

The Confessor's Tongue for January 17, A. D. 2016

33rd Sunday after Pentecost; St. Anthony the Great

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.

January 17: St. Anthony the Great

Anthony was an Egyptian born in about the year 250. Following the death of his noble and wealthy parents, he divided the inherited estate with his sister, who was a minor, and made sure that she was cared for. Anthony distributed his half of the estate to the poor, and in his twentieth year he dedicated himself to the ascetic life for which he had yearned from his childhood. In the beginning, Anthony lived a life of asceticism near his village, but in order to flee the disturbance of people, he withdrew into the wilderness on the shore of the Red Sea. There he spent twenty years as a recluse, not associating with anyone except God. Through constant prayer, reflection, and contemplation, he patiently endured unspeakable temptations from the devil. His fame spread throughout the entire world, and many disciples gathered around him, whom he set on the path of salvation by his example and words.

During the eighty-five years of his ascetic life, only twice did he go to Alexandria: the first time to seek martyrdom during a time of persecution and the second time at the invitation of St. Athanasius the Great to refute the claim of the Arians that he, too, adhered to their heresy.

Anthony reposed at the age of 105, leaving behind an army of disciples and emulators. Even though Anthony was not a scholar, he was nevertheless a counselor and teacher of the most learned men of his time, as was St. Athanasius. When certain Greek philosophers tempted him with literary wisdom, Anthony shamed them with the question: "Which is older, the understanding or the book? Which of these two was the cause of the other?" Ashamed, the philosophers dispersed, for they perceived that they had only literary knowledge without understanding, whereas Anthony had understanding. Here is a man who attained perfection insofar as man, in general, can attain it on earth. Here is an instructor of instructors and a teacher of teachers, who for eighty-five years perfected himself; and it was only in that way that he was able to perfect many others. Filled with many years of life and great works, Anthony reposed in the Lord in the year 356. *from the Prologue*

Having considered St. Anthony's sayings over the past year, we may now have a better appreciation for this great saint, his example, and his teaching. O Venerable Father Anthony, pray to God for us!

On Idle Curiosity

We all know the saying "Curiosity killed the cat." The cat, which is viewed as a curious creature sticking its nose into all matters, in this case did so to its disadvantage. We say this when our curiosity, by inciting us not to mind our own business but that of others, leads us into trouble.

In his book *Path of Salvation*, St. Theophan the Recluse defines 'curiosity' as "an irresistible inclination to see and hear without purpose". It "consists of trying to know everything without order, without aim, without distinguishing whether it is needful or not" (pp. 54-55).

Curiosity is a gift from God. It helps us to live and learn in our world. Without curiosity, there would be little innovation, little advance of knowledge. Asking why things are this way and how they work and then investigating guided by such questions leads to much knowledge.

The curiosity that kills the cat and that of which St. Theophan writes might be termed "idle curiosity" to distinguish it from curiosity purposefully directed towards an end. "Idle curiosity" seeks to see and hear and know things without aim, without purpose, without need. It pokes its nose unabashedly into the business of others. The tabloids are full of material that both incites and panders to idle curiosity. The internet and Google make indulging in idle curiosity easier than it has ever been with all the attendant dangers thereof.

Idle curiosity will inevitably get us, like the cat, into spiritually deadly trouble. Curiosity properly used will bring us to knowledge of God. *Fr. Justin Frederick*

Reflection on God Hearing Us

St. Nikolai of Zicha (+1956)

Do not ever think that God does not hear you when you pray to Him! He hears our thoughts, just as we hear the voices and the words of one another. And if He does not act immediately according to your prayer, it is either because you are praying to Him in an unworthy manner, or because you ask something of Him which would be detrimental to you, or because He in His wisdom and providence, delays the fulfillment of your petition until the proper moment. Father John of Kronstadt writes, "As by means of the electric telegraph we speedily communicate with persons who are far away from us, so likewise, by means of lively faith—as though through telegraph wires—we speedily communicate with God, with the angels, and saints. As we trust entirely in the speed of the electric current and in its reaching its destination, so likewise should we completely trust in the speed of the prayer of faith and in its reaching its destination. Send our petition to God and the saints by means of the telegraph of faith, and you will speedily obtain an answer." And again, in another place, St. John writes: "God and the created spirits, and the souls of the departed—as well as those of the living—are sentient beings; and thought is rapid and in some manner omnipresent. Think of them with your whole heart, and they will be present with you. God will surely be with you always; and the others, by the gift and power of God, will also be with you." *Prolog from Ochrid*

21 January: St. Maximus the Confessor

The Church honors the memory of the Venerable Maximus with two feasts during the year: January 21 and August 13. Because the latter feast corresponds with the leavetaking of Transfiguration, the celebration of the summer feast of St. Maximus is often transferred to August 12.

