

The Confessor's Tongue for November 14, 2010

25th Sunday After Pentecost: Apostle Philip, Gregory Palamas, Ss Justinian & Theodora
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 also said, "Obedience with abstinence gives men power over wild beasts."

Saying 36 Sayings of the Desert Fathers

Commentary: The first wild beast to be tamed is ourselves. Our self will, our insistence on doing what seems best to us, what makes sense to us, what pleases us, is cut off by obedience to God and to the proper authorities He has placed in the life of each person.

In the desert, a monk submitted to his elder and to his brother monks. As Anthony puts it in the next two sayings, many monks fall away because of spiritual pride in trusting in their own works and not consulting with their spiritual father. Likewise, a monk should be able to tell his elders "how many steps he takes and how many drops of water he drinks in his cell, in case he is in error about it."

In the monastery, a monk submits to the abbot and to the monastery's particular way of life set by its Typicon (there is a saying that you do not bring your own Typicon with you to another place). He presumes to do nothing without the blessing of his Abbot.

In the world, in the parish, we employ obedience, but it normally takes different forms from that in the monastery. Instead of getting a blessing for everything from a priest, we cut off self will by submitting to those God has put into our lives: the governing authorities, our parents, our teachers, our employer, our spouse, our husband, our family, our bishop and priest, our local parish and its way of doing things, our Father-confessor, and the Church in general.

When we are young, our most important relationship is with our parents, and we should know that God never blesses disobedience or disrespect to them. One of the most important tasks of parents is to train their children in willing, humble obedience.

As adults, we cut off self will by obeying our boss at work. In the family, the wife submits to the husband; failure to do this can sabotage her marriage. Many marriages are damaged by the wife usurping her husband's headship. The husband also has to submit to his condition of being married and the responsibilities it requires of him. He must submit to God's command to love his wife as Christ loves the Church, command which demands right actions, not feelings. He can no longer live for himself first, but for his wife and children and what is best for them.

In the parish, we follow the guidance of our Confessor, our Priest, and our Bishop. They are not there to run every aspect of our lives, but they are there to care for our souls. As Paul writes, "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls as they that

must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you." (Hebrews 13:17) The obedience here is limited and specific, having to do with the services, parish life in general, and whatever is said to us in Confession. When we constantly resist the priest or our bishop and disregard their spiritual guidance, we lose an opportunity to tame the wild beast in us. Obedience freely chosen frees us from slavery to our whims and having to have it our way.

One note of caution must be sounded here. A parish priest is not an abbot and is rarely an elder. The obedience rendered to the priest is not comprehensive as is the obedience a monks renders his abbot. It happens occasionally that those who live in the world, inspired by monastic literature and feeling the need for intensive guidance, will try to get their priest to run their lives as a abbot does; sometimes it is a priest who is goes beyond proper bounds in trying to be a 'spiritual father' to his flock. While a monk in a strict monastery may need a blessing to do anything, it is not so in the parish. By virtue of being married, for example, we have a general blessing to do everything needed to care for our families and spouses: we don't need to get a blessing to go to the grocery store, to change homeschooling curriculum, or to buy a car. We may request our priest's counsel in the significant decisions of our lives, but he is not there to make those decisions for us.

Obedience is to supplemented with abstinence, which is another way of saying 'fasting.' Fasting is necessary to subject the body to the soul, so that the body does not tyrannize the soul through addiction to pleasure and the ensuing misuse of the good things God has given us. Instead of eating what we want (what will taste good to us at the moment), we limit our freedom by eating only fast-worthy foods; instead of eating when we want, we wait until the appointed time to eat, and then we eat a due measure avoiding excess. In fasting this way, we daily teach the body to be subject to the soul which rationally provides what the body needs for health and strength without letting the body enslave the soul to serve its desires.

Fasting is especially important in our time of general abundance, when, thanks to the global economy, we can eat just about anything we want all year long. We readily become accustomed to indulging our desires and whims for particular foods and tastes, having such abundance readily available and the means to purchase what we want. Few of us have the experience of having to 'tighten our belts' due to not having enough to eat or of eating the same two or three basic foods at every meal for a month at a time. The relative weakness of our faith in our time is due in large part to abundance and ease of life and our indulging our bodies.

