

The Confessor's Tongue for September 27, A. D. 2015

Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost; Martyr Callistratus & Companions

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 25

Abba Anthony said, "A time is coming when men will go mad, and when they see someone who is not mad, they will attack him, saying, 'You are mad, you are not like us.'" Saying 25 Sayings of the Desert Fathers

Commentary: What does it mean to be 'normal', to be 'sane'? "Normal" may be defined as "conforming with, adhering to, or constituting a norm, standard, pattern, level, or type; typical." "Sane" may be defined as "of sound mind, mentally healthy; having or showing sound judgment; reasonable." Scientists and doctors have done much research into human abnormalities and insanity but relatively little has been done to define rigorously what constitutes human normality and sanity. In the popular mind, the concept of normalcy and sanity are derived from some sort of statistically average condition of humans based on observation. Those who differ markedly from that norm are not 'normal.' And, over time, what is considered 'normal' changes, sometimes drastically.

Even the professionals in the fields of Psychiatry and Psychology struggle to define what is normal for human beings. To be normal means to be "according to a norm, or standard." But what is that standard? How may we know it? Who sets it? Is there a standard at all for human behavior? The norm may be what society and medicine say is normal. It may mean conformity with society and its expectations and most common behavior. But most professionals concede in the end that "'normality' is a constantly evolving concept with a surprising range of definitions." Hence what was normal yesterday may be abnormal today, and what was abnormal yesterday becomes today's norm.

Such a view cannot content us. For Christians, the standard of normality for a human being is revealed first in Christ, and, after Him, in His Mother and the Saints. They are 'normal' according to what God intended for man when He made man in His own image. They are sane because their minds are illumined by God's Light and their bodies are in subjugation as servants to the illumined mind, which seeks to do God's will in all things as the only rational and proper course for man. "Normal" for the Christian is never a statistical average of what is or an ever-evolving, socially-determined standard, but is seen in Christ the Cornerstone.

By any Christian understanding of 'normal', the vast majority of human beings are not normal and are not in their right minds, are not sane. They have 'gone mad' as St. Anthony says, though in the world and by the world, they are regarded as entirely 'normal.' Because the Christian person differs markedly from the world's daily experience of what it is to be human, the world considers the Christian to

be insane because he 'is not like us.' Hence, we should expect the world to consider us 'abnormal' and insane (though we should not intentionally give them reason to think so!—though all of us are called to be fools in the world's eyes for Christ's sake). Of course, we return the compliment: we gaze on the spectacle of life in our world and find insanity all around. How can they live like this, if, indeed, it can be called living at all?

Indeed, if God is come to man in human flesh, if Jesus Christ is the God-man come to reveal God to us and to open the way for us to become partakers of the Divine nature eternally, if our life is hid with Christ in God and apart from Him there is no true life, then to follow Christ and be a Christian in the fullest sense of the word is the supremely rational path to follow. To live any other way, to follow any other path is insanity and folly. It is to be in denial about the ultimate nature of reality. To be a Christian is to accept the reality of life in this universe as it is and to live in conformity with it. Hence it is the only rational path, for every other path denies the fundamental reality of God become man.

Because of our markedly different views of what is 'normal', we should not court the world's good opinion of us at the expense of compromising the Faith or moderating the Christian way of life to be more acceptable to the mad denizens of this world. If we have any Christian walk worthy of Christ, we shall always appear out of step with the world, and in the world's eyes, our life, not governed by fear of death and the philosophy "eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow we shall die", will be irrational and mad. They think to be a Christian is to be in denial of reality, to be deluded by promises of "pie in the sky." But the heavenly Bread of Life has come down from heaven to us; He is Emmanuel, God with us, God who nourishes us with Himself. He is not a fond hope of "pie in the sky bye and bye..."

Christ, His Mother, and the Saints show us what it is to be normal. Let us keep our eyes on them and not care unduly for what the world thinks of us.

Fr. Justin Frederick

A Word On Giving

We do not speak much about giving at St. Maximus. The priest considers it his task to teach about the relation of money to spiritual life from time to time and that it is the work of the Holy Spirit to persuade people to give out of love for God as part of their worship. It is not the priest's part to hector, to harangue, or to guilt people into giving.

On this day of the annual meeting, it is appropriate to take a look at this matter as we stand on the verge of building a permanent temple that will be consecrated as a church. We need it, as we are averaging nearly 90 persons a Sunday this year. The

new church will more than double our space for worship and allow the parish to grow to a size which will be able to support the establishment of new parishes, both here in Denton County and in surrounding counties.

