

# The Confessor's Tongue for January 18, 2009

31<sup>st</sup> Sunday After Pentecost: SS Athanasius & Cyril of Alexandria

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.

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## January 18: SS Athanasius & Cyril

St. Athanasius the Great was born at the end of the 3rd century in Alexandria where he also received his formation. Most of all he studied the Holy Scriptures, read it day and night and so he studied all the books of the Holy Scriptures as if it were one book. Zealously he also studied the works of the fathers before him, especially their commentaries. Together with all this he led a strictly ascetic life. Knowing all this, the Bishop of Alexandria Alexander ordained him a deacon. As a deacon, together with Bishop Alexander, St. Athanasius was present at the Ecumenical Council in Nicaea and actively participated in the dispute with Arius. After returning from Nicaea when Bishop Alexander died, the general choice of the heir fell upon Athanasius. "This Christian, reverent man, ascetic, true bishop", were some of the epithets mentioned at election of St. Athanasius by a clique of people.

St. Athanasius had long refused the bishopric, considering that he was unable to govern church during such difficult times; however he was forced to concede to the general desire and became the bishop of Alexandria in 328, being only 28 years old. The Arians had no other such awesome and implacable opponent as St. Athanasius, who conducted a merciless struggle with them up to the end of his life and came out of this struggle with the victory banner of Orthodoxy unharmed. Everyone who liked Orthodoxy was converted to him after the council, conformed their teaching to his doctrine. Even those without right thinking solicited his approval. He exposed and refuted the false opinions of the heretics, encouraged and supported the defenders of Orthodoxy, showed condescension to those who were inclined to the side of false thinking, deceit and threats.

Against contemporary errors he was armed with words and writings and in general by all measures he cared for the pacification of the Church. During this struggle he was exposed to countless dangers and persecutions by the Arians, he was repeatedly expelled from Alexandria and hid in Gallia, Italy and in the Egyptian desert by local ascetics. Distinguished by an unbowed steadfastness, heroic courage and flaming zeal, he endured all the trials, underwent all the sufferings and with the greatest patience, without the slightest change to his position for which he devoted all his life and for which he was ready at all times even to pour out his blood.

Due to his unusual insight, he always and everywhere rendered decisive defeat to the heretics, being content, in this way, to use the most spiritual armor, without any violent means. "Neither by sword nor arrows," he said, "not with the help of warriors he returns to the true, but with conviction and advice".

Struggling through his entire life with the prejudgments and passions of people of every estate,

St. Athanasius developed a rare knowledge of people; an amazing art to penetrate into the most secret turns of their ideas and intentions and at the same time developed a remarkable step in responding to them. He precisely defined when it was possible to demand and when it is necessary to ask submissively, when it was possible to struggle against force and when it was necessary to flee dangers. Using strong measures against heretics and church rebels, he gave to his given flock skilful support of the gentle and indulgent character of a wise leader.

"Pleasant in conversation, angel like in appearance", he was a receptacle and carrier of lofty traits. In him apparently is the person, clearly the discerning finger of God and given the Church, as a great pillar and firm support of Orthodoxy in the difficult hour of trial.

According to the witness of St. Gregory the Theologian, St. Athanasius had "all the virtues; his life and morals are a rule for bishops; his teachings are the laws for Orthodoxy". He is glorified by the Holy Church as "a golden trumpet of theology", "an advocate of the faith", "a pillar of light and the foundation of the church".

St. Athanasius left many writings, representing in itself an eternal monument of the indestructibility of Orthodoxy by any enemy. Some of his creations are treatises against heretics, in others he explains the Holy Scriptures, in the third group he wrote canons of moral teaching. He also wrote a biography of St. Anthony the Great. St. Athanasius the Great reposed in 373 at the age of 80.

St. Cyril was born in Alexandria in the second half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century and at first practiced asceticism for about 15 years in the Nitrian Desert. His uncle Theophilus, Archbishop of Alexandria, called and ordained him to be his deacon. Theophilus knew of Cyril's great talents, his firm faith and broad knowledge (he knew almost all the Holy Scriptures from memory) and is why he often assigned Cyril to the preaching of the word of God.

After the death of Theophilus, endeared for his virtuous life, Cyril was elected in his place in the year 412. Removing Jews and Pagans, the enemies of the holy faith, from among his flock, St. Cyril was also busy establishing his flock in faith and piety. His fervent zealotry about the purity of Christian doctrines and unshakeable firmness in the defense of the faith was especially evident in the struggle against Nestorius, who disturbed the church with his heresy. St. Cyril wrote an exhortatory message to the Nestorians, letters to Emperor Theodosius the Younger, to Pope Celestine I and to various monasteries, opposing the opinions of Nestorius and stating the true Christian teaching about the incarnation of the Son of God. At the Third Ecumenical Council called in the city of Ephesus in

the year 431, St. Cyril was the presiding officer. St. Cyril died in the year 444. The Church celebrates the day of his death on June 9. He left many instructions in the faith and exhortatory works.