Through obedience and fasting, the wild beast that is the man untamed by Christ's yoke gains power to govern himself and not live as a slave to passions and sins. Freedom in any meaningful sense is this ability gained to govern oneself so that one may carry out Christ's commandments. Self-government of this sort is not only essential to Christian life, it is also the only firm basis for freedom in society. If we fail to govern ourselves, a stronger authority will be needed to force us to keep in our place.

Fr. Justin Frederick

14 November Apostle Philip

From among the 12, he was born in Bethsaida. After the Descent of the Holy Spirit, he preached the Gospel in Galilee, and then in Greece, Arabia, Ethiopia, Syria and Asia Minor, enlightening "with the light of wisdom" and "with the lightning of preaching to those sitting in the darkness of ignorance". His preaching was accompanied by many miracles: in Galilee he raised a child from the dead; in Greece one leader together with the people wanted to kill St. Philip for his sermon, but was then struck with blindness and only through the prayer of the apostle received his sight. With the spread of Christianity during the reign of the Emperor Domitian the Holy Apostle Philip together with the Holy Apostle Barnabas (see June 11), on an order of the town mayor, were arrested, dragged through the streets suffering beatings and curses, were then thrown into prison and sentenced to crucifixion. The Holy Apostle Philip, with pierced feet and crucified on the cross with his head down, was hanged high up on a tree in the city of Hierapolis.

14 November: Right-Believing Emperor Justinian and Empress Theodora

St. Justinian was born a Slav. The famous Greek emperor, fortunate in wars with the enemies of the empire, was also zealous in rooting out paganism as a real adherent of Orthodoxy, as a fervent law-giver (under him the code of church and civil laws was made), and as the mediator of church disputes he was both voluntarily and truly a pious person. He built the Hagia Sophia temple in Constantinople and many other temples and hospitals. He called the Fifth Ecumenical Council and wrote the church hymn "Only-begotten Son" in refutation of the Nestorian heresy. He died in 565 and for his service to the Church and devout life he was added to the choir of saints. St. Theodora became a faithful wife of the Emperor from being a sinner and became the defender of Orthodoxy from being the patroness of the Monophysite heresy. She died in 548.

The soul is greater than the body: the body becomes sick, and with that it is finished. But a spiritual sickness extends into eternity. Deliver us, O Lord, from such illness, and grant us healing.

St. Macarius of Optina

Confession Mechanics

Every so often, we need instruction or reminders. Based on what I have observed over the past few months, the following reminders are in order.

When we come for Confession, we stand before the icon of Christ and the Cross; we cross ourselves and bow twice, kiss the cross and the icon, and then cross ourselves and bow a third time.

When our Confession is done, we again cross ourselves and bow twice, kiss the Cross and icon, and the cross and bow a third time. We then turn, bow to the priest, and ask his blessing by holding out our hands in the form a cross, right over left, and then kiss the priest's hand when he finishes giving his blessing.

During Confession, we do not use other people's names. We may speak of our husband, our wife, our third child, our mother, our father, our friend, but we don't use their names. This helps keep us focused on our sin and from speaking unnecessarily about others in our confession.

When we come to confession, we come ready to name our sins as specifically as we can. Most of us would do best to have a list of things written down, which we have prepared beforehand to confess. We name our sins, our faults, our failures to love God with all our heart, our neighbor as ourself, our wives as Christ loved His Church. Any 'story' needed to give the context of the sin should be only what is needed and be brief.

This last item becomes particularly important as the parish grows and more people are needing to come to Confession. If you do due diligence and come prepared, the confession line can be kept moving.

Upcoming Events 2010

- 14 November: IOCC event at Holy Trinity, 6:00 p.m.
- 15 November: Nativity Fast Begins
- 15 November: Pan-Orthodox Unction Service at SS. Constantine & Helen, 7:00 p.m.
- 2 December: St. Maximus Male Choir, "Chantus Maximus" sings at the city of Denton tree lighting.
- 22 December: Metropolitan Jonah visits.

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!