

The Confessor's Tongue for May 3, A. D. 2015

Sunday of the Paralytic; St. Theodosius of the Kiev Caves

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 15

The brothers praised a monk before Abba Anthony. When the monk came to see him, Anthony wanted to know how he would bear insults, and seeing that he could not bear them at all, he said to him, "You are like a village magnificently decorated on the outside, but destroyed from within by robbers."

Saying 15 in *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*

^o*Commentary:* Outward appearances can be deceiving, and oft men praise and are impressed for slight cause. Here a monk had impressed some of the brethren in the desert. No doubt he fasted more strictly than most, prayed longer, prostrated more frequently, knew more scriptures by heart, lived more austerely. The brethren were taken in by these outward signs of possible sanctity and praised him. St. Anthony was not taken in, but tested him by offering him insults and found him far from perfect when he thereby was grieved and angered.

Like St. Silouan's test of love for enemies, the 'insult test' readily distinguishes between those who are nearing perfection and those who yet have far to go, regardless of how good they otherwise appear. To bear insults well, without grief or anger, i.e., with meekness, is an distinguishing mark of true sanctity.

An insult intentionally or unintentionally degrades the object of it, reduces its worth, "puts it down," creates a sense of psychological hurt. Thus a person feels insulted when others in their words or actions do not accord him the respect or recognition he thinks he merits, delivering a blow to his sense of self-respect and self-worth. The common response to insult is anger or grief, a feeling of 'being hurt' or offended.

The Christian is to bear insults without hurt or anger because he knows that God is his only judge and that human judgments are usually mistaken. Moreover, he has gained humility, so he can respond in accordance with the Stoic philosopher Epictetus' advice:

"If you are told that such an one speaks ill of you, make no defense against what was said, but answer, 'He surely knew not my other faults, else he would not have mentioned these only!'"

Knowing his own sins, the Christian accepts the sting of insult as a deserved correction and means of acquiring humility. Knowing that God is his only judge, the Christian learns indifference both to insult and to praise (which generally is more dangerous spiritually).

"A brother came to see Abba Macarius the Egyptian and said to him, 'Abba, give me a word, that I may be saved.' So the old man said, 'Go to the cemetery and abuse the dead.' The brother went there, abused them, and threw stones at them; then he returned and told the old man about it. The latter

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said to him, 'Didn't they say anything to you?' he replied, 'No.' The old man said, 'Go back tomorrow and praise them.' So the brother went away and praised them, calling them 'Apostles, saints, and righteous men.' He returned to the old man and said to him, 'I have complimented them.' And the old man said to him, 'Did they not answer you?' The brother said, 'No.' The old man said to him, 'You know how you insulted them and they did not reply, and how you praised them and they did not speak; so you too, if you wish to be saved, must do the same and become a dead man. Like the dead, take no account of either the scorn of men or their praises, and you can be saved.'"

Those who learn to bear insult patiently must still learn to bear the greater challenge of praise, which, by feeding vainglory and pride, poses a subtler and greater danger. The Christian is called to be as indifferent to both as the dead are.

If we find ourselves oft insulted, we may gain great benefit. Abba Isaiah said, 'Nothing is so useful to the beginner as insults. The beginner who bears insults is like a tree that is watered every day.' Here is a stiff test of faith, of love, of forgiveness: a compulsion to pray for those persecuting with words in accordance with Christ's command to pray for and do good to those who speak ill of us. Here, too, is a powerful antidote to pride and vainglory, to our inclination to think more highly of ourselves than we should.

Abba Agathon of the Desert Fathers offers us an example of bearing insults. "It was said concerning Abba Agathon that some monks came to find him having heard tell of his great discernment. Wanting to see if he would lose his temper, they said to him, 'Aren't you that Agathon who is said to be a fornicator and an proud man?' 'Yes, it is very true,' he answered. They resumed, 'Aren't you that Agathon who is always talking nonsense?' 'I am.' Again they said, 'Aren't you Agathon the heretic?' But at that he replied, 'I am not a heretic.' So they asked him, 'Tell us why you accepted everything we cast you, but repudiated this last insult?' He replied, 'The first accusations I take to myself, for that is good for my soul. But heresy is separation from God. Now I have no wish to be separated from God.' At this saying, they were astonished at his discernment and returned, edified."

