

The Confessor's Tongue for August 23, A. D. 2015

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost; Leavetaking of Dormition, St. Irenaeus of Lyon
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 22

Abba Anthony said, 'I believe that the body possesses a natural movement, to which it is adapted, but which it cannot follow without the consent of the soul; it only signifies in the body a movement without passion. There is another movement, which comes from the nourishment and arming of the body by eating and drinking, and this causes the heat of the blood to stir up the body to work. That is why the apostle said, "Do not get drunk with wine for that is debauchery." (Eph 5:18) And in the Gospel the Lord also recommends this to His disciples: "Take heed to yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness (Luke 21:34); But there is yet another movement which afflicts those who fight, and that comes from the wiles and jealousy of the demons. You must understand what these three bodily movements are: one is natural, one comes from too much to eat, the third is caused by demons.' Saying 22 *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*

Commentary: This is not an easy saying for us to understand. It is not so much that we do not live as monks, but that we are so habituated to an abundance of good things and an ease of acquiring whatever our body desires that we are deadened to the dynamic Antony describes. We are acquainted with, at least, or know all-too well, the effect drinking too much alcohol has: it decreases our inhibitions, loosens the rational mind's control over the body, and allows the passions free rein, particularly anger and lust. Antony and many other experienced fathers bear witness to the same, only more subtle, dynamic in response to eating too much, pandering too much to the taste, and pampering the body with comforts such as soft clothes and soft beds.

The body is intended ever to be guided by the soul rather than to guide the soul. It is designed to serve the soul in carrying out God's will, especially the rational element in man and highest part of the soul, the *nous* illumined by Christ. In man disordered by sin, the soul becomes enslaved to the body and its desires. The body is not evil, and has a proper movement natural to it. When it is in subjection to the soul, it does not move without the soul's consent. We can stir up passionate movements in our bodies, however, by excessive eating and drinking (i.e. more than the body needs to maintain health), by pampering and indulging the body. These give the body pleasure and increase its desire for more. This movement is always passionate, and is involuntary, though it is voluntarily aroused through excessive eating, drinking. Increasingly, the body impresses the soul into service as its servant to fulfill its growing desires, even against the rational judgment of the soul. Hence we witness the drug addict or drunkard, who though he knows with his mind that he needs to stop and that what he is doing is self-destructive, his body lords it over his soul and compels the mind to

scheme as to how it can get the next fix or drink. Hence fasting is indispensable for keeping the body in proper subjection to the soul. So too, vigils help keep the body's desire for sleep in proper compass, and physical work restrains the passionate movements of the body. For this reason, monks have often worn rough clothes and slept on hard beds.

Sometimes, however, it is the demons who stir up the body directly, not natural motion or our own over-eating or drinking. The devil attacked Antony in this way, even appearing to him in the form of a woman trying to beguile him (*Life of Antony*, 5). The life of Elder Joseph the Hesychast also bears witness to this sort of attack. This provocation has to be borne with faith and patience, and is most often experienced by those who are actively engaged in spiritual combat and are making progress. Knowing that the body and its passions can be stirred up by the demons is a comfort empowering the one provoked to steadfast endurance. Not knowing this could lead one quickly to despair thinking that he himself is to blame—and this, too, is one of the enemy's devices against us. *Fr. Justin Frederick*

Reflection from the Prologue

St. Nikolai of Zicha

Learn to respect and love lowly and simple people. Such are the most blessed on earth, and such are the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven. In them there is no pride—indeed, pride is the prevalent madness afflicting the rich and powerful of this world. The lowly carry out their duty in this world perfectly; and yet, when someone praises them for it, it seems unearned to them—while the self-seeking men of the world seek praise for all their work, and often it is imperfectly done.

St. Alexander the charcoal-burner (Aug 12) was an eminent philosopher, yet he left everything, hid himself from exalted society and the praise of the world, and mingled with the lowliest and the simplest of men—a charcoal-burner among charcoal-burners. Instead of yearning for his erstwhile praise and honors, he rejoiced that children ran after him, laughing at him because of his sooty skin and ragged clothes. Even so, Alexander was not the only who desired to live with the lowly and simple. Many kings and princes, learning of the sweetness of the Christian Faith, have removed the crowns from their heads and fled from aristocratic vanity, to be among simple people. Did not the Lord Christ Himself, the King of Kings, appear among shepherds and fishermen? St. Zeno counsels: "Do not choose a glorious place for living, and do not associate with men of prominence."

