

The Confessor's Tongue for April 26, A. D. 2015

Sunday of the Myrrhbearers; Hieromartyr Basil of Amasea, St. Stephen of Perm
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.

April 26: St. Stephen of Perm

A good example of an Orthodox missionary.

Born in the city of Ustiug, the son of a clergyman, "having applied himself to virtues from childhood" and possessing unusual intellectual abilities, he learned to read books in one year and helped his father during the worship services in church. According to a special secret desire he began diligently to study the Zyrian language by himself. Apparently, the grace of God rested on him and in inscrutable ways Providence prepared him beforehand for a formidable apostolic ascetic effort. And here, having reached youthful years and not feeling affection for what is temporal, he spent his days reading sacred books and those of the fathers. Thirst for knowledge grew in him more and more, and he went to Rostov to complete his education.

Accepted here as one of the brethren of the Monastery of St. Gregory the Theologian, known from old times for the richness of their library and for the education of monks, St. Stephen, with burning desire for enlightenment, did not concede to anyone even in monastic asceticism, became more and more perfected in the spiritual life. Being the first to appear in church for the divine services and the last to leave, he spent days and nights in fasting, prayer and prostrations, trained in humility, meekness, patience and love, in order to transfer all disappointments and sorrows to the Lord, without harm to the affairs of faith and for the salvation of his soul.

Having prepared himself for missionary work by studying the Holy Scriptures and the Greek language in Rostov, he translated the Holy Gospel into the Zyrian language, and with the blessing of Bishop Gerasimus of Kolomna, went to Little Perm to enlighten the pagan-Zyrians (in 1370 or 1379), "beginning, like a lamb among wolves, to go and preach Christ among the obstinate and depraved". The preacher of the Christian faith has borne much labor, much struggle, much deprivation and much sorrow, "living among unbelieving men, who prayed before idols, fire, water, rocks and gold women and magicians and magi and the tree". The self-denying but dangerous activity of Stephen had a great success.

After he shamed the magus Pam (or Pam the centurion, who was the old man Vymichei, the head pagan priest and chief of the magi), the Zyrians were baptized. And in 1383 Stephen was installed as the bishop of Little Perm. He was "like a true hierarch, quiet and meek", and "a zealous apostle" and an "all-wise teacher".

For the confirmation of the newly converted in the faith Stephen opened schools at the temples to also "teach Permian letters, commanding them to learn the Horologion [Book of Hours], the

Osmoglasnik [Music Book of Eight Tones] and the Psalms of David in Permian. In this way he divided the students according to their abilities, so that "some would be appointed priests, others would be deacons"; others also learned to write in Permian. He built churches and put Zyrian priests in them, led the divine services in the Zyrian language, protected the Zyrians from fierce foreigners, petitioned for them in Moscow, supplied them with bread during a poor harvest. In Moscow, he earnestly interceded for them before boyars and leaders saddened about Zyrian privileges and advantages. Many times he delivered them from violence and bailiff bribes and facilitated grants for them. Even the Novgorod boatmen obeyed the words of the venerable one and did not plunder the Zyrians.

According to tradition, the hierarch was not only a preacher of the faith but also an icon-painter. About 17 versts [11.2 miles] from Iarensk in the church in the village of Irtovo is the wonderworking image of the Savior Not Made by Hands, written by Stephen in large dimensions in the ancient Byzantine style.

He died on April 26, 1396 in Moscow where he went on church business. His relics are in a hidden place in the Moscow Kremlin at the Savior in the Pine Forest. *Bulgakov Handbook, Fr. E. Tarris, trans.*

The Sayings of St. Anthony the Great 14

Abba Anthony heard of a very young monk who had performed a miracle on the road. Seeing the old men walking with difficulty along the road, he ordered the wild asses to come and carry them until they reached Abba Anthony. Those whom they had carried told Abba Anthony about it. He said to them, 'This monk seems to me to be a ship loaded with goods, but I do not know if he will reach harbor.' After a while, Anthony suddenly began to weep, to tear his hair, and lament. His disciples said to him, 'Why are you weeping, Father?' The old man replied, 'A great pillar of the Church has just fallen (he meant the young monk) but go to him and see what has happened.' So the disciples went and found the monk sitting on a mat and weeping for the sin he had committed. Seeing the disciples of the old man he said, 'Tell the old man to pray that God will give me just ten days, and I hope I will have made satisfaction.' But in the space of five days he died. Saying 14 in The Sayings of the Desert Fathers

Commentary: The true Christian does not envy the gifts, miracles, or accomplishments of others, nor does he take pleasure in their sins. When the young wonderworker falls, Anthony takes no joy, but weeps, lamenting his fall. We must guard ourselves lest we, feeling threatened by others or envying their gifts, take a malicious pleasure in their shortcomings or failures. Solomon even warns us in his Proverbs not

to take pleasure in the downfall of a wicked man lest the Lord cease to chasten him!

