

The Confessor's Tongue for February 14, 2010

Forgiveness Sunday; Expulsion of Adam from the Paradise of Bliss; Cheesefare
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.

February 14: St. Auxentius

Born in Syria, at first he was the courtier for the Emperor Theodosius the Younger, and later, having entered monasticism, left for Bithynia and practiced asceticism on Mount Oxia, near Chalcedon. He was present at the Fourth Ecumenical Council where he zealously struggled against the Eutychian and Nestorian heresies. The Venerable One healed the sick through the strength of his prayers and had the gift of spiritual insight. He died in about the year 470.

February 14: St. Isaac of the Kiev Caves

Before he became a monk, he was a rich merchant in the city of Toropets. Having distributed all his estate to the poor and needy, he came to Kiev to the Ven. Anthony from whom he accepted tonsure. Wishing for great ascetic efforts, he left for seclusion, carrying out the most severe life. He ate only one prosphora throughout the day. After a seven-year seclusion he underwent heavy temptations from the devil. Having mistaken the spirit of evil for Christ, he bowed down to it, after which he fell down terribly crippled. The Ven. Theodosius himself went after him and gradually taught him to eat food. After his recovery, he returned to the solitary life, having taken on himself the ascetic effort of the holy fool. Before his death he again left his seclusion, where again strange visions of demons began to disturb him, but now he successfully banished them with the sign of the cross and prayers. Having become worthy of the gift of wonders, the venerable one died on February 14, 1090. His relics rest openly in the St. Anthony caves.

S. V. Bulgakov, Handbook for Church Servers, 2nd ed., 1274 pp. (Kharkov, 1900) pp 0084-5 Translated by Archpriest Eugene D. Tarris © January 9, 2004. All rights reserved.

Prayer for the Start of the 40-Day Fast

O God, Hope of all the ends of the earth, and of those who are far off at sea, who didst foretell these holy days of fasting in the Law, and in the Prophets, and the Evangelists: Do Thou count all of us worthy to pass the course of the Fast in purity, to preserve the Faith undivided, and to keep Thy commandments all the days of our lives. Bid an Angel of peace to preserve our comings-in and goings-out for every good work, being obedient together and together pleasing Thee unto a perfect communion of Thy most-pure Mysteries. And accept, O Master, the bending of the knees and the fasting of Thy servants, granting unto all of us spiritual blessing in Christ Jesus our Lord, with Whom Thou art blessed, together with Thy most-holy, good, and life-giving Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

The Sayings of St. Anthony the Great

Abba Pambo asked Abba Anthony, "What ought I to do?" and the old man said to him, 'Do not trust in your own righteousness, do not worry about the past, but control your tongue and your stomach.'

Saying 6 in *The Sayings of Desert Fathers*

Commentary: The unspoken, assumed goal in the question is "What should I do to be saved? to make progress in the spiritual life? to enter into union with Christ who through the incarnation entered into union with me?"

Trusting in one's own righteousness is a pitfall of those who have made some progress, and it is deadly to spiritual life. A man comes to trust in his moral goodness ("I'm not like those sinners"), in his generosity ("I tithe every month"), his faithful prayer ("I read all the morning and evening prayers every day"), his fasting ("I don't break the fast like some"), etc. It leads to comparing himself with others, considering himself better than others, to pride, vainglory, and judging of others. We must keep our eyes on Christ and the saints so we don't think that we have achieved some great righteousness in comparison with others around us. 'A haughty spirit goes before a fall', and judging others deprives us of God's grace. If there is any good in us, it is by Christ's grace and the power of the Holy Spirit in us, not of ourselves. Understanding that we have received the virtues and gifts that we have, we shall not glory in them as though we had not received them, that is, as though they were the product of our own efforts.

Sometimes the past continues to cast a shadow over our present life, either in our lamenting and despairing over our failures or in living in our past success. The past is gone. The future is not yet. We have only the present moment in which to live. There we live day by day trusting in God for everything. St. Paul says that he forgets what is behind and reaches for what is ahead to win the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Assuming we have thoroughly repented of our past sins and confessed them, we should not dwell on them or let the enemy bring us into despair over them.

Two things difficult to control must be brought into submission to Christ: our tongues and our stomachs. The Apostle James says that if a man can control his tongue, he is perfect, able to control the whole body as well. Our tongues are to be used to glory God and give thanks to Him, and to speak truth to edify and build up one another, as well as to enable us to carry out the necessary daily business of living. We tend to turn the use of the tongue into a sport for pleasure, to build ourselves up, to tear others down, for criticizing, cursing, blaming, judging. How much evil is brought into being in our world through the careless use of our tongues! How much harm we do to others merely to gratify our own egos or to

advance our selfish interests! We lead others into sin when we criticize, judge, and gossip about others. The Spirit is grieved and quenched in us and God's grace is lost through the misuse of the tongue.

