

The Confessor's Tongue for October 2, A. D. 2016

15th Sunday after Pentecost, Blessed Andrew, Fool for Christ; SS Cyprian & Justina
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.

October 2: Blessed Andrew, Fool for Christ

Born a Scythian (according to the Eastern Menaion he was a Slav), the slave of the wealthy Constantinople resident Theognostus, who taught him the Greek language and the sciences, Andrew "loved Christ from a young child", was meek and obedient, frequently prayed to God and thought about the salvation of his soul. He diligently read the lives of the martyrs and saints and, finally, became zealous to imitate them. On special command from above, he accepted for himself the difficult ascetic effort of foolishness. In torn clothes he went about the city, endured hunger, cold, sneers and beatings, and at night he abided in silent prayer for himself, for his abusers and for the entire Christian world. "All who have seen" the way of life of St. Andrew marveled at his "patience". For his long-term asceticism of folly the Lord granted St. Andrew the gift of the recovery of sight and "all future things, as if seen before his eyes". He "led the youth Epiphanius to the right way" and predicted to him that "he would be bishop and teach the people" (see Oct. 1). For St. Andrew "hidden things were opened" and he "saw all bodiless and carnal things". In the Blachernae Temple he became worthy to see the Mother of God, "praying for the world" and covering Christians with her Holy Veil (see Oct. 1). St. Andrew died in the 66th year of his life. Some place the time of the life of St. Andrew in the 10th century, but others place it between the 5th and 7th centuries. *Bulgakov Handbook*

Question & Answer

Question: How can I relate to the Psalter when it speaks of enemies? I don't have any enemies.

Answer: As the word "enemies" occurs in fifty-one (one-third) of the psalms and a total of eighty times in all, it is a significant word. Perhaps many of us hear this frequent word and think of human enemies. If we think like this, though, it raises problems. In Psalm 17:37, we read: "I have pursued mine enemies, and overtaken them: neither did I turn again till they were consumed." Again, in verse 40: "Thou hast also given me the necks of mine enemies; that I might destroy them that hate me." If these words refer to our human enemies, how can we relate them to Christ's command to love our enemies and do good to those who hate us?

As the Psalter is the Church's first prayer book and provides a significant amount of the material found in her services, we must understand how the Church understands the Psalter. Here are two keys to unlock that understanding. First, the Psalter is a prophetic work that speaks of the God-man Jesus Christ. In Psalm 1, the "blessed man who walks not in the way of the impious" is first of all Christ and only after that, everyone who chooses that path. In Psalm

2, God's anointed one (what the Greek word *khristos* means) who will rule the nations with a rod of iron and break them in pieces like a potter's vessel is Christ the King. The shepherd who keeps his flock from want and leads it to good pastures and still waters is Christ (Psalm 22/23). The one who says, "They parted my garments among them, and for my raiment did they cast lots" (Psalm 21/22:19) is Christ on the Cross. The King of glory for whom the gates lift up their heads is Christ at His ascension to heaven (Psalm 24.24:7-10), and so forth. Seeing Christ in the Psalms will give us greater appreciation for His Incarnation and deeper understanding of our life in Him.

Second, the Church understands the Psalter as a handbook for prayer and spiritual warfare. Hence, when it speaks of "enemies," it refers not to flesh and blood but to our spiritual enemies: the devil, his demons, and the passions within us that war against us. In this sense, we all have enemies—very serious and deadly enemies, and if we don't recognize we have them, we cannot win the spiritual war. Christ has smitten all our enemies through His Cross and Resurrection, rendering them powerless against us except to the degree that we believe their lies and submit ourselves to their will. For our faith to be perfected, we have to battle them and overcome them, and this battle is described in the Psalms.

One passage that presents difficulties to readers lacking the two keys is Psalm 138/139: 21-22: "Have I not hated them, O Lord, that hate Thee, and pined away become of Thine enemies? With a perfect hatred have I hated them; they have been to me as enemies." Here, if one takes it as referring to human enemies, one faces a direct contradiction with Christ's command to love one's enemies. But understanding this as referring to the spiritual warfare, the way to proper understanding is opened. Besides the power of desire (*epithumia*), the soul possesses the faculty of *thumos*, the "incensive power", which is associated with anger and hatred. This power was given to us for two purposes, according to the fathers: to resist evil and to move us to the effort of pursuing good. When the demons tell lies contradicting God's will, our *thumos* is supposed to be aroused and directed against them in anger and hatred to protect us. Too often, we respond to the enemy's lies at best with a mixture of anger and desire (at worst with only desire), which betrays us to him. Having perfect anger for him and the lies he would use to separate us from God provides protection for us.

