

The Confessor's Tongue for September 6, A. D. 2015

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost; Miracle of Archangel Michael, Martyr Eudoxius
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 23

Abba Anthony also said, 'God does not allow the same warfare and temptations to this generation as He did formerly, for men are weaker now and cannot bear so much.'
Saying 23 Sayings of the Desert Fathers

Commentary: Whether it is the declining age spans we find in Genesis or a comparison stretching from our grandparents and parents to ourselves and on to the generation of our children and grandchildren, it is a common idea that man is somehow in decline from one generation to another. Almost every civilization has looked back to a long departed "golden age" in comparison with which contemporary times appear base. If we compare the pioneers or our grandparents with ourselves, in many ways we come off worse by comparison: they were harder working, more honorable, less self-indulgent, more capable of doing things for themselves and enduring hardship. Compare the current generation of movie stars and celebrities with the previous generation, and you get the distinct impression that the present crop are but children in adult bodies in comparison. Whatever the reason for it and whether it is actually the case, the impression of decline and decay is hard to escape.

Anthony finds the same thing among the monks of the desert. Already over his long life (he lived to be more than one hundred), he perceives a lessening of the trials and warfare God permits His people to experience, for they are weaker and cannot bear what the previous generation bore, especially in direct assaults from the demons such as he experienced to great degree (see *The Life of Antony*). Indeed, this is biblical, for we know that "God does not permit us to be tempted beyond what we are able to bear."

Though we wrestle with the enemy, the enemy has been bound—he does not have free reign to assault us with all his power. By the power of Christ's victory and God's mercy, he is unable to attack more than God permits, and God permits only what we can bear. And whatever we face, we know that God makes a way of escape for us, if we will but exercise our faith to find it and use it.

Thus if our trials seem great, we should take heart, for God has declared that we are able to bear them and that He is with us in them. If the enemy assaults us strongly, we remember he is bound; God holds him on a leash to use as a trainer to test and develop our faith, though he ever seeks to destroy us. A hymn from the *Octoechos (Friday Vespers, tone 4)* expresses this well:

Thou who art compassionate hast given me the enemy for my profit, as a gift to scourge and teach me; for his wickedness serveth as a test, which, without being good, leadeth me to the good: therefore it is now in thanksgiving that I

cry: Save me, O Lord, before I perish utterly.
(*Mother Mary, trans.*)

Indeed, we live in a generation weakened by pleasure and ease of life. Our fasting falls well short of the Church's common norm, let alone the feats of the great ascetics. We struggle to pray our prayer rule each day and to make it to church only once a week, but who among us delights in prayer, in staying up late or rising early to give ourselves to prayer as so many have done through the ages? We struggle to read the Scriptures: who of us has read them through once, let alone five, ten, fifteen, twenty times? Who among us can quote passages, recite Psalms and other treasures of Scripture that we have laid up in our hearts? We struggle to tithe and give alms, thinking we can't live on 90% of our income, where others such as St. Antony gave their all, or as Joachim and Anna, gave a third to the temple, a third in alms, and lived on a third. The saints seem alien to us and their virtues, their exploits and accomplishments appear impossible.

Yet despite the weakness of our times, God is merciful and does not allow us to be tempted beyond what we can bear. He ever works to strengthen us and lift us higher. And in our time of moral and physical decay, our general weakness, and the stormy sea of temptation that surrounds us, especially the most basic temptations to gluttony and sexual impurity and self-indulgence, which are probably greater than ever and unprecedented in scope, there is still the opportunity to win crowns, and glorious ones at that.

Let us hear what the desert fathers had to say about us in comparison with them, and take heart: The holy Fathers were making predictions about the last generation. They said, "What have we ourselves done? One of them, the great Abba Ischyron replied, 'We ourselves have fulfilled the commandments of God.' The others replied, 'And those who come after us, what will they do?' He said, 'They will struggle to achieve half our works.' They said, 'And to those who come after them, what will happen?' He said, 'The men of that generation will not accomplish any works at all, and temptation will come upon them; and those who will be approved in that day will be greater than either us or our fathers.'

We live in a generation where sinning through gluttony, fornication and lust, and luxurious living and self-indulgence is easier than ever and harder than ever to resist. Even those of us of modest means enjoy a high level of prosperity and physical comfort unimaginable even to the rich in times past. We may now indulge our desire around the year for foods that were once available only seasonably. The media saturated with images and ideas works to seduce and

distract us, filling us with various lusts, desires, and fears, tempting us to forget God and to despair. In this context, we should not expect to have dramatic contests with the demons as Anthony did, or accomplish great feats in prayer, fasting, or even almsgiving as did so many before us. We have to fight for our very spiritual lives, to keep the flame of faith burning in a time when the whole nexus of modern life blows vigorously upon it to extinguish it. It may be that the feat of keeping faith in God alive, seeking God through prayer, fasting, and almsgiving to the small degree our strength permits, and seeking to keep Christ's commandments and do His will in all things will be a greater accomplishment in our times than all the ascetic feats of the Saints in times of old.

