us. But that requires fitting us in with others. We don't always fit at first, so God 'bashes' us against others to knock off our rough edges. (We don't think much about how our shortcomings and rough edges affect others, only about how theirs affect us!) As Fr. Hopko liked to say, "We go to church so that we may be lacerated by the Word and bashed by the Holy Spirit." God accomplishes most of that bashing and lacerating through the priest and people. We shall never grow into a mature man in Christ if we do not subject ourselves to this process. Nature itself clearly shows that a plant often transplanted will never grow to its full potential or fruitfulness. So, to put this word another way: bloom where God has planted you if you wish to please God—unless He gives you a compelling reason to go elsewhere.

**St. Isidore of Pelusium** (Feast Feb. 4)

*Abba Isidore, a relative of the Patriarchs Cyril and Theophilus of Alexandria, was known for writing 10,000 letters of instruction, encouragement, and reproof to various people in his lifetime. He reposed in 450.*

Abba Isidore of Pelusium said, 'To live without speaking is better than to speak without living. For the former who lives rightly does good even by his silence but the latter does no good even when he speaks. When words and life correspond to one another, they are together the whole of philosophy.'

He also said, 'Vice takes men away from God and separates them from one another. So we must turn from it quickly and pursue virtue, which leads to God and unites us with another. Now the definition of virtue and of philosophy is: simplicity with prudence.'

*From 'The Sayings of the Desert Fathers'*

**From The Path of Salvation**  
*St. Theophan the Recluse (+1894)*

The sowing and development of the Christian life are different in essence from the sowing and development of natural life, owing to the special character of the Christian life and its relation to our nature. A man is not born a Christian, but becomes such after birth. The seed of Christ falls on the soil of a heart that is already beating.

But since the naturally-born man is injured and opposed by the demand of Christianity—while in a plant, for example, the beginning of life is the stirring of a sprout in the seed, and awakening of, as it were, dormant powers—the beginning of a true Christian life in a man is a kind of re-creation, and endowing of new powers, of new life.

Further, suppose that Christianity is received as a law, the resolution is made to live a Christian life; this seed of life (this resolution) is not surrounded in a man by elements favorable to him. Besides this, the whole man—his body and soul—remains unadapted to the new life, unsubmitive to the yoke of Christ. Therefore, from this moment begins in a man a labor of sweat, a labor to educate his whole self, all his faculties, according to the Christian standard.

This is why, while growth in plants, for example, is a gradual development of faculties—easy, unconstrained—in a Christian it is a battle with himself involving much labor, intense and sorrowful, and he must dispose his faculties for something for which they have no inclination. Like a soldier, he must take every step of land, even his own, from his enemies by means of warfare, with the double-edged sword of forcing himself and opposing himself.

Finally, after long labors and exertions, the Christian principles appear victorious, reigning without opposition; they penetrate the whole composition of human nature, dislodging from it demands and inclinations hostile to themselves, and place in it a state of passionlessness and purity,

making it worthy of the blessedness of the pure in heart—to see God in themselves in sincerest communion with Him.

Such is the place in us of the Christian life. The life has three stages which may be called: 1) turning to God, 2) purification or self-amendment, 3) sanctification.

In the first state, a person turns from darkness to light, from the domain of Satan to God; in the second stage, he cleanses the chamber of his heart from every impurity in order to receive Christ the Lord who is coming to him; in the third stage, the Lord comes, takes up His abode in his heart, and communes with him. This is the state of blessed communion with God—the goal of all labors and ascetic endeavors.

**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 and oil for use in the Church in their name.

Typically loved ones are remembered 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 anniversary 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"). In some cases, the living make an offering in thanksgiving for blessings received.

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 spitefully use you and persecute you."

To make an offerings of Temple Wine and Oil, take the appropriate slip on the candle table and fill it out. Circle which offering you are bringing, and put the slip and the money in the basket. If you wish to bring actual oil or port wine, you may do so. Please note that the number of names to be commemorated per offering should be limited to one person, a married couple, or at most one entire 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.

**Upcoming Events 2015**

- 2 February: Meeting of the Lord in the Temple
- 22 February: Forgiveness Sunday. Forgiveness Vespers, 6:00 p.m. Plan to attend.
- 12 April: Holy Pascha, Feast of Feasts

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