

The Confessor's Tongue for November 22, A. D. 2015

Twenty-Fifth Sunday after Pentecost; Apostles of 70 Philemon, Archippus, Martyr Apphia
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 31

One day Abba Anthony received a letter from the Emperor Constantius, asking him to come to Constantinople, and he wondered whether he ought to go. So he said to Abba Paul, his disciple, "Ought I to go?" He replied, "If you go, you will be called Anthony; but if you stay here, you will be called Abba Anthony." Saying 31 Sayings of the Desert Fathers*

Commentary: Notice, that, despite the honor of being summoned by the Emperor, Anthony questions the wisdom of going and seeks to discern whether he should go. Moreover, to answer the question, he relies not on his own discernment but consults a brother. And he asks not a great elder, but his own disciple! And this disciple, Abba Paul the Simple, was far inferior in experience to Antony. An older man, he had left the world after he found his wife with another man, saying to her, "You two can stay together and look after each other. I am leaving to become a monk." With that he went to St. Antony, who would not receive him and shut him out of his cell for three days. But Abba Paul was still there when Antony came out. Through his simplicity and determination, Abba Paul prevailed upon Antony to receive him as a monk. It is of this one Antony improbably asks council.

Anthony's ability to seek counsel in an important matter did not appear full-formed in him but had been developed over the course of his life. At the beginning of his ascetic life, he was diligent to learn from those who had gone before him in asceticism. As a bee visiting the flowers, he went from experienced person to experienced person, learning as much as he could from each. Having begun his ascetic life in humility, he was able to preserve humility even when he had attained such great fame that an emperor invited him to visit.

Humility is required to ask counsel of others, still greater humility is required to ask one who less in age, experience, and wisdom. How many pitfalls we would avoid if we would take counsel with others! How many tears of repentance would need never be shed if only we had asked counsel and listened! We ought not to ask counsel of just anyone, of course. We can ask those who will tell us what we want to hear, but that will not help us. We must ask those who have a measure of wisdom and discernment from God and the courage to speak the truth even when it may be unpalatable to us.

Secondly, notice the reversal of the world's values. Most of us would leap at the opportunity if the President summoned us by name to visit him. Yet Abba Paul indicates that to go the Emperor will hinder Anthony in his true vocation of being a monk. He will be known simply as 'Anthony' if he goes to the Emperor, but if he stays in his cell in the desert,

he will be known as 'Abba Anthony.' Very often the thing the world judges as great honor and opportunity is a spiritual hindrance for the true lover and seeker of God. Public exposure, honor, riches, power, and publicity may well hold one back from one's full potential in Christ.

So thirdly, we see that our choices in life are not always between good and bad, but sometimes between good, better, and best. Good and better can be the enemy of best, and here that is the case. Better for Anthony to have his full development as monk and become known as 'Abba' than to partake of the fleeting honor of seeing the Emperor, with all the opportunities that might present, and fall short of his spiritual potential. For this reason, St. Paul the Apostle tells us that "all things are lawful, but not all are profitable." It was lawful for Anthony to respond to the Emperor's invitation and visit him, it was a 'good' thing, not inherently wrong, but it was not profitable for him nor the best thing for him, as he discerned through the counsel of his disciple Paul. May God grant us all the wisdom to take counsel with others and the desire to pursue His best and what is truly profitable for us, and not to be content with merely the good and lawful.

**(Emperor Constantius, second son of Constantine the Great, was a protector of Arianism and ruled from 337 to 361.) Fr. Justin Frederick*

On Correcting the Faults of Others

If you wish to correct the faults of anyone, do not think of trying to do so solely by your own means: you would only do harm by your vices, for instance, by pride and the irritability arising from it; *but cast thy burned upon the Lord*, and pray with all your heart that God Himself will enlighten the mind and heart of that man. If he sees that your prayer breathes love, and that it really comes from the depths of your heart, he will undoubtedly fulfill it, and you will soon see, from the change that has taken place in him for whom you prayed, that it is the work of the most high God.