So let us patiently endure the burden of our times with faith in God, clinging to Christ our Savior, keeping faith alive despite our weakness and the great temptations of our times. Crowns are to be won for keeping the warmth of faith burning in our cold-hearted age. *Fr. Justin Frederick*

Book Review: Elder Zenobius:

*A life in Spiritual Continuity with Pre-Rev. Russia
Zimoviy Chesnokov, Jordanville, 2013.*

Many more than we suppose are God's holy ones on this earth. Sometimes we see them easily. Often they dwell in far places, so our paths do not cross and their report does not reach us. Sometimes we see them and do not recognize their sanctity.

Elder Zenobius was one of God's holy ones whose sanctity was seen by those who knew him, but whose report did not reach far due to the conditions under which he lived.

Zenobius was born September 14, 1896 in Glukhov, Chernigov Province, in what is now north-central Ukraine. He lost his father at age three, his mother at eleven. After living with relatives for five years, he went to live at the House of Work at the Glinsk Hermitage, Chernigov Province, (just west of the border with Russia and the city of Kursk) where monks took needy and orphan boys in to learn trades. In 1914 at age 18, he became a novice. He was tonsured a monk in 1921, just a year before the victorious Bolsheviks closed the monastery. Zenobius, with the blessing of the elders there, took an antimion (so he could serve Liturgy wherever he went) and departed for Abkhazia, on the eastern shore of the Black Sea, part of the Soviet Republic of Georgia. There he entered a monastery that was still open, was ordained deacon and then priest, and served in a parish church in Sukhumi until 1930, when he was arrested and imprisoned. He worked as a prisoner in labor camps building the White Sea-Baltic Canal and a chemical plant. After early release in 1934, he lived as a hermit in the Caucasus mountains from 1936 until 1942 and in secret monastic communities there.

In 1942, being ill, he travelled to Tbilisi, Georgia for treatment. There he became well-acquainted with the Patriarch of Georgia Callistratus,

In 1950, after the death of the rector, the Patriarch immediately appointed Fr. Zenobius rector of St. Alexander Nevsky Cathedral in Tbilisi, saying: "This man . . . has great obedience, which is worth more than literacy and pride, and puts anyone in the first place." Fr. Zenobius was consecrated a bishop in 1956 to oversee Russian parishes in Georgia. He served faithfully and effectively in his cathedral of St. Alexander Nevsky, with good relations with each Georgian patriarch, until his repose March 8, 1985. He was canonized as a saint in 2010 at Glinsk Monastery by Metropolitan Vladimir of Kiev.

Elder Zenobius possessed great humility and simplicity. One, a man came to see Metropolitan Zenobius for the first time. Upon reaching the church, he saw an elderly monk wearing a worn skufia on his head, a shabby old cassock and bast shoes [a poor man's shoe made from linden or birch tree fibers, basket-woven and fitted to the foot], talking with some old ladies. Realizing he should not interrupt, the man waited until the conversation was over before he addressed himself to the monk to ask where he might find the Metropolitan. He was utterly amazed when the monk answered softly, "I am Metropolitan Zenobius."

Having received great grace from his elders at the Glinsk Monastery before it was closed, Zenobius throughout the difficult years of communism helped keep alive the Faith in the hearts of many, counseling them, imparting to them spiritual nourishment, and praying for them. As he became known, people came to see him from all over the Soviet Union. He instructed them to say the Jesus Prayer, not seeking "to reach some high level and particular concentration of thought, but with simplicity of heart [to] pray to the Living God, who is as close to us as our soul." He advised people to use the prayer in moments of solitude and to drive away thoughts. He considered this more important than reading spiritual books.

On fasting, he instructed people: "If you are a guest, never try to explain fasting rules to your hosts. Eat what they have cooked and then go to confession [for breaking the fast]. People should not have to fuss around you and ask, 'Are you allowed to eat this or not?'"

This great elder, who was spiritual father to Patriarch Illia II, now intercedes for us on earth in heaven. Pray to God for us, O holy father Zenobius!

Upcoming Events 2015

- 6 September Maevers-Williams Wedding, 3:00 p.m.
- 7 September Labor Day Picnic noon, Vespers 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!