Book Review

The Struggle for Virtue: Asceticism in a Modern Secular Society
Archbishop Averky. Jordanville, 2014

Archbishop Averky (1906-1976), the fourth abbot of Holy Trinity Monastery in Jordanville, NY (1960-76), delivered the thirteen lectures contained in this volume in Western Europe shortly after the end of World War Two. Though seventy years old, they remain relevant, vibrant and fresh, speaking clearly and persuasively to the modern ear about Christian asceticism and its place in our lives.

The introduction clearly defines Christian asceticism in contrast to the world's distorted notions thereof as the constant practice of good deeds inseparably bound to spiritual life and the rooting out of evil deeds and evil dispositions. The "good deeds" are delineated by the commandments of Christ in the Gospel. As all Christians contend with evil dispositions and habits that tyrannize and enslave the soul, ascetic struggle to uproot them is essential for all Christians. As the Archbishop puts it, "Asceticism is something so closely bound up with the spiritual life that without it spiritual life is simply *inconceivable*."

The twelve lectures that follow elaborate on particular areas of ascetic struggle. The topics include "The Importance of Spiritual Discernment", "Gospel Love and Humanistic Altruism", "Acquiring Gospel Love", "The Christian Understanding of Freedom", "Resisting Evil", "Waging the Unseen Warfare," "Christian Struggle", "The Holy Fathers on Combating the Passions", and "Pastoral Asceticism".

Three additional topics bear further elaboration. In chapter one, Archbishop Averky deals with "Self-Asserting Pride and Christian Humility." He traces the origin of human self-asserting pride to Adam and Eve questioning God and putting their faith in the words of the serpent. Since then, "We can find its footprints throughout the entire history of mankind." It led to the first murder and to the flood. It led to the Tower of Babel, and is the root of national pride, which continues to afflict the world. It led to the schism between East and West, as Rome, unable to absorb the spirit of Christian humility, sought to rule the whole Christian world in the spirit of pagan pride. In the Reformation, that same spirit manifested as man asserted his own authority to interpret the Scriptures. Since then, things have not improved. We can see the fruit today, expressed in Archbishop Averky's works: "Human pride run rampant led to each person's life losing all value and literally hanging on a string; the precious fruits of age-old culture were ruthlessly destroyed; and over it all hangs the specter of destruction of not only all of mankind, but even of our entire planet." Christian humility is the only remedy.

"Reawakening Our Conscience" presents a provocative reflection on conscience as well as powerful prescriptions for guarding our conscience.

Deluded by the notion of 'moral progress', modern man has lost the concept of evil and pays little heed to the voice of conscience. The conscience is an inherent part of every human being. But it is a sensitive, fragile instrument, which becomes hardened and numbed through willful sin. The Christian must work to guard his conscience, to respond to its promptings, and to repent with tears when he violates its voice. "Even minor things are significant."

A great struggle we all face is not allowing harmful impressions into our souls, which the Archbishop discusses in "Guarding the Heart Amidst the Distractions of Life." Even more so than in Archbishop Averky's time, these harmful impressions are all around us to distract us and lead us into temptation. A distracted person is not able to be vigilant, to watch and pray to avoid entering temptation. The frenzied life of modern man makes vigilance difficult. Distractedness paralyzes spiritual development. Yet the prescription against distractedness is hard: forbid oneself idle activity, fulfill one's duties attentively, avoid foolish jokes and idle talk, all fantasy and daydreaming. "In a word, it is necessary to take yourself in hand, not to allow the senses to eagerly seize upon any and all manner of external impressions, but rather to occupy yourself diligently, honestly, and conscientiously with your own responsibilities, public and private, without excessive bustle and fretfulness."

The Struggle for Virtue is a little book of some 160 pages of text plus notes and index. Yet its message is of vital importance for us, which, if taken to heart and acted upon, will have a monumental effect on our lives.

Fr. Justin Frederick

Several copies of this book are being ordered by our bookstore. Let Subdeacon Antony know if you'd like a copy.

A copy may also be found in the library.

St. Theophan on Wandering Thoughts

Thoughts wander when one is reading spiritual works and during prayer. What should one do? No one is free from this. There is no sin in it, only vexation. Having wandering thoughts becomes a sin when one willingly allows flightiness of mind. But if thoughts scatter involuntarily, what fault can there be? There is fault, though, when one notices thoughts wandering and, taking no action, one wanders along with them. When we catch our thoughts wandering off, we must bring them back to their proper place at once.

Upcoming Events 2015

- 6 September Maevers-Williams Wedding, 3:00 p.m.
- 7 September Labor Day Picnic noon, Vigil at 5:00
- 8 September Great Feast Nativity of Theotokos
- 14 September Great Feast Elevation of the Cross
- 27 September Annual Meeting, noon

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!