

The Confessor's Tongue for March 14, 2010

Fourth Sunday of the Fast: St. John of the Ladder

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.

The Sayings of St. Anthony the Great

Abba Anthony said, "Our life and our death is with our neighbor. If we gain our brother, we have gained God, but if we scandalize our brother, we have sinned against Christ."

Saying 9 in *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*

Commentary: There is an old saying that "one Christian is no Christian." We are not saved alone in isolation from others; we cannot live as Christians if we ignore the bond to our brother, a bond we acquired at Baptism. We cannot be close to God if we scandalize and alienate the people around us, for this is a sin against love. As St. John puts it in his first epistle, 'How can a man love God whom he has not seen if He does not love his brother whom he has seen?' Loving God and loving our neighbor are connected; showing love for our neighbor, even to our enemy, reveals and proves our love for God, who loves all men equally.

Hence the authenticity of our faith and love for God is revealed in our relations to those around us. The Christian faith, life in the Church, is not some abstract intellectual affair, but the mundane, daily, and often dirty business of learning to love the people God has put in our lives, especially the members of our families and our parish.

How can we love our brother and not scandalize him, understanding that love in essence is not a feeling but a choice to do what is right towards him? Let us count the ways:

1. Come to church regularly. By doing this, we affirm to others that our relationship to Christ is our first priority, and that example encourages them. Neglecting to come sends the subtle message that Christian worship is not of first importance to us and tempts others to think and act likewise.

2. When in church, dress neatly and modestly and conduct oneself with great care so as not to distract others. Come on time. Don't go in and out during the Liturgy. Don't get caught in conversations outside of church during the Liturgy, thus showing disrespect for what is happening in the church and distracting others.

3. Come to Confession regularly. By dealing with your own sins, you make yourself more receptive to God's grace by which alone you can truly love others.

4. Prepare yourself for Communion regularly, thus showing your faith in the Mystery and setting a good example to others. No one should commune less frequently than four times a year (the four fasts). Preferably we should commune once of month if not more frequently.

5. Parents: show your love for your brethren by taking the time to discipline and train your children to behave in church. Letting them do as they will, go in and out at will, talk, scream, play with noisy toys, run around, etc., not only reflects poorly on

you, it sends the message to others that you don't respect your brethren enough to keep your children under control.

6. Others: show your love for parents by helping with children, by not encouraging children to misbehave, by praying for and encouraging them.

7. All: pray for one another, especially for the brethren who annoy you. If you don't know what else to say, use the Jesus prayer and insert the other person's name: "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on N." Do this throughout the day as the thought of a person comes to you, especially if the thought of the person comes with anger, annoyance, judgment, or bitterness.

8. Shoulder your part of the burden of caring for the parish by giving of your time and resources to develop and improve what God has given us. Don't expect others to do it all.

9. Before you come to church, offer yourself to God in prayer. Ask Him to use you to be a blessing to someone while at church. As we all have a ministry to fulfill towards one another, we come not only to receive from God but to give to Him and one another. Really listen to your brethren and get to know them. Be sensitive to their needs and be willing to let God use you to meet them. Be willing to be God's hand reaching out in love to someone with whom you'd rather not bother.

10. Help clean up, and, in general, help keep the church clean. If you see something that needs doing, take initiative and get it done after checking with the priest or a council member.

11. Pray for the members of your family. Choose to love them rather than scandalizing or alienating them by harsh words, wrong actions, disrespect, and disobedience. Quickly and sincerely say you are sorry when you do wrong. Bear your part of the burden of maintaining the home economy: even children can and should be taught to clean, cook, and care for the home.

So brethren, let us love one another, look out for one another, seek one another's good, and be willing to limit our own freedom to avoid offending or scandalizing others, for "our life and death is with our neighbor."

Fr. Justin Frederick

Thursday of the Fifth Week

At Matins on this day the Canon of St. Andrew of Crete, which was read in four parts on the first four days of the first week, is read in its entirety, and the *Life of St. Mary of Egypt* is read after the Sessional Hymn (Kathisma). According to this feature of the Thursday Matins it is called either the St. Andrew of Crete or the St. Mary of Egypt Thursday. In the Canon are collected and stated all the exhortations to fasting and repentance, and the Holy Church repeats it now in its fullness to inspire us new strength for