The Christian life is likened to a merchant ship. In the course of life, we gain a valuable cargo of virtues and good works to offer to God, but we must make it safely to port. The monk had a great treasure of virtues and accomplishments, but his ship foundered before reaching a safe haven. Thus we, too, must be vigilant and cautious until the end and not trust in what we have accomplished until now. The miracle the young monk worked was impressive, and St. Anthony sees in it evidence of significant accomplishment ("a ship loaded with goods"). But he has doubts, nonetheless, whether the monk will "reach harbor", perhaps based on the perception that the monk's miracle was mixed with a measure of pride and self-display that rendered him vulnerable.

Having fallen, the monk is found weeping over his sin. He asks Anthony's envoys to ask their elder to pray that God will give him ten days to make his repentance complete, but he is given only five days. Is his repentance complete and is he reconciled with God in that time? We are not told. Certainly, five minutes, let alone five days, is enough for repentance, but was it enough for this monk? Was he excessive in setting himself a need for ten days to repent? Was he deluded to think he needed any time beyond the present to gain God's forgiveness?

A saying from Abba Poemen casts light on this matter:

A brother questioned Abba Poemen saying, 'I have committed a great sin and I want to do penance for three years.' The old man said to him, 'That is a lot.' The brother said, 'For one year?' The old man said again, 'That is a lot.' Those who were present said, 'For forty days?' He said again, "That is a lot.' He added, 'I myself say that if a man repents with his whole heart and does not intend to commit the sin any more, God will accept him after only three days' (Poemen 12 in *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*).

Some who think of forgiveness of sins as something God automatically grants upon receive a request for it in words may be scandalized by the concept of 'making satisfaction' and needing time to repent. Others who know the canonical penalties for series sins may be scandalized by Abba Poemen's leniency.

So what do we make of this? Notice that the sin is serious, one which, presumably, would deprive the monk of Holy Communion. Notice, too, Abba Poemen's qualifying words: "if a man repents with his whole heart and does not intend to commit the sin any more". Does a quick, "Lord I have sinned, please forgive me" constitute repentance with one's whole heart? It could, but it might not. Often, it takes time for sinner to come to repent with his whole heart and seriously intend not to commit the sin again. The monk in Anthony's saying wants ten days. He is given only five. Only God knows whether it was enough for him.

God is quick to forgive. He forgives in a moment, without reluctance. Man's part is to ask in repentance

with the intention not to repeat the offense. When a Christians betrays his faith and his Savior by committing a serious sin, he will need time to complete his repentance so that it is wholehearted and sincere. How much time? Only God knows. But we must not presume on God's mercy and assume that we can choose to sin and still have time for repentance. That time may not be given, or we may fail to repent with all our heart. *Fr. Justin Frederick*

From the Diary of a Russian Priest

If we are not allowed to judge, how can we help our erring brother? By turning our attention to the beam in our own eye; only then, after we have struggled to remove it, shall we understand how deep-seated are the causes of sin, how hard it is to fight against it, what are the means whereby it can be cured, how great are the pity and compassion that the sinner deserves; and these feelings our ours, and our experience of the struggle with sin, will help us to remove the mote from our brother's eye—through compassion, example, love. Judgment will disappear of itself.

"The desert lulls the passions to sleep", but man is till required to uproot them (St. Isaac the Syrian). This is the advantage of living in the world: through our meetings and conflicts with people and circumstances, such a life reveals our passions and sinful inclinations to us.

Read continually such words as feed your soul, and direct you to the one true goal in life. Here, a certain asceticism, self-limitation, self-coercion, are necessary. *Every Christian is an ascetic*. Keep this in mind. Human nature is so distorted that you will have to exercise a ruthless pressure upon it if you want to straighten it out according to the Gospel measures, and you will have to do this straightening out every day, every hour, May God help you in this task!

Prayer & Idle Talk

It is necessary to preserve the fruit of prayer. It is spoiled and lost very often due to idle talking right after prayer and from [day] dreaming, which is also idle talking, only with yourself. Silence after prayer is very beneficial: it keeps the prayer in the mind, heart, and even in the mouth, audible to you. *St. Nikon of Optina*

Upcoming Events 2015

- 2 May Russian Divine Liturgy at St. Maximus
- 3 May Saito-Hollemeak Wedding
- 21 May Ascension
- 25 May Memorial Day Picnic

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!