We must pray fervently for all those enslaved by vices, for the enemy works within them. *St. John of Kronstadt*

On Praying for the Departed

Some ask, what is the use of naming the departed, or of praying for them? God Himself knows the names and needs of all. But those who so speak forget, or do not know, the importance of prayer, do not realize the importance of every word uttered from a whole heart; they forget that the justice and mercy of God are moved by your heartfelt prayer, which the Lord In His goodness imputes to the merit of the living or the departed themselves, as to the

members of the one body of the Church. They do not know that the *Church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven*, in her love continually prays to God for us, and expressly names before God those who pray for them—equal for equal. We name them, and they name us. But he who does not lovingly remember his brethren in prayer will not himself be remembered, and does not deserve to be named. Even one word of faith and love means much in prayer: *The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.*

Pray to the Lord for the repose of the souls of your departed forebears and brethren each day, at morning and at evening, in order that the remembrance of death may live in you, and that hope of the life to come, after death, may not become extinct in you; and that your spirit may daily be humbled by the thought of the transitory nature of your life.
St. John of Kronstadt

On Reading the Scriptures

"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path."

The Scriptures contain the Spirit-inspired words of the prophets and apostles, the record of God's revelation to man. In the Scriptures God reveals much of His will for us and guides us on the path to knowing Him and pleasing Him. Knowing the Scriptures is a source of spiritual strength; neglect of them will result in spiritual weakness and ignorance of God's will. As St. John Chrysostom puts it in his ninth homily on Colossians, "This is the cause of all evils, the not knowing the Scriptures." How much trouble and suffering we would be spared if we read and meditated upon the Scriptures regularly, if we endeavored to organize our lives in accordance with their teaching! How many mistakes we would avoid, and how much more quickly we would recover from falls if we knew them!

Much profit comes to us by bringing the words of Scripture into our lives each day. St. John Chrysostom writes in Homily 37 on John:

Great is the profit of the divine Scriptures, and all-sufficient is the aid which comes from them. And Paul declared this when he said, "Whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written aforetime for our admonition upon whom the ends of the world are come, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope." (Romans 15:4, I Corinthians 1:11). For the living oracles are a treasury of all manner of medicines, so that whether it be needful to quench pride, to lull desire to sleep, to tread under foot the love of money, to despise pain, to inspire confidence, to gain patience, from them one may find abundant resource.

St. John of Damascus speaks at length about Scripture in his work *On the Orthodox Faith (Book 4.17)*:

It is one and the same God whom both the Old and the New Testament proclaim, who is praised and glorified in the Trinity: *I am come*, saith the Lord, *not to destroy the law*

but to fulfill it. For He Himself worked out our salvation for which all Scripture and all mystery exists. And again, *Search the Scriptures, for they are they that testify of me.* And the Apostle says, *God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son.* Through the Holy Spirit, therefore, both the law and the prophets, the evangelists and apostles and pastors and teachers spake. All Scripture, then, is *given by inspiration of God and is also assuredly profitable.* Wherefore to search the Scriptures is a work most fair and most profitable for souls. For just as the tree planted by the channels of waters, so also the soul watered by the divine Scripture is enriched and gives fruit in its season, viz. orthodox belief, and is adorned with evergreen leafage, I mean, actions pleasing to God. For through the Holy Scriptures we are trained to action that is pleasing to God, and untroubled contemplation. For in these we find both exhortation to every virtue and dissuasion from every vice. If, therefore, we are lovers of learning, we shall also be learned in many things. For by care and toil and the grace of God the Giver, all things are accomplished. *For every one that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.* Wherefore let us knock at the very fair garden of the Scriptures... But let us not knock carelessly but rather zealously and constantly: lest knocking we grow weary. For thus it will be opened to us. If we read once or twice and do not understand what we read, let us not grow weary, but let us persist, let us talk much, let us enquire. *For ask thy Father, he saith, and He will shew thee: thy elders and they will tell thee [Deut32.7].* For *there is not in every man that knowledge.* Let us draw of the fountain of the garden perennial and purest waters springing into life eternal. Here let us luxuriate, let us revel insatiate: for the Scriptures possess inexhaustible grace.

Now during the Nativity Fast as we seek to make room in our hearts for Christ is a good time to apply ourselves afresh to the Holy Word of God.

Reading the chapter of Proverbs (OT) that corresponds to the day of the month will give us much wisdom for daily life. If, in addition, we will undertake to read one chapter from the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John) and two chapters from the Epistles (Acts – Revelation), we shall read the entire New Testament in three months (the monks of Optina keep this rule of reading). Think what a difference reading the entire NT four times a year would make in your thoughts and soul!

Or, follow the program laid out last week here. Whatever you do, find a way to be nourished by God's Word during the Fast and beyond.

Upcoming Events 2015-16

6 December Feast of St. Nicholas
17 December Thursday, 7:00 p.m. Holy Unction
26 December Feast Day at Nativity of our Lord Monastery
31 December All-Night Vigil for St. Basil
20-21 January Visit of Bishop Maxim for the Feast of St. Maximus

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!