Our goal, however, is not just to build a building and pay a priest, it is to be the Church here in Denton. That means building a church as a consecrated place to worship God, but also make the fullness of Christ's Gospel available to the people of our county and surrounding counties. We would work to start parishes in every town of 5,000 or more and multiple parishes in cities such as Denton.

There is another side to being the Church though, and that is to care for orphans and widows in their distress, as St. James says. As our parish tithes to the Diocese of the South, it is our goal also to set aside ten percent of our parish income to use to help those in need. This can take many forms: helping those within the parish who need help, giving in the name of Christ to those who come to us from outside, supporting worthy charities, and even undertaking ministries such as a food pantry, a soup kitchen, or even housing for the retired. Schooling for our children could also be developed. Doing these things shows the world that we are truly Christ's disciples through our love for one another.

The good news is that money to take the next step of building the church is already in the parish, but, as you will see, it is not yet in the parish.

Looking at our parish this past year, we have roughly 98 adults (18 years and older) connected to our parish, 86 of whom are Orthodox. Of those Orthodox adults, we have records of 52 of them giving to the parish, which means 60% of our Orthodox adults are giving. While some of the 35 not recorded as giving may be giving anonymously by cash, the general cash giving for the last fiscal year was about \$6,200, which represents a tithe on *one* median household income in Denton County (\$74,000 in 2009-2013).

Of the 52 adults recorded as giving (in what we might call 35 'giving units', constituting either a single person or a family), 28 (in 19 giving units) of them either tithed or gave a significant proportion of their income less than a full tithe. The top ten units each gave more than \$4000 over the year (5 of them over \$6,000), units eleven through fourteen gave between \$3000 and \$4000, and three units gave between \$1800 and \$2200. These were all regular members of our parish. Then there were nine gainfully employed giving units representing fifteen adults who gave between \$200 and \$1200; all but one of those units gave less than \$1000. The remaining adults who gave are not easily categorized, but the amounts given were small.

So, the money is here in the parish. If we wish to build a church in which to glorify God, we have the resources. But to each of us remains the choice whether to offer them—or not. Some of us are doing that, some are not, some are doing it minimally. If

everyone tithes, there will be no lack, not only to build a church but also to start missions and develop charitable work. We'll not have to do fundraisers or hire professionals to raise funds. We'll not have to harangue and cajole you to give. The money will be there to do the work.

Please, everyone read the other articles in this issue and ponder them prayerfully before God. (You should know that your priest does not ask you to do what he himself will not do. He has tithed to the parish since its start, and has always been in the top ten, though it is highly questionable whether he has a top-ten income. This year, he ranked number nine in giving, the lowest rank he has ever had. It is time to push him out of the top ten once and for all.)

Stewardship: Tipping & Tithing

Now it came to pass on a day at noon that the writer of this piece was a guest of a certain rich man. And the lunch was enjoyed at a popular restaurant. And the waiters were very efficient. And the food was good. Now when the end of the meal was at hand, the waiter brought unto the host the check. And the host examined it, frowned a bit, but made no comment.

But as we arose to depart, I observed that he laid some coins under the edge of his plate. I know not what denomination the coins were, although the waiter, who stood nearby, smiled happily, which, being interpreted, means that the tip was satisfactory.

Now this parable enters not into the merits or demerits of tipping. But as I meditated on the coins that become tips throughout our nation, I began to think of tips and tithes. For the proverbial tip should be at least a tenth of the check (preferably 15% or more), lest the waiter turn against you.

And as I continued to think on these things, it came unto me that few people who go to church treat God as well as they honor their waiter. For they give unto the waiter a tithe or more, but unto God they give whatsoever they think will get them by, if at all.

Truly, does man fear the waiter more than he fears God? And does he love God less than he loves the waiter? Or does the waiter do more for him than God? Truly a man and his money are past understanding! *A 20th Century Christian in Where Moth and Rust Do Not Consume: An Anthology on Christian Giving*, by Rev. Anthony Coniaris.

The Curse of Withholding Alms

It was told us at the monastery of St. Theodosius the Great that it used to be the custom for the poor and orphans of the region to come here on Holy Thursday to receive half a peck of grain or five loaves of blessed bread, five small coins, a pint of wine, and half a pint of honey. For three years prior to the event which we are about to relate, grain had been scarce and, in this area, it was selling at one piece of gold for two pecks. When the Great Fast came round, some of the brethren said to the hegumen: "Abba, do not make provision for the customary dole to the poor this year, sir, lest the monastery not have enough for the brethren—for grain is not to be

found." The abba began to say to the brethren: "Children, let us not discontinue the charity of our father Theodosius [founder of the monastery]. Behold, it is his commandment, and it would be held against us if we disobeyed it. It is he himself who will look after us."

