

# The Confessor's Tongue for June 14, A. D. 2015

Second 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.

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## **The Sayings of St. Anthony the Great 20**

*A brother renounced the world and gave his good to the poor, but he kept back a little for his personal expenses. He went to see Abba Anthony. When he told Anthony this, the old man said to him, "If you want to be a monk, go into the village, buy some meat, cover your naked body with it, and come here like that." The brother did so, and the dogs and birds tore at his flesh. When he came back, the old man asked him whether he had followed his advice. He showed him his wounded body, and Saint Anthony said, "Those who renounce the world but want to keep something for themselves are torn in this way by the demons who make war on them." Saying 20 Sayings of the Desert Fathers*

*Commentary:* The first step to becoming a monk is renunciation of the world: of property, ties, titles, family, his name—everything that might hold him back from being fully devoted to Christ and from having faith in Christ alone for everything. Anything from the former life that the monk holds onto provides leverage for the enemy to wound him and torment him and overthrow his good intention to devote himself to Christ without distraction.

And what of us who live in the world as Christians, followers of Christ? Unless we learn to see all things that we have as belonging to God, our King, Master, Owner and ourselves as merely stewards commissioned to use His goods according to His purposes—including ourselves—we will be in the same condition as the wounded monk.

For example, we tithe to acknowledge Christ as Master over the fruits of our labor (He gives us the power to make wealth Deuteronomy 8:18) and to secure His blessing on the portion that remains to us. And of that portion that remains, part is for our use and the support of our lives, and part is for the relief of those in need. That this is so we may readily see in the marriage service, where we pray for the newly united man and woman that God grant them an abundance of good things, not so they can have financial security or live a comfortable life, but so that they may always have something with which to relieve the needs of the poor and may never have to turn someone away empty-handed because they don't have enough to share. Here God will surely judge us for our profligate spending, for our living beyond our means, for our enslaving ourselves financially through debt. Spending so much that our monthly payments consume our entire income will not excuse us before God for not tithing or giving alms. Rather, we will stand condemned for luxurious living. Even if we don't accumulate debt, but spend all that we make on ourselves, we shall still find ourselves condemned before God: our checkbook and credit card statements will tell the tale of a life squandered in pursuit of this world's goods rather than spent to acquire of the Kingdom of God.

We must not, then, hold tightly to this world's goods as though they were our own or our lives were contained in them. We cannot afford to have a sense of entitlement, that God somehow owes us a certain standard of living, a certain level of comfort or ease, freedom from suffering, or anything else. Anything in this world we let our hearts get attached to can and will be used by our enemy to afflict us and hold us back from the kingdom of God.

Though the "love of money is the root of all evil", it is not money alone that holds us back. Unhealthy relationships we cling to pull us into sin. Caring for pets and possessions can tie us down. Jobs or positions can provide so much of our identity that we cannot let them go or walk away when God calls us to something else. The pursuit of pleasure so engrosses us that we cannot fast or pray and are retarded in spiritual progress. Trying to secure security in an insecure world keeps us from seeing our only true security in Christ. Worry—holding onto the idea that it all depends on us but not knowing what to do about it—keeps us from Christ. The anger that afflicts us and torments us most often has its source in our love of things that are not God: when someone else steps between us and the object of our desire, or threatens to deprive us of it, anger arises.

Giving ourselves to God is a continual process. The very services teach us this. At the end of dearly every Litany, we are called to "commend ourselves, each other, and all our life unto Christ our God." Doing it repeatedly in the services is practice for doing it repeatedly each day of our life. If anger begins to arise in our hearts because someone has disrupted our day, we must commend ourselves to God. The government passes a new tax law that threatens our financial security, we commend ourselves and our wealth to God. We start to worry about a member of our family, we commend him and ourselves to God. Constantly, every time we think of clinging to them or find ourselves in fear of losing them, we commend ourselves, our time, our family and friends and every relationship (and strangers too!), our money, our possessions, yea, our very life to Christ while giving thanks to God for the trials that beset us. In doing this, like the monk who renounces all, we sever the unhealthy connections that root us to the world that we may be free to follow Christ.

To accomplish this work in us, our Physician often uses sickness and impending death to get us to clarify our vision and to divest ourselves of the things we could not bring ourselves to let go of earlier in life, so we should not despair if we seem to make little progress. On the other hand, if we do not begin this process now, impending death may find us so firmly bound by the world that we cannot get free.

