

The Confessor's Tongue for March 1, A. D. 2015

Sunday of Orthodoxy; Nun-Martyr Eudocia

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 7

Abba Anthony said, "I saw the snares that the enemy spreads out over the world, and I said, groaning, 'What can get through such snares?' Then I heard a voice saying to me, 'Humility.'"

Saying 7 in *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*

Commentary: The snares the enemy lays out by which to catch and destroy souls are many and powerful. Looking at our own world, how shall we escape gluttony, with so many varied foods to suit every taste in such great quantity available around the clock? How shall we escape lust and fornication in a when sensual images assail us from all sides, modesty and virginity are lost virtues, and sexual encounters are nearly free for the asking? How shall we escape greed, stinginess, and envy in a society that glories in conspicuous consumption? How shall we avoid telling and being enslaved by lies in a world of spin and image over substance? How shall we avoid error when even the notion Truth is denied and all opinions and positions are treated as being of equal value? How shall we avoid sloth in a culture of entertainment, whose constantly expressed desire is "don't work too hard" and "take it easy"? How shall we be motivated to undertake the hard work of repentance when there are so many means of escape available to us to numb the pain of guilt and feelings of inadequacy? And if we by some means escape the common pitfalls and sins of our age, how shall we avoid judging those who do not and taking pride in our own righteousness?

Who, if not the Lord, will save us from this wicked and perverse generation?

St. Anthony was granted to see the snares that the enemy spreads, and he groaned in despair of escaping them. How may one escape them? How can we sinners resist the compelling advertising of the enemy?

The answer given to Anthony is not one our world prescribes for troubles: humility. Humility says, "I am weak; of myself, I can do nothing good. Left to myself, I will be overcome and will fall. If I haven't fallen today like my neighbor, I surely will tomorrow. Unless Christ stretches out His hand to catch me, I shall surely sink in the sea like Peter. If there is any good in me, any resistance to sin, any victory over my passions and over the enemy, it is entirely due to God's grace at work in me. Let me cry out to God for help now and always that I not fall into any snare."

Humility places no confidence in man and all its trust and hope in God. God gives grace, not to the proud, but to the humble, to those who recognize their need (James 4:10, I Peter 5:6). "Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up." Man's task is to humble himself; God's task is to lift up. He lifts up those who, recognizing their weakness and susceptibility to sin, persist in crying

out to Him for help in every need and in giving glory to Him for every victory.

The man with humility sees his own sins and reproaches himself and does not see the sins of others. As St. Macarius of Optina says, "Let the following be for you signs of humility or pride: the latter scorns everyone, reproaches them, and sees darkness in them, while the former sees only his own faults and does not dare to judge anyone." Such is humility which delivers from demonic snares.

Amma Theodora [one of the Desert Mothers] said that neither asceticism, nor vigils, nor any kind of suffering are able to save, only true humility can do that. There was an anchorite [hermit] who was able to banish demons; and he asked them, "What makes you go away? Is it fasting?" They replied, "We do not eat or drink." "Is it vigils?" They replied, "We do not sleep." "Is it separation from the world?" "We live in deserts." "What power sends you away then?" They said, "Nothing can overcome us, but only humility." "Do you see how humility is victorious over the demons?" Humility is alien and repellent to the proud hosts of hell.

God, on the other hand, is humble. "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Philippians 2:5-8). Christ, who had every right to glory over man by virtue of His Divinity humbled Himself rather, and in so doing won Himself the name above every name at which every knee will bow. We are to have the same mind of humility in us, and that humility is our only path to victory over the proud hosts of hell.

So powerful is humility, that St. Barsanuphius of Optina says "With only humility, one can be saved, even without any works." In the *Prologue from Ocbriid*, there is a story (March 30) that illustrates this point. A monk was lazy, careless, and lacking in his prayer life. But when he lay dying, he was happy. When the brethren, who knew his faults, asked how it was that a monk with so many sins could die joyfully, he replied: "I now see angels who are showing me a page containing my numerous sins. I said to them, 'Our Lord said: *judge not, and ye shall not be judged.* I have never judged anyone, and I hope in the mercy of God that He will not judge me.' And the angels tore up the paper with my sins." Upon hearing this, the monks were astonished and edified.

Humility allows us to receive the grace of God we need to stand. Only through humility can we escape the enemy's snares. *Fr. Justin Frederick*

Homily on the Sunday of Orthodoxy
Fr. Alexander Schmemmann

Rejoicing today in the triumph of Orthodoxy on this first Sunday of Lent, we joyfully commemorate three events: one event belonging to the past; one event to the present; and one event which still belongs to the future.