St. Maximus was an official in the court of the Emperor Heraclius of the East Roman Empire. About the year 614, after having served the emperor for three years, Maximus, longing for a life of solitude, of *hesychia*, left his position and became a simple monk, who, despite become an abbot, was never ordained.

St. Maximus' keen mind was illuminated through his ascetic struggles, and he wrote extensively about the spiritual life based in the writings of those who had gone before and his own experience of those truths. But in 634, through his association with St. Sophronius, Patriarch of Jerusalem, St. Maximus was enrolled in the struggle against the Monothelite heresy, which taught that Jesus Christ had had only one will—a divine one. But for Christ to lack a human will was to render Him less than fully human. The consequences of this were not merely academic, for as St. Gregory the Theologian had taught, "What is not assumed is not healed." If Christ had not assumed a human will, then man's will was not healed by Christ—and it was man's will above all, perhaps, that needed to be healed. Man could not be saved if Christ lacked a human will. For the rest of his life, and sometimes nearly alone, St. Maximus eloquently defended Christ's full divinity in the face of political pressure, heretics, and wavering churchmen. He was tried by imperial authorities, condemned, and exiled three times: in 655, 656, and finally, in 662. The last time, his right hand and his tongue, the instruments of his teaching, were cut off. He died in exile shortly afterwards on August 13, 662.

St. Maximus bears the titles "venerable" and "Confessor". "Venerable" (*prepodobnii*) is the title given to monastic saints. "Confessor" (*ispovednik*) is the glorious title given to a saint who has been persecuted and has suffered for the Faith.

One of the Church's most profound theologians, St. Maximus possessed equally profound insight into the spiritual life which he acquired through his practice of it. True Christian life always consists both of believing and confessing the right doctrine as well as doing the right things or living the right way. In his writings, the intimate relation between theology and spirituality is manifest. Christian spirituality (how one approaches and interacts with God) depends on Christian theology (what is said about God). If the Church's confession of who God is, and especially, who Jesus Christ is, becomes corrupt or distorted, it will inevitably corrupt spiritual life as well.

St. Maximus teaches that there are three faculties of the soul: the rational faculty (mind or nous), the concupiscent (desiring) and the irascible (temper). There is a proper use for each, and there are misuses

of each, which are sinful. Regular misuse results in a sinful habit. To overcome a fixed habit of pleasure related to the concupiscent element, one needs the continual exercise of fasting, vigils, and prayer. To overcome a habit of temper, kindness, benevolence, love, and mercy are needed.

Sin in action is preceded by sin in thought. "For unless anyone sins first in thought, he will never sin in deed." As a result the war with sinful thoughts is far harder to win than the war with sinful actions. To prevail over thoughts, Maximus counsels, "Take care of your passions and you will easily drive thoughts from your mind. Thus for fornication—fast, keep vigil, work hard, keep to yourself. For anger and hurt—disdain reputation, dishonor, and material things. For grudges—pray for the one who has hurt you, and you will be rid of them."

"A passion is a movement of the soul contrary to nature either toward irrational love or senseless hate of something or on account of something material." Furthermore, "the beginning of all passions is love of self, and the end is pride. Self-love is irrational love of the body, and if one eliminates this, he eliminates along with it all the passions stemming from it."

About money, St. Maximus says there are three sinful reasons for loving it: "pleasure-seeking, vainglory, and lack of faith. And more serious than the other two is lack of faith." There is also a virtuous reason for acquiring money: the financial administrator acquires money "so that he might never run short in relieving each one's need."

St. Maximus' teaching offers us many more riches than we can recount here. Many of his writings are found in volume two of the *Philokalia*. His work entitled *400 Chapters on Love* should be known all Christians. He wrote many other works, including *200 Chapters on Theology*, and commentaries on the Lord's Prayer and the Divine Liturgy.

The ikos from the canon of Matins for the saint well sums up his life:

Showing thyself to be an emulator of the sufferings of the Savior, and having Him in thy soul, O most blessed one who art most rich, thou didst appoint ascents in thy heart. And He hath given thee grace from heaven; for thou didst manfully oppose the tyrants, O wise one; and preaching the unoriginate, divine, and consubstantial Trinity, and denouncing the heretics who fought against God, thou didst endure boundless trials, O venerable and most praised one: the severing of thy theologizing tongue together with thy hand. Yet didst thou not cease to speak with boldness, confirming the faithful with thy divine teachings, manifestly preaching the transcendent and unoriginate Trinity unto all the people.

Upcoming Events 2015-16

20-21 January Visit of Bishop Maxim for the Feast of St. Maximus

13 March: Forgiveness Vespers, 6:00 p.m.

14-19 March: Clean Week: Plan now to set aside as much of this week as possible for prayer.

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!