"All man's labor is for his mouth, and yet the appetite is not filled," says Solomon (Ecclesiastes 6:7). Our need to eat drives us to work. But we can let our need for food become all-consuming and make satisfying the needs of our belly and body the goal of our life, whether consciously or, what is more likely, unconsciously. St. Paul writes about those who "are enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things" (Philippians 3:18-19). We make a god of our belly by living to eat and to satisfy the desire of the body for pleasure and comfort beyond what it truly needs. Man properly ordered is governed by his mind illumined by the light of Christ; the illumined mind guides both the will and emotions of the soul and the body. In disordered man, the desires of the body dictate to the will and mind, and man is governed by his god, the belly.

Though it is common for Christians monks to be accused of being obsessed with sexual matters, in fact, their greater concern was food: how to eat what is necessary to take care of the body so it can be a good servant, but not so much that the body usurps its place as servant of the soul and comes to subject the soul to its pleasures. Indeed, as we make progress in our life in Christ, we become increasingly aware that sexual intemperance has its root in intemperance of the tongue and belly. St. John Cassian goes so far as to write that because Jesus conquered Satan's temptation to misuse food, He was not subsequently tempted sexually.

Controlling the tongue and belly will take us far on the path of salvation; allowing them free reign will keep us from making progress and will lead us to destruction. *Fr. Justin Frederick*

The Spiritual Power in Guarding the Tongue

When Abba Macarius was praying in his cell on one occasion, he heard a voice from God, which said, "Macarius, thou hast not yet attained to the state of excellence of two women who are in such and such a city." The old man rose up in the morning, and took in his hand a palm stick, and he began to set out on the road to that city. Now, therefore, when he had arrived at the city, and learned the place of the abode of the two women, he knocked at the door, and there went forth one of the women and brought him into the house.

And when he had been sitting down for a little, the other woman came in, and he called them to him, and they came nigh and sat down before him. Then the old man said to them, "On your account I have made this long journey, and have performed all this labor, and with great difficulty have come from the desert; tell me, then, what are thy works?"

And they said unto him, "Believe us, O father; neither of us hath ever been absent from, or kept herself from her husband's couch up to this day; what work, then, wouldest thou see in us?"

Then the old man made apologies to them and entreated them to reveal to him and to show him their spiritual labor, and therefore they said unto him, "According to worldly considerations we are strangers one to the other, for we are not kinsfolk, but it fell out that the two of us married two men who are brethren. And behold, up to this present we have lived in this house for twelve years, and we have never wanted to quarrel with each other, and neither of us hath spoken one abominable word of abuse to her companion. Now we made up our minds together to leave our husbands and to join the army of virgins, but, although we entreated our husbands earnestly to allow us to do so, they would not undertake to send us away. And as we were unable to do that which we wished, we made a promise between ourselves and God that, until death, no worldly word should go forth from our mouths."

Now when Macarius heard this, he said, "Truly, virginity by itself is nothing, nor marriage, nor life as a monk, nor life in the world; for God seeketh the love of a man, and giveth the Spirit unto him."

Forgiveness Vespers Rite of Forgiveness

Following Vespers tonight, we shall observe the rite of mutual forgiveness. Each person will do a prostration (or bow if not able to prostrate) to each other person, asking forgiveness of one another "Forgive me!" and responding "God forgives, and I forgive." Please be sure to ask and extend forgiveness audibly to each person you face.

Lenten Bible Reading Program

A Lenten Bible reading program to get you through the New Testament during the Great Fast is available on the candle table. Please take one!

February Namedays

26 Photina Louise Newcomb (Samaritan Woman)
26 Svetlana Leah Cole (Samaritan Woman)

February Birthdays

6 Louise Newcomb
15 Rick Joines
23 Lauren Garcia

Upcoming Events 2010

- 14 February, 6:00 p.m. Forgiveness Vespers, Great Lent Begins. If you attend this parish, you should consider this service to be mandatory.
- 27 February Liturgy and Women's Retreat and Nativity of Our Lord Monastery.
- 27-28 February Metropolitan Jonah visits for Vigil and Liturgy. Parish workday Saturday morning the 27th to prepare.
- 4 April 2010, Holy Pascha, the Feast of Feasts.

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!