Moreover, living a life bound by the world deprives us of many gifts of grace and the joy of freedom in

Christ that we might have enjoyed much sooner had we but applied ourselves. *Fr. Justin*

### Logistics of Confession

Typically at St. Maximus, open Confession (when you may simply show up) is scheduled after most services (except Liturgies). If you wish to make a confession, just remain in the church after service. The priest is looking for such people and will start confession once the church has cleared. He will read the general prayers for all who desire to confess at that time, and then will either call someone to come up or wait for someone to come.

When you come up to the icon stand for confession, venerate the cross and icon before you, bowing and crossing yourself twice, kissing the icon and the cross, and the bowing and crossing a third time. As you make your confession, look at Christ, not at the priest. He will put his epitrahelion (stole) over your head and invite you to begin.

Please come prepared for Confession, with the sins you need to confess clearly in mind or written down. The time to start thinking about your sins is not when you stand before the icons. Others are waiting; please come prepared.

While you are confessing, it is best not to use the names of other people. Speak of “my wife”, “my husband”, “my second son”, “my boss”, “a fellow parishioner”, “my goddaughter”, etc. The focus is on your sins, not theirs. Only speak of their sins to the degree you must to make your own clear.

Confession is for naming our sins, but a bare list of sins is as inadequate as a long recounting of problems. Strive to be concise, to name sins for what they are, but give enough detail (context, frequency, effect on others, etc.) to make the nature of the sin clear beyond a bare name.

Having confessed your sins and receiving absolution, venerate the cross and the icon again, then turn to the priest and ask his blessing, before departing.

### Praying with the Psalter

From the Church's beginning, the Psalter has been her basic prayer book. To this day Psalms comprise a large part of the fixed portions of the services. Three Psalms are read at each of the canonical hours—First, Third, Sixth, and Ninth—and at Little Compline. Matins begins with the Six Psalms and ends with the last three Psalms of the Psalter, and Psalm 50 is tucked away in the middle of the service. Vespers begins with Psalm 103 and uses four more at “Lord I have cried” (140, 141, 129, 116). Divine Liturgy uses Psalms 102 and 145 as its first two antiphons, and every service draws on the Psalter for its Prokeimenon. Psalm 50 is part of the daily morning prayers for many Orthodox Christians, and Psalms 22, 23, and 113 are part of an Orthodox Christian's preparation for Holy Communion. The 150 Psalms are divided into twenty roughly equal portions known as ‘kathismata’. One kathisma is

prescribed to be read and every Vespers (except Sunday night or any evening after a Vigil) and two kathismata at Matins. Thus in the course of the week all twenty kathismata of the Psalter are read sequentially in addition to the Psalms that are read as fixed parts of each service.

Indeed, the traditional Psalter of the Church is set up as a prayer book. It prescribes the usual sequence of opening prayers to preface the reading of the Psalms; a kathisma is read which is followed by the basic sequence of prayers “Holy God...” “All Holy Trinity...” “Our Father...”, three or four short troparia, and a prayer special to the kathisma. Then the next kathisma is read with a similar sequence of prayers following it. With this basic procedure, one may easily pray as long as one wishes, either much or little. One may well keep Vigil by reading the Psalter for a good portion of the night.

The importance of the Psalter for prayer in the church may be seen not only in its use in the services, but also by the ancient canon which requires that for a man to be a candidate for the episcopacy, he must know the Psalter by heart. This is another way of saying that a bishop must be a man of prayer. If he is, he will have prayed the Psalter sufficiently to have it by memory. This may strike us as unlikely for one to have memorized the Psalter, but if one prays them and hears them daily in the same translation, over the course of a few years, with a little effort, one could well have the whole Psalter memorized. In our general sloth and weakness of mind, we do not commit much to memory in our day and we doubt our mind's ability.

The Psalter's inspired words speak to every human condition and express the cry of man's heart to God. The Church has found there not only a book of prayers, but also a manual for prayer and for spiritual warfare as she wrestles not with enemies of flesh and blood but the passions and the demons. She also finds Christ there, knowing the Psalter to be a prophetic book that speaks much about her Savior, especially about His life on earth in the flesh. Indeed, David, the author of many of the Psalms, is remembered in the Church primarily as a prophet.

This complete version of the Orthodox Psalter now exists in English in two editions, one which has recently gone on sale and another which is available online with Russian and English on facing pages. Several versions of the Psalms have been available without the prayers along with one translation of the kathisma prayers without the Psalms, but until very recently, no one had yet put it all together in English.

We do well to make the Psalter a part of our daily prayer rule. Even to add but a psalm or two each day to our prayers will have great effect on our minds and souls over time. May all of us make profitable use of the God-given treasure of the Church. *Fr. Justin*

### Upcoming Events 2015

8-28 June Apostles' Fast

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!