Whenever we have any feast or joy in the Church, we Orthodox first of all look back — for in our present life we depend on what happened in the past. We depend first of all, of course, on the first and the ultimate triumph — that of Christ Himself. Our faith is rooted in that strange defeat which became the most glorious victory — the defeat of a man nailed to the cross, who rose again from the dead, who is the Lord and the Master of the world. This is the first triumph of Orthodoxy. This is the content of all our commemorations and of all our joy. This man selected and chose twelve men, gave them power to preach about that defeat and that victory, and sent them to the whole world saying preach and baptize, build up the Church, announce the Kingdom of God. And you know, my brothers and sisters, how those twelve men — very simple men indeed, simple fishermen — went out and preached. The world hated them, the Roman Empire persecuted them, and they were covered with blood. But that blood was another victory. The Church grew, the Church covered the universe with the true faith. After 300 years of the most unequal conflict between the powerful Roman Empire and the powerless Christian Church, the Roman Empire accepted Christ as Lord and Master. That was the second triumph of Orthodoxy. The Roman Empire recognized the one whom it crucified and those whom it persecuted as the bearers of truth, and their teaching as the teaching of life eternal. The Church triumphed. But then the second period of troubles began.

The following centuries saw many attempts to distort the faith, to adjust it to human needs, to fill it with human content. In each generation there were those who could not accept that message of the cross and resurrection and life eternal. They tried to change it, and those changes we call heresies. Again there were persecutions. Again, Orthodox bishops, monks and laymen defended their faith and were condemned and went into exile and were covered with blood. And after five centuries of those conflicts and persecutions and discussions, the day came which we commemorate today, the day of the final victory of Orthodoxy as the true faith over all the heresies. It happened on the first Sunday of Lent in the year 843 in Constantinople. After almost 100 years of persecution directed against the worship of the holy icons, the Church finally proclaimed that the truth had been defined, that the truth was fully in the possession of the Church. And since then all Orthodox people, wherever they live, have gathered on this Sunday to proclaim before the world their faith in that truth, their belief that their Church is

truly apostolic, truly Orthodox, truly universal. This is the event of the past that we commemorate today.

And after five centuries of those conflicts and persecutions and discussions, the day came which we commemorate today, the day of the final victory of Orthodoxy as the true faith over all the heresies.

But let us ask ourselves one question: Do all the triumphs of Orthodoxy, all the victories, belong to the past? Looking at the present today, we sometimes feel that our only consolation is to remember the past. *Then* Orthodoxy was glorious, *then* the Orthodox Church was powerful, *then* it dominated. But what about the present? My dear friends, if the triumph of Orthodoxy belongs to the past only, if there is nothing else for us to do but commemorate, to repeat to ourselves how glorious was the past, then Orthodoxy is dead. But we are here tonight to witness to the fact that Orthodoxy not only is not dead but also that it is once more and forever celebrating its own triumph — the triumph of Orthodoxy. We don't have to fight heresies among ourselves, but we have other things that once more challenge our Orthodox faith.

Today, gathered here together, Orthodox of various national backgrounds, we proclaim and we glorify first of all our unity in Orthodoxy. This is the triumph of Orthodoxy in the present. This is a most wonderful event: that all of us, with all our differences, with all our limitations, with all our weaknesses, can come together and say we belong to that Orthodox faith, that we are one in Christ and in Orthodoxy. We are living very far from the traditional centers of Orthodoxy. We call ourselves Eastern Orthodox, and yet we are here in the West, so far from those glorious cities which were centers of the Orthodox faith for centuries — Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem, Moscow. How far are those cities. And yet, don't we have the feeling that something of a miracle has happened, that God has sent us here, far into the West, not just in order to settle here, to increase our income, to build up a community. He also has sent us as apostles of Orthodoxy, so that this faith, which historically was limited to the East, now is becoming a faith which is truly and completely universal.

This is a thrilling moment in the history of Orthodoxy. That is why it is so important for us to be here tonight and to understand, to realize, to have that vision of what is going on. People were crossing the ocean, coming here, not thinking so much about their faith as about themselves, about their lives, about their future. They were usually poor people, they had a difficult life, and they built those little Orthodox churches everywhere in America not for other people but for themselves, just to remember their homes, to perpetuate their tradition. They didn't think of the future. And yet this is what happened: the Orthodox Church was sent here

through and with those poor men. The truth itself, the fullness of the apostolic faith -- all this came here, and here we are now, filling this hall and proclaiming this apostolic faith — the faith that has strengthened the universe. And this leads us to the event which still belongs to the future.

