

The Confessor's Tongue for December 13, A. D. 2015

Twenty-Eighth Sunday after Pentecost; St. Herman of Alaska, Wonderworker
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.

On the World Economic Crisis

St. Nicholas of Zicha

Written to Priest K. in 1929, pertinent now.

You are asking me, man of God, about the reason and meaning of the present crisis. Who am I that you ask me about this great mystery? "Speak if you have something greater than silence," said St. Gregory the Theologian. And although I find that presently silence is higher than any word, I will, out of love for you, write what I think about this question.

"Crisis" is a Greek word, and in translation it means "judgment". In the Holy Scripture the word "judgment" is used many times. We read in the Psalms, Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment (Ps. 1:5). Later again, I will sing of mercy and judgment: unto thee, O Lord, will I sing. (Ps. 101:1). The wise king Solomon writes that the judgment will come to everyone from the Lord (Proverbs 29:26). The Savior himself said, "For the Father judges no man, but has committed all judgment unto the Son." (John 5:22). Apostle Peter writes, "For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God" (1 Pet. 4:17).

Replace the word "judgment" with the word "crisis" and read, "I will sing of mercy and crisis", "Crisis will come to everyone from the Lord", "The Father committed all crisis unto the Son", "For the time is come that crisis must begin at the house of God".

Previously the Europeans, when some trouble befell them, used the word "judgment" instead of the word "crisis". These days the word "judgment" is replaced with the word "crisis", a clear word with one less clear. The drought would come, people would say, "God's judgment!", flood — "God's judgment!". A war or epidemic would start, "God's judgment!", earthquakes, locust, other trials, always the same — "God's judgment!" Therefore, crisis is because of the drought, because of the flood, of the wars and epidemics. And people see the present financial, economic catastrophe as God's judgment, but they call it "crisis" rather than "judgment". So that the trouble would increase from lack of reason! Because when the clear word "judgment" was said, the reason that led to the trouble was clear, and the Judge who allowed the trouble was known, and so was the purpose for which the trouble was allowed. But after replacing the word "judgment" with the word "crisis", which is unclear for the most, no one can explain why it is, from whom, and for what. And this is the only thing in which this crisis differs from the crisis that happens from drought and flood, war or epidemic, locust or other tribulation.

You are asking about the reason of today's crisis, or God's judgment? The reason is always the same. The reason for all droughts, floods, epidemics and other troubles is the same as of today's crisis — the

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falling away from God. The sin of falling away from God has resulted in this crisis as well, and the Lord allowed it so as to wake people, sober them, so that they would repent and come back to him. The crisis is commensurate to sins. And truly, the Lord used modern means to teach modern people: he struck the banks, the stock exchanges, the entire financial system. He overturned the tables of money-lenders just as he once did in the temple in Jerusalem. He created an unprecedented panic between merchants and money-lenders. Stirred up, brought down, mixed up, confused, bestowed fear. And all that so that proud European and American wise men would wake up, repent, remember God. So that they who are anchored in the haven of material comfort would remember their souls, acknowledge their trespassings and bow down before God the Highest, the living God.

How long will the crisis last? Until the proud culprits acknowledge the victory of the All-Powerful. Until the people would realize that they have to translate the unclear word "crisis" into their native language and would exclaim with the repentant sigh, "God's judgment!"

Therefore you, honest Father, should also call "crisis" "God's judgment", and you will understand everything.

Greetings to you and Lord's peace!

December 13: St. Herman of Alaska

"Once the Elder was invited aboard a frigate which came from St Petersburg. The Captain of the frigate was a highly educated man, who had been sent to America by order of the Emperor to make an inspection of all the colonies. There were more than twenty-five officers with the Captain, and they also were educated men. In the company of this group sat a monk of a hermitage, small in stature and wearing very old clothes. All these educated conversationalists were placed in such a position by his wise talks that they did not know how to answer him. The Captain himself used to say, 'We were lost for an answer before him.'

"Father Herman gave them all one general question: 'Gentlemen, What do you love above all, and what will each of you wish for your happiness?' Various answers were offered ... Some desired wealth, others glory, some a beautiful wife, and still others a beautiful ship he would captain; and so forth in the same vein. 'It is not true,' Father Herman said to them concerning this, 'that all your various wishes can bring us to one conclusion - that each of you desires that which in his own understanding he considers the best, and which is most worthy of his love?' They all answered, 'Yes, that is so!' He then continued, 'Would you not say, Is not that which is best, above all, and surpassing all, and that which by

preference is most worthy of love, the Very Lord, our Jesus Christ, who created us, adorned us with such ideals, gave life to all, sustains everything, nurtures and loves all, who is Himself Love and most beautiful of all men? Should we not then love God above every thing, desire Him more than anything, and search Him out?"

