

# The Confessor's Tongue for January 18, A. D. 2015

32<sup>nd</sup> Sunday After Pentecost; SS Athanasius and 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: St. Athanasios of Alexandria

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. 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 skillful 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 God gave the Church 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. *Bulgakov Handbook, Fr. Eugene Tarris, translator.*

## St. Symeon the New Theologian On Faults Often Considered Trifling

There will be those who, like myself, have been insubordinate and disobedient toward God's commandments who vainly calculate and say, "But I have not committed fornication! Swearing is nothing. I have not committed adultery! But what sin is it to have stolen a penny or a piece of bread?" And again, "I should attain bliss, if I do not commit the foul and sacrilegious vice of homosexuality. But what sin is there in being insulting or jealous, in being flippant or frivolous?" Then again there are those who in their folly think highly of themselves for being pure from the practice of sins of the flesh, and think that they are like angels of God, but take no account of the virtues and passions of the soul. They have nothing but contempt for all the rest of the Lord's commandments and do not force themselves to fulfill them. They refuse to do anything that is strenuous or to undergo any suffering for a commandment of God, and live carelessly.

What benefit, brethren, is there from abstaining from fornication and other impure acts of the body and yet seek after glory and strive for money? The one corrupts the body, and the other corrupts the soul. Moreover, glory from men and love for it makes

us to be unbelievers, according to the word of the Lord when He says, "How can you believe, who receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?" What good is it to be innocent of homosexual acts, but to waste away with envy, hatred, and jealousy toward your neighbor? Hatred toward one's brother makes him who feels it into a murderer, for the apostle says, "anyone who hates his brother is a murderer." According to the sacred canons, a sodomite and a murderer are subject to the same penalty, and if they fail to repent they will be subject to eternal condemnation.

### Introduction to The Sayings of St. Anthony

Fr. Thomas Hopko once said that the full teaching of Christian spiritual life is expressed in the thirty-eight sayings of St. Anthony the Great found in the classic work *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*. That comment inspired the forthcoming series of reflections on those sayings. It originally ran in the *Confessor's Tongue* 2006-7 shortly after the author heard the remark, but not every saying was covered then. It ran again beginning in January of 2010 in an expanded form, but the first saying was not covered. Given that we celebrated St. Anthony's feast yesterday (Jan 17), and celebrate St. Athanasius his biographer today, that we have been reading St. Athanasius (whose name in Greek means "immortal" *a-* 'without' and *thanatos*, 'death') on Wednesday nights and will be reading his *Life of Antony* during Great Lent this year, it seems fitting to reconsider the sayings of Antony to derive benefit therefrom. As we revisit them in the months ahead, I pray I may offer them in a form much improved over 2010. Fr. Justin Frederick

### The Sayings of St. Anthony the Great

*When the holy Abba Anthony lived in the desert, he was beset by accidie, and attacked by many sinful thoughts. He said to God, "Lord, I want to be saved, but these thoughts do not leave me alone; what shall I do in my affliction? How can I be saved?" A short while afterwards, when he got up to go out, Anthony saw a man like himself sitting at his work, getting up from his work to pray, then sitting down and plaiting a rope, then getting up again to pray. It was an angel of the Lord sent to correct and reassure him. He heard the angel saying to him, "Do this, and you will be saved." At these words, Anthony was filled with joy and courage.*

*He did this, and he was saved.*  
Saying 1 in *The Sayings of Desert Fathers*

**Commentary:** St. Anthony the Great (251-353) is considered the father of eremitical monasticism, thanks to the influence his living example and his *Life* written by St. Athanasius had on countless others. His first saying expresses the basic formula he practiced in his Christian life. It is not esoteric or complicated, but simple, just "work and pray".

Acedia (see Nov 2, 2014 *Confessor's Tongue* for a detailed discussion) is one of the eight deadly thoughts, the "demon of noonday", which deprives a man of the energy and desire to work on his salvation. Boredom, distraction, and sloth all are connected to

acedia. Antony had committed himself to ascetical life in the desert, but he was tormented by thoughts of boredom, sloth, distraction, and discouragement, as, at some point, is everyone who seriously commits himself to the spiritual life. These thoughts uncounted would rob him of prayer, work, and Christian life.

Christian life is spiritual warfare, and that warfare persists until man's last breath. That warfare is not against one's fellow man politically, economically, or socially, but against the fallen spiritual powers who insinuate evil thoughts and lies into man's mind to lead him away from God and into sin. No sin is ever committed which is not conceived first in thought. To cut off sin in deed, the thoughts that come into one's mind must be watched, discerned, and dealt with. For this reason, the Savior commands His followers to "watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation".

In response to Antony's cry for help with his thoughts, the Lord answers through an angel: work and pray, work and pray, "do this, and you will be saved." The answer given to Antony is given to us too. All of us have to work, whether it is housework, chores, schoolwork, a profession, a job humble or exalted. That work, little though we may like it, if used properly, will help save us. If "idle hands are the devil's workshop" (and they are), work at the very least keeps man from idleness leading to temptation in thought and sin in deed. Having to work each day to make a living, or diligently embracing the responsibilities given at home or school, keeps man out of more trouble than he might think. But work alone will not save. Work as we know it is part of the fallen order of things: "you will eat bread by the sweat of your brow." Man's work must be redeemed by prayer, in which man offers himself, his work, his friends and family, and all his life to Christ and thereby wages war against thoughts. There is no spiritual life without prayer, and there will be no spiritual success without work. The desire to avoid work ("don't work too hard"!) and to have abundant leisure and pleasure undermines spiritual life. But work without prayer, without God, deadens the soul and leaves it vulnerable to idolatry, covetousness, pride, and greed. But to work diligently that one may eat (and pray while one works) and then to rise from work to pray regularly (one's private prayer rule and one's participation in public worship) provides man with the balance he needs to gain victory over evil thoughts.

### Upcoming Events 2015

21 January: Patronal Feast of St. Maximus  
2 February: Meeting of the Lord in the Temple  
22 February: Forgiveness Sunday. Forgiveness Vespers, 6:00 p.m. All members should plan now on attending this service.

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!