If today we can only proclaim, if we can only pray for that coming triumph of Orthodoxy in this country and in the world, our Orthodox faith forces us to believe that it is not by accident but by divine providence that the Orthodox faith today has reached all countries, all cities, all continents of the universe. After that historic weakness of our religion, after the persecutions by the Roman Empire, by the Turks, by the godless atheists, after all the troubles that we had to go through, today a new day begins. Something new is going to happen. And it is this future of Orthodoxy that we have to rejoice about today.

We can already have a vision of that future when, in the West, a strong American Orthodox Church comes into existence. We can see how this faith, which for such a long time was an alien faith here, will become truly and completely universal in the sense that we will answer the questions of all men, and also all their questions. For if we believe in that word: "Orthodoxy," "the true faith"; if for one moment we try to understand what it means: the true, the full Christianity, as it has been proclaimed by Christ and His disciples; if our Church has preserved for all ages the message of the apostles and of the fathers and of the saints in its purest form, then, my dear friends, here is the answer to the questions and to the problems and to the sufferings of our world. You know that our world today is so complex. It is changing all the time. And the more it changes, the more people fear, the more they are frightened by the future, the more they are preoccupied by what will happen to them. And this is where Orthodoxy must answer their problem; this is where Orthodoxy must accept the challenge of modern civilization and reveal to men of all nations, to all men in the whole world, that it has remained the force of God left in history for the transformation, for the deification, for the transfiguration of human life.

The past, the present, the future: At the beginning, one lonely man on the cross — the complete defeat. And if at that time we had been there with all our human calculations, we probably would have said: "That's the end. Nothing else will happen." The twelve left Him. There was no one, no one to hope. The world was in darkness. Everything seemed finished. And you know what happened three days later. Three days later He appeared. He appeared to His disciples, and their hearts were burning within them because they knew that He was the risen Lord. And since then, in every generation, there have been people with burning hearts, people who have felt that this victory of Christ had to be carried again and again into this world, to be

proclaimed in order to win new human souls and to be the transforming force in history.

Today this responsibility belongs to us. We feel that we are weak. We feel that we are limited, we are divided, we are still separated in so many groups, we have so many obstacles to overcome. But today, on the Sunday of Orthodoxy, we close our eyes for a second and we rejoice in that unity which is already here: priests of various national churches praying together, people of all backgrounds uniting in prayer for the triumph of Orthodoxy. We are already in a triumph, and may God help us keep that triumph in our hearts, so that we never give up hope in that future event in the history of orthodoxy when Orthodoxy will become the victory which eternally overcomes all the obstacles, because that victory is the victory of Christ Himself.

As we approach the most important moment of the Eucharist, the priest says, "Let us love one another, that with one mind we may confess...." What is the condition of the real triumph of Orthodoxy? What is the way leading to the real, the final, the ultimate victory of our faith? The answer comes from the Gospel. The answer comes from Christ Himself and from the whole tradition of Orthodoxy. It is *love*. Let us love one another, that with one mind we may confess . . . confess our faith, our Orthodoxy. Let us, from now on, feel responsible for each other. Let us understand that even if we are divided in small parishes, in small dioceses, we first of all belong to one another. We belong together, to Christ, to His Body, to the Church. Let us feel responsible for each other, and let us love one another. Let us put above everything else the interests of Orthodoxy in this country. Let us understand that each one of us today has to be the apostle of Orthodoxy in a country which is not yet Orthodox, in a society which is asking us: "What do you believe?" "What is your faith?" And let us, above everything else, keep the memory, keep the experience, keep the taste of that unity which we are anticipating tonight.

At the end of the first century — when the Church was still a very small group, a very small minority, in a society which was definitely anti-Christian when the persecution was beginning — St. John the Divine, the beloved disciple of Christ, wrote these words: "And this is the victory, our faith, this is the victory." There was no victory at that time, and yet he knew that in his faith he had the victory that can be applied to us today. We have the promise of Christ, that the gates of hell will *never* prevail against the Church. We have the promise of Christ that if we have faith, all things are possible. We have the promise of the Holy Spirit, that He will fill all that which is weak, that He will help us at the moment when we need help. In other words, we have all the possibilities, we have everything that we need, and therefore the victory is ours. It is not a human victory which can be defined in terms of money, of human success, of human achievements. What we are

preaching tonight, what we are proclaiming tonight, what we are praying for tonight, is the victory of Christ in me, in us, in all of you in the Orthodox Church in America. And that victory of Christ in us, of the one who for us was crucified and rose again from the dead, that victory will be the victory of His Church.