But the brethren continued to argue with the abba, saying: "We cannot give the accustomed charity, for we do not have anything to give." Then the hegumen was deeply grieved: "Go then and do what you will." The customary charity therefore was not distributed that Holy Thursday. But on Holy Friday morning, the brother in charge of the granary opened up and found that what grain they did possess had germinated. So they ended up throwing it all into the sea.

Then the abba began to say to the brethren: "He who sets aside the commandments of his father suffers these afflictions. You are now reaping the fruits of disobedience. We were going to part with five hundred pecks [125 bushels] of grain and, in doing so, to serve our father Theodosius by our obedience; also to bring consolation to our brethren the poor. Now about five thousand pecks [1250 bushels] of grain has gone to ruin. What good has it done us, brethren? We have twice been guilty of wrong-doing: once in that we transgressed the precept of our father; and again in that we did not put our trust in God but in our granary. So let us learn from this, my brethren, that God watches over all humanity; and that Saint Theodosius invisibly cares for us, his children."

Comment: Very often when we rob God by not bringing our tithes and offerings into His house or giving alms to those in need, what we improperly kept back for ourselves often ends up being taken from us, and even more besides: sickness imposes unexpected medical costs, or sudden car problems bring a high bill from the mechanic, or we make foolish, unnecessary purchases that we later regret, a major appliance goes out and needs to be replaced, etc. If we knew the full reason for all the financial reverses in our lives, we should quickly see that it is wrong to think we cannot afford to tithe and give offerings and alms; in truth, we cannot afford not to do it. God is not mocked; if we see fit to rob Him, He withholds His blessing on our finances and we suffer under a curse that deprives us of what we withheld and more. This is the economy of the Kingdom, and blessed indeed are we if we understand it and live according to it.

Money & Its Relation to Spiritual Life

Archbishop Dmitri

This article was originally written in 1972 for the Third All-American Council. Since then, the Church in America has taken steps to educate clergy and laymen alike in the areas of stewardship and tithing, and much has changed. Nevertheless, the following comments are still applicable to our day, particularly that which is said about the theology of giving. The article was republished in The Dawn, June-July 2002.

Giving as Practiced in Our Churches

Even a cursory glance at the system of giving in our Church, the difficulties and ill will arising from

finances...(within the framework of the Church's life), would lead one to believe that, indeed, money is the root of all evils, and that, insofar as the Church is concerned, it is simply an evil that has to be endured. In fact, there is little evidence that any thought is ever given to the possibility of money's being sanctified or to its being an integral part of worship. Nor has there been any sustained or general interest in trying to discern the meaning of money from the theological point of view. Almost always, when the various organs of the Church, the National Church, the Diocese, and the parish appeal for contributions or gifts or for the fulfillment of the several assessments, it is invariably in terms of the needs of those organs. The practical is almost the only consideration, and that every member must give, even sacrifice, of his possessions and wealth for his spiritual well-being and, ultimately, for his salvation, will strike most of our people not only as a daring innovation but as a completely non-Orthodox scheme.

It is also true that many of our people think in terms of giving only what they can spare when everything else is taken care of and no sacrifice would be required. Any suggestion that he give a regular part of his income, a certain percentage, making it a part of his personal or family budget, is looked upon as an attempt to encroach upon his freedom, to coerce him, and to destroy the element of freewill in his offering.

Parish Support

Our parishes have usually supported themselves through the payment of dues and fund-raising, this last either for the general fund or for improvements and building programs, in the form of bazaars, raffles, food-sales, dances, and even gambling. We have been trained to think that except for the minimal amount required for membership, any other donation to the Church is to be made only after clear evidence of the need has been presented. Further, these extra gifts have to be made in exchange for something: food, entertainment, or even the chance for personal profit.

Money, then, in this environment, is the principal temporal business of the parish, and any idea of relating it to the spiritual life is regarded as unorthodox and anti-traditional. The priest thus is not to concern himself with money at all, except to act sometimes as a kind of salesman whose personal persuasiveness may be put to use by and for the parish council, the proper agency for dealing with the necessary, but still dirty, business.