If we read the Psalms with these two keys in our possession, great spiritual riches will open to us.

Fr. Justin Frederick

The Parable of the Sower and the Soils

The parable Christ told of the sower and the soils provides fundamental insight into spiritual life that assists us from beginning to end. For those of us who converted to Orthodoxy, there are insights here to help sustain us in our new way of life.

Those who come to the Orthodox Church as adults very often enter with great enthusiasm and high hopes. They have seen the true Light and found the true Faith. All the problems they experienced wherever they were before are not behind them. To think so is meet and right—with a caveat: the initial enthusiasm will wear off, the challenge of the daily work of choosing to abide in Christ will manifest, and some will be tempted and slip away.

Why is this so? The parable explains. Of the four soils, three particularly represent adult converts who have joyfully received the Faith. The shallow, stony soil represents those who receive the Faith with gladness and enthusiasm but fall away when the going gets tough. Sometimes the resistance is external, such as persecution from and conflict with family or friends. It is usually internal, too, reflecting the resistance of the old man to the work of being crucified with Christ and dying to self-will. The old man could be said to persecute the new spiritual man. Over time, the internal and external tensions prove to be too much for the once-enthusiastic convert, and the person withers spiritually in the heat generated by the battle and seeks relief by abandoning the fight. The root of the problem in this case is stubborn self-will, a heart that has not softened in full submission to the Master and His will.

The weedy soil represents those who receive the word gladly but who fail to deal adequately with the weeds of sin which the devil constantly sows through thoughts. In time, if those weeds are not plucked up while small, they will grow and choke out the plant of the kingdom. The soul, drawn to the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life will be spiritually enervated, losing all taste for spiritual things, much as one who has overindulged in junk food has no taste for good food. Sin dulls the spiritual sensitivity of the soul, especially when it is willfully chosen. Unless the convert continues in active warfare and quick repentance after falls, sin grows quickly in the soul to smother spiritual life.

The hard-packed soil of the path on which the seed falls but is snatched up by birds perhaps does not apply so much to adult converts as it does to those baptized as infants who hear the word as they grow up in the Church but never choose to act on it. Yet even an adult can get to the place: having once received the word, he lets his heart grow hard and cold to the point that further sowing of the word does not penetrate the surface of his heart but is snatched away by the demons.

No one should despair over this. However the condition of the soil of one's heart may be described at this moment, that is not one's fixed identity. Just as bad soils in the physical world can be improved and

become productive, so the condition of the soil of the heart is not static, but changes. It can change both for the better and for the worse. If as Christians we hear the word of the Gospel and don't act on it, don't work to receive it into our lives and apply it, our hearts are like the hard path—what we've heard will get taken from us. If we receive the word and act on it but retain conditions for doing so in our minds (I'll pray if you give me what I want...) or our stubborn self-will is not softened and humbled, then when the going gets tough, we'll get going—right out of the Church. If we receive the word but don't work to uproot the sin the constantly sprouts in our lives, or souls will be overgrown with sins and will have no desire for life in Christ.

In all cases, our desire is that the soil of our hearts become good so that the word of the Gospel sown therein may be free to grow and bear abundant fruit. God speaks through the prophet Hosea (10:12), "Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the Lord, till he come and rain righteousness upon you" and through the prophet Jeremiah, "For thus saith the Lord to the men of Judah and Jerusalem, Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns." We who are baptized into Christ are spiritually Judah and Jerusalem. All of us have fallow, untilled and unused soil in our hearts. All of us have thorns and rocks to remove. If we work to prepare the soil of our hearts to seek the Lord, He will come visit us bringing rain to make the seeds of His righteous kingdom grow.

Fr. Justin Frederick

Three Kinds of Believing

The Venerable Bede

- 1) To believe God
- 2) To believe that God is
- 3) To believe in God

Truly it is not all the same when it comes to the matter of belief. The *first* kind of belief is to believe that things that God speaks are true. Many, even the wicked, are able to believe that the things God speaks are true; they believe that they are true and do not wish to make them their own because they are too lazy to do anything about them. The *second* kind of belief is to believe that God exists. Even the demons are able to believe, however, that He is God (James 2:19). The demons even believe that Jesus is the Son of God (Luke 4:41). The *third* kind of belief is to rightly believe in God and be Christian not only in name but also in action and way of life. Without love, faith is empty; with love, it is the faith of a Christian; without love, it is the faith of a demon.

Upcoming Events 2016

- 2 October Annual Meeting
- 31 October All-Saints Festival
- 7-8 November Feast Day at Holy Archangels Monastery

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!