Today is the triumph of Orthodoxy, and a hymn sung today states solemnly and simply: "This is the Apostolic faith, this is the Orthodox faith, this is the faith of the Fathers, this is the faith that is the foundation of the world." My dear brothers and sisters, this is also our own faith. We are chosen. We are elected. We are the happy few that can say of our faith, "apostolic," "universal," "the faith of our fathers," "Orthodoxy," "the truth." Having this wonderful treasure, let us preserve it, let us keep it, and let us also use it in such a way that this treasure becomes the victory of Christ in us and in His Church. Amen.

From the Rite of Orthodoxy

As the prophets beheld, as the apostles have taught, as the Church has received, as the teachers have declared, as the world has agreed, as grace has shown forth, as truth has been revealed, as falsehood has been dispelled, as wisdom has become manifest, as Christ has awarded; thus we declare; thus we affirm; thus we proclaim Christ our true God, and honor His saints in words, writings, thoughts, sacrifices, churches, and holy icons - on the one hand, worshiping and reverencing Christ as God and Lord, and on the other, honoring the saints as true servants of the same Lord of all, and offering them proper veneration. **This is the Faith of the Apostles. This is the Faith of the Fathers. This is the Faith of the Orthodox. This is the Faith on which the world is established.** Therefore, with fraternal and filial love we praise the heralds of the faith, those who with glory and honor have struggled for the faith, and we say: to the champions of Orthodoxy, faithful emperors, most-holy patriarchs, hierarchs, teachers, martyrs, and confessors. May their memory be eternal! Let us beseech God that we may be instructed and strengthened by the trials and struggles of these saints, which they endured even unto death, and by their teachings, entreating that we may to the end imitate their godly life. May we be deemed worthy of obtaining our requests through the mercy and grace of the Great and First Hierarch, Christ our God, through the intercessions of our glorious Lady, the Theotokos and ever-virgin Mary, the divine angels and all the Saints.

Sayings of St. Poemen the Great

Abba Poemen said, "Experience is a good thing; it is that which tests a man."

He also said, "A man who teaches without doing what he teaches is like a spring which cleanses and gives drink to everyone, but is not able to purify itself."

He also said, "A man may seem to be silent, but if his heart is condemning others, he is babbling ceaselessly. But there may be another who talks from morning till night and yet he is truly silent; that is, he says nothing that is not profitable."

He also said, "If man remembered that it is written, 'By your words you will be justified and by your words you will be condemned' (Matt. 12:37), he would choose to remain silent."

Homily on the Nourishment of the Soul

St. Nikolai of Zicha

"I am the Bread of life." John 6:48

Thus spoke the Lord Jesus to the hungry human race. These words have been proved through the centuries to Christ's innumerable followers, who have received the Lord as the nourishment of their souls.

A desperate young man who was close to suicide confessed to a spiritual father. The spiritual father listened to him carefully and said to him: "My son, you are to blame for your misfortune. Your soul is starved to death. Throughout your entire life, you learned only how to nourish your body, but you never thought that the soul requires greater and more frequent nourishment than the body. Your soul is on the verge of dying from hunger. My son, eat and drink Christ. Only this can restore your soul from death. Every day eat and drink of Christ. He is the Life-creating Bread of our souls." The young man obeyed the elder and returned to life.

Brethren, let us nourish our souls with Christ, that our souls may be alive and healthy. Let us continually nourish our minds with Christ's thoughts, that our minds might be enlightened and clear. Let us continually nourish our hearts with the love of Christ, that our hearts might be full and joyful. Let us continually nourish our wills with the commandments of Christ and the example of Christ, that our wills might perform good deeds very minute. Let Christ's thoughts be our thoughts and Christ's love be our love and Christ's good will be our good will. Let us continually nourish our souls with Christ the Lord; with our soul let us continually eat Him and drink Him! There is no more nourishing Bread than He; there is no sweeter drink than He. In Holy Communion, He gives Himself completely to us, Body and Blood. But Holy Communion is a reminder that our souls must continually be nourished by Him, continually eat Him and drink Him just as we continually breathe.

O our good and sweet Lord, stir up our souls that they may continually nourish themselves with Thee and remain alive. Thou art our Bread of Life. To Thee be glory and praise forever. Amen.

Upcoming Events 2015

8 March: Pan-Orthodox Vespers at St. Maximus with Hieromonk Gerasim speaking.
12 April: Holy Pascha, Feast of Feasts, Picnic

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!