the successful end to Lent. "Since", it is said in the Synaxarion, "the Holy Forty Day Lent is drawing near the end so that men should not become lazy, or more carelessly disposed to the spiritual efforts, or give up their abstinence altogether," that this Great Canon is offered. It is "so long, and so well-composed, as to be sufficient to soften even the hardest soul, and to rouse it to resumption of the good, if only it is sung with a contrite heart and proper attention". And the church *Typikon* (Ustav) orders the Great Canon to be read and chanted slowly and "with a contrite heart and voice, making three prostrations at each Troparion". For the same purpose of abstinence and strength, and attention to repentance is the reading of the Life of the Venerable Mary of Egypt. According to an explanation of the same Synaxarion, the Life of the Venerable Mary also "manifests infinite compunction and gives much encouragement to the fallen and sinners", representing itself to us as a paradigm of true repentance, and an example of the unutterable mercy of God. It serves as the continuation of the Canon of St. Andrew of Crete and a transition to the order of the following Sunday. Reading the Canon of St. Andrew and Mary of Egypt on the Thursday of the Fifth Week was established from the time of the Sixth Ecumenical Council. *Note: The Typikon appoints this service to be served at the 4th hour of the night, i.e. 10 p.m. Wednesday night. It is frequently moved to an earlier time for convenience.*

From: S. V. Bulgakov, **Handbook for Church Servers**, 2nd ed., 1274 pp. (Kharkov, 1900) p 522-525. Translated by Archpriest Eugene D. Tarris © 2004. Rights reserved.

From St. John of the Ladder

He who is proud of his natural advantages, I mean cleverness, ability to learn, skill in reading, a clear pronunciation, quick understanding, and all such gifts received by us without labor, will never obtain the supernatural blessings, because he who is unfaithful in a little is also unfaithful and vainglorious in much. *Step 22.31*

It is a sign of the beginning of health when our thought no longer prides itself on its natural gifts. But as long as it has that stench in its nose, it cannot detect the fragrance of myrrh. *Step 25.22*

Contrition is one thing, self-knowledge is another, humility is another.

Contrition is the result of a fall. He who falls is crushed, and he stands in prayer without boldness but with praiseworthy audacity, as one who is shattered, steadying himself with the staff of hope and using it to drive off the hound of despair.

Self-knowledge is a true idea of one's spiritual growth, and an unbroken remembrance of one's slightest sins.

Humility is Christ's spiritual doctrine, noetically introduced into the inner chamber of the soul by those who are accounted worthy of it. It cannot be defined by perceptible words. *Step 25.38-41*

The Master, knowing that the virtue of the soul is modelled on outward behavior, took a towel and

showed us how to walk the way of humility. For the soul becomes like its bodily occupations. It conforms itself to its activities and takes its shape from them. Authority served as a ground for arrogance for one of the angels, although that was not why it was conferred on him. *Step 25.58*

When our soul leaves this world we shall not be blamed for not having worked miracles, or for not having been theologians, or for not having been rapt in divine visions. But we shall certainly have to give an account to God of why we have not unceasingly mourned. *Step 7.80*

Listen to me, listen, all you malicious reckoners of other men's accounts! If it is true (as it really is true) that 'with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged,' then whatever sins we blame our neighbor for, whether bodily or spiritual, we shall fall into them ourselves. That is certain. *Step 10.9*

Do not regard the feelings of the a person who speaks to you about his neighbor disparagingly, but rather say to him: 'Stop, brother! I fall into graver sins every day, so how can I criticize him?' In this way you will achieve two things: you will heal yourself and your neighbor with one plaster. This is one of the shortest ways to the forgiveness of sins; I mean, not to judge. 'Judge not, and ye shall not be judged. *10.7*

An angry person is a willing epileptic, who due to an involuntary tendency keeps convulsing and falling down. *Step 8.11*

If the Holy Spirit is peace of soul, as He is said to be and He is in reality, and if anger is disturbance of heart, as it actually is and as it is said to be, then nothing so prevents His presence in us as anger. *8.14*

He whose will and desire in conversation is to establish his own opinion, even though what he says is true, should recognize that he is sick with the devil's disease. And if he behaves like this only in conversation with his equals, then perhaps the rebuke of his superiors may heal him. But if he acts in this way even with those who are greater and wiser than he, then his malady is humanly incurable. *Step 4.48*

He who has tasted the things on high easily despises what is below. But he who has not tasted things above finds joy in possessions. *Step 17.6*

Confessions During the Fast

All the faithful who desire to commune at Pascha and beyond should make a Confession during the course of the Fast. Your priest requests that you make every effort to come for Confession *before* Holy Week. Please don't wait to the last minute! Yet two weeks yet remain until Holy Week, so there is plenty of time to prepare and make one's Confession.

Upcoming Events 2010

28 March, Palm Sunday
28 March – 3 April, Holy Week
4 April, Holy Pascha, the Feast of Feasts: Midnight Vigil & Liturgy, 3:00 p.m. Vespers and Picnic

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!