All said, "Why, yes! That's self-evident!" Then the Elder asked, "But do you love God?" They all answered, "Certainly, we love God. How can we not love God?" "And I a sinner have been trying for more than forty years to love God, I cannot say that I love Him completely," Father Herman protested to them. He then began to demonstrate to them the way in which we should love God. "if we love someone," he said, "we always remember them; we try to please them. Day and night our heart is concerned with the subject. Is that the way you gentlemen love God? Do you turn to Him often? Do you always remember Him? Do you always pray to Him and fulfill His holy commandments?" They had to admit that they had not! "For our own good, and for our own fortune," concluded the Elder, "let us at least promise ourselves that from this very minute we will try to love God more than anything and to fulfill His Holy Will!" Without any doubt this conversation was imprinted in the hearts of the listeners for the rest of their lives.

The Sayings of St. Anthony the Great 34

Abba Anthony once went to visit Abba Amoun in Mount Nitria, and when they met, Abba Amoun said, "By your prayers, the number of the brethren increases, and some of them want to build more cells where they may live in peace. How far away from here do you think we should build the cells?" Abba Anthony said, "Let us eat at the ninth hour and then let us go out for a walk in the desert and explore the country." So they went out into the desert and they walked until sunset, and then Abba Anthony said, "Let us pray and plant the cross here, so that those who wish to do so may build here. Then when those who remain there want to visit those who have come here, they can take a little food at the ninth hour and then come. If they do this, they will be able to keep in touch with each other without distraction of mind." The distance is twelve miles.

Saying 34 Sayings of the Desert Fathers

Commentary: Abba Amoun in humility credits Anthony's prayers for the growth of his community rather than his own leadership. In humility, he asks Anthony's council about that matter of where to build more cells to house the brethren so a modicum of peace may be maintained. Humility keeps him from taking credit for God's work in him and from relying on his own judgment. Humility makes it possible for man to learn new things and to receive wise council. Without humility, we will make no spiritual progress, for spiritual life requires God's grace, and God gives his grace only to the humble.

The Desert Fathers gave advice when they were asked but avoided giving unsolicited advice. Asking

indicates humility, a recognition of need and an openness to receive. Giving unsolicited advice is dangerous, for the intended recipient has not indicated his readiness to receive it in humility by asking for it, and the giver likely speaks out of pride or the pleasure of hearing his own voice.

Anthony on his part, does not rush to give his own wisdom in response to Abba Amoun's request. He waits until the fast of the day is concluded and broken at the ninth hour (3:00 p.m.) and then walks into the desert with the brethren to explore until they find the proper place at sunset. And notice how practical is the result, how it fits into the monks' way of life: the monks building the cells are far enough away from the original settlement so as to have a large measure of peace and quiet, but they are within the walking distance of an afternoon (let it not be said that these monks are fat and lazy! a twelve-mile walk between 3:00 p.m. and sundown...) and so will not be so remote as to be practically cut off. Thus Abba Amoun and Abba Anthony set an example of doing all things with prayer and counsel and in not relying on their own wisdom.

The custom of planting a cross on a site where a church or monastery will be built remains a living custom in the Church to this day. When we have the official groundbreaking ceremony for a new church, we plant a cross on the spot to claim it for its holy purpose. *Fr. Justin Frederick*

A Prayer of the Venerable Anthony of Optina for the Beginning of Every Day

O God make speed to save me; O Lord, make haste to help me. Direct, O Lord, to the glory of Thy holy name, all that I do, read, and write, and all that I think, say, and understand, for from Thee my every deed has its beginning and in Thee it has its end. Grant me, O Lord, that I not anger Thee, my Creator, in word, deed, or thought, but rather, may all my deeds, counsels, and thoughts be to the glory of Thy most-holy name. O God make speed to save me; O Lord, make haste to help me. *Translated by Fr. Justin Frederick*

From St. Herman of Alaska

"The empty years of these desires separate us from our heavenly homeland, and our Love for these desires and our habits clothe us, as it were, in an odious dress; it is called by the Apostle 'the external (earthly) man.' (I Corinthians 15:47). We who are wanderers in the journey of this life call to God for aid. We must divest ourselves of this repulsiveness, and put on new desires, and a new love for the coming age. Thus, through this we will know either an attraction or a repulsion for the heavenly homeland. It is possible to do this quickly, but we must follow the example of the sick, who wishing for desired health, do not stop searching for means of curing themselves. But I am not speaking clearly."

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!