### Sanctity of Life Sunday 2009

*Metropolitan +Jonah*

The Lord Jesus Christ emerged from the waters of Baptism, and heard the Word of the Father: "You are my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." The Lord's word to each and every human being, to each and every being which bears the image and can actualize the likeness of God, is the same: You are my beloved. It is the very Word of God who, by His incarnation and assumption of our whole life and our whole condition, affirms and blesses the ultimate value of every human person--and indeed of creation as a whole. He filled it with His own being, uniting us to Himself, making us His own Body, transfiguring and deifying our lives, and raising us up to God our Father. He affirms and fulfills us, not simply as individuals seeking happiness, but rather as persons with an infinite capacity to love and be loved, and thus fulfills us through His own divine personhood in communion.

Our life as human beings is not given to us to live autonomously and independently. This, however, is the great temptation: to deny our personhood, by the depersonalization of those around us, seeing them only as objects that are useful and give us pleasure, or are obstacles to be removed or overcome. This is the essence of our fallenness, our brokenness. With this comes the denial of God, and loss of spiritual consciousness. It has resulted in profound alienation and loneliness, a society plummeting into the abyss of nihilism and despair. There can be no sanctity of life when nothing is sacred, nothing is holy. Nor can there be any respect for persons in a society that accepts only autonomous individualism: there can be no love, only selfish gratification. This, of course, is delusion. We are mutually interdependent.

First as Christians, but even more so, as human beings, we must repent and turn to God and one another, seeking forgiveness and reconciliation. Only this will heal the soul. Only by confronting our bitterness and resentment, and finding forgiveness for those who have hurt us, can we be free from the rage that binds us in despair. Repentance is not about beating ourselves up for our errors and feeling guilty; that is a sin in and of itself! Guilt keeps us entombed in self-pity. All sin is some form of self-centeredness, selfishness. Repentance is the transformation of our minds and hearts as we turn away from our sin, and turn to God, and to one another. Repentance means to forgive. Forgiveness does not mean to justify someone's sin against us. When we resent and hold a grudge, we objectify the person who hurt us according to their action, and erect a barrier between us and them. And, we continue to beat ourselves up with their sin. To forgive means to overcome that barrier, and see that there is a person who, just like us, is hurt and broken, and to overlook the sin and

embrace him or her in love. When we live in a state of repentance and reconciliation, we live in a communion of love, and overcome all the barriers that prevented us from fulfilling our own personhood.

All the sins against humanity, abortion, euthanasia, war, violence, and victimization of all kinds, are the results of depersonalization. Whether it is "the unwanted pregnancy", or worse, "the fetus" rather than "my son" or "my daughter;" whether it is "the enemy" rather than Joe or Harry (maybe Ahmed or Mohammed), the same depersonalization allows us to fulfill our own selfishness against the obstacle to my will. How many of our elderly, our parents and grandparents, live forgotten in isolation and loneliness? How many Afghan, Iraqi, Palestinian and American youths will we sacrifice to agonizing injuries and deaths for the sake of our political will? They are called "soldiers," or "enemy combatants" or "civilian casualties" or any variety of other euphemisms to deny their personhood. But ask their parents or children! Pro-war is NOT pro-life! God weeps for our callousness.

We have to extend a hand to those suffering from their sins, whatever they are. There is no sin that cannot be forgiven, save the one we refuse to accept forgiveness for. Abortion not only destroys the life of the infant; it rips the soul out of the mother (and the father!). It becomes a sin for which a woman torments herself for years, sinking deeper into despair and self-condemnation and self-hatred. But there is forgiveness, if only she will ask. We must seek out and embrace the veterans who have seen such horrors, and committed them. They need to be able to repent and accept forgiveness, so that their souls, their memories, and their lives, might be healed.

Most of all, we must restore the family: not just the nuclear family, but the multi-generational family which lives together, supports one another, and teaches each one what it means to be loved and to be a person. It teaches what forgiveness and reconciliation are. And it embraces and consoles the prodigals who have fallen. In this, the real sanctity of life is revealed, from pregnancy to old age. And in the multi-generational family each person finds value. This is the most important thing that we can possibly do.

The Blessed Mother Teresa said that the greatest poverty of the industrialized world is loneliness. Let us reach out to those isolated, alienated, alone, and in despair, finding in them someone most worthy of love; and in turn, we will find in ourselves that same love and value, and know indeed that God speaks to us in the depths of our souls, You are my beloved in whom I am well pleased.

#### Upcoming Events 2009

21 January Feast of St. Maximus, Parish Patronal Feast; Vigil on eve 7:30; Liturgy 9:00, Brunch after.

**GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!**