Money as Worship

It may be startling to hear that the giving of money is an integral part of worship and can in no way be divorced from the spiritual life. But such is the case, for there is no worship without giving or offering. The Christian's life demands a totally consecration to God, and this means that every aspect of his life must be sanctified. No one part of his life can be reserved and kept as a purely material,

this-worldly concern, for when one refuses to let his wealth be sanctified, then it can become the root of all evils, and stand between him and God. In commenting on I Timothy 6:10, St. John Chrysostom says, "But this root is from us, and not from the nature of things." The young man thought he was just because he kept all the commandments, but went away sad when he learned that the one thing needful for him was to part with his wealth.ⁱ

The Theology of Giving

The offering acceptable to God is nothing less than the offering of oneself. In speaking of the gift of the Macedonians, St. Paul says, "First they gave their own selves to the Lord,"ⁱⁱⁱ and, "Yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead."ⁱⁱⁱ

In the Eucharist, the meaning of the offertory is that each member offers himself to God, all that he is and all that he has. His offering is accepted and is returned to him so that he may be a member of the Body of Christ through Communion.

Throughout the Old Testament, the sign of man's offering of himself was his offering from what he produced. Such offering, regularly the tithe or tenth,^{iv} was holy and, in turn, sanctified the rest of his possessions. So when man produced things, the works of his hands, the produce of the land, cattle, or other animals, it was the tenth part of those things that he offered. In modern society, the only thing that man produces is money. He usually works for a salary or he invests money and increases his holdings through interest and dividends. To this pursuit of making money he dedicates most of his time and energy, that is, he devotes himself. Unless a certain part of his modern product is consciously and premeditatedly devoted to God, to His work, and to the extension of His Kingdom among men, then donations, gifts, and dues are merely token amounts. The amount of one's gift and the spirit in which it is made indicate the relative importance God and His Church hold in the heart of the giver.

The eighth and ninth chapters of St. Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians contain the whole theology of Christian giving. Although he is speaking specifically about a collection for the relief of the Christians at Jerusalem, he reveals a number of universal truths about giving.

Giving represents the degree of a Christian's devotion, and is a means of grace.^v It is part of the Christian life and even proof of one's love.^{vi} Christian giving is sacrificial,^{vii} and our Lord's emptying Himself and becoming poor for our sakes is the basis for the call to Christians to sacrifice.^{viii} Giving must be in proportion to what one has, though the Macedonians had given even more than they were able.^{ix} It must be voluntary^x and cheerful.^{xi} Giving provides a good example to others and is the occasion for thanksgiving.^{xii}

Truly, if each Christians followed the principles of giving as outlined by St. Paul, there would be no need for any kind of fund-raising events or assessments.

Conclusions

In the light of the clear teaching of the Gospel, each Christian must give according to his means. This implies that he must dedicate regularly a part of his income to God's work (ideally a tithe, or even more if he is especially blessed materially). It would be appropriate for the Church to be a real item in the budget of each family and each individual. The concept of total commitment, which is the only acceptable way of life for a Christian, means that we must begin, as indeed a few parishes have already done, to encourage people to consider the urgency of adopting the pledge system or any other system in which they could give freely and generously to God's work, to respond to the responsibility of mission, to complete the work of sanctification of their whole lives.

Further, when real Christian giving becomes general in our Church, the necessity for the parishes to depend on money-making schemes will automatically diminish. Then so much of the energy and time of the parish can be given over to knowing the saving faith of Christ, to preaching the Gospel, and to deepening the spiritual life.

Parishes in their turn, rather than being selfishly turned in upon themselves, must make the work of the whole Church and the carrying out of its mission their own concern. This means that parish budgets should include regular and generous contributions and allotments to work outside their own boundaries—to mission, to education (particularly to seminaries), and to works of mercy.

Finally, it should be understood that there is a close relationship between the spiritual life and one's financial commitment to the Church. Over and over again in the Bible, it is made clear that one's willingness to give of his possessions to God's work is the measure of his willingness to give himself, and one's *self* is the only acceptable offering. "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."^{xiii}

Endnotes

ⁱ Matthew 19:22.

ⁱⁱ 2 Corinthians 8:5.

ⁱⁱⁱ Romans 6:13.

^{iv} Leviticus 27:30-32.

^v 2 Corinthians 8:1, 8:8.

^{vi} 2 Corinthians 8:24, 8:7.

^{vii} Mark 12:43-44.

^{viii} 2 Corinthians 8:9.

^{ix} 2 Corinthians 8:3.

^x 2 Corinthians 8:12.

^{xi} 2 Corinthians 9:7.

^{xii} 2 Corinthians 9:11-12.

^{xiii} Luke 12:34.

Upcoming Events 2015

27 September Annual Meeting, noon

31 October All-Saints Party 3:00 p.m.

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!