Being insulted tests one's faith. But in our time, there is a widespread disease of the mind which causes those afflicted with it to find insult and offence where none was ever intended and then to cry "you hurt me, you offended me." This malady manifests itself when someone takes the intended compliment "You look nice today" as an insult "Are you saying I look bad on other days?" It seems hardly a week goes by but that some celebrity, athlete,

business executive, or politician makes a comment that leaves social media screaming its rage at their offensive words and calling for a firing and a public apology. Sometimes the offense is clear and real; other times, it is clear that someone is just looking for an excuse to take offense and raise a stink. Surely here is a deadly disease eating away at civil society—people looking for reasons to be offended! To take offense easily is no virtue, but is spiritually destructive. A Christian who finds himself often “hurt” and “offended” must realize that there is something amiss in his soul that needs healing from Christ and that he needs to become more like the dead men the monk insulted and praised to no effect.

This saying of St. Anthony elucidates Christ's command “Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment” (John 7:24), “for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart” (I Samuel 16:7). Man is expert in making himself look good outwardly to others, in creating Potemkin villages that look impressive but have no substance but are inwardly empty. The insult test reveals the man who cannot pass it as an outward appearance devoid of substance: “a village magnificently decorated on the outside, but destroyed from within by robbers.” May God grant us true all true substance—even if it means our appearance is less impressive. *Fr. Justin Frederick*

May 3: St. Theodosius of the Kiev Caves

He was born in the village of Vasilkov, 30 versts [19.8 miles] from Kiev, and in childhood moved with his parents to Kursk. From young years he found out that he had an overwhelming inclination for asceticism, leading an ascetical life in his parental home. He did not love games and dress, constantly went to church and with all attention heard the sacred books. He asked his parents to train him to read the sacred books and, because of his exceptional talent and rare diligence, quickly learned to read books so that all marveled at the mind of the adolescent.

When he was 14 years old, having lost his father, he remained under the supervision of his mother, who loved him very much and who from her sorrows chastised him for his inclination to asceticism. . . .

Once having heard the Gospel words about the forgiveness of parents from love for God (Mt. 10:37), the young Theodosius secretly left his parental home and was tonsured (in 1032) as a monk at the age of 24 in the Kievan Monastery of the Caves where soon all the brethren were awed by his asceticism.

Within 4 years the mother of Ven. Theodosius found him and with tears begged him to return home, but Ven. Theodosius tried to convince her to remain in Kiev and to accept monasticism in the St. Nicholas Monastery.

As a strict ascetic of piety, Ven. Theodosius labored more than the others in the monastery and quite often did part of another's labor: carried water for the other, cut fire wood, ground rye and carried

flour for each one; sometimes on a hot night exposed his body for food for mosquitoes and midges; with blood flowing from the bites, but he quietly spun wool and sang psalms. He appeared in the temple before the others and, standing in place, did not step down from it. He did the reading with attention, not being distracted by anything.

In 1054 Theodosius became a hieromonk, and in 1057 he was chosen Hegumen. The glory of his asceticism attracted many monks to the monastery, in which he built a new church and kellia and led them with the Studite cenobitic Ustav [Typikon]. As a Hegumen, Theodosius fulfilled the darkest chores of the monastery: he carried water for the brethren, cut fire wood, tilled the soil, spun wool, frequently went to the bakery, in line with the bakers and with a cheerful spirit he kneaded dough and baked bread. Being present at meals with the brethren, Theodosius usually ate only dry bread and boiled greens without oil. He passed the night without sleep in prayer for himself and for the monastery. . . . Nobody saw that Theodosius did not sleep lying down, but always fell asleep sitting up. His clothing was rigid hair sackcloth, worn straight on the body; over it was another overcoat and that it was rather thin. In Great Lent he left for a cave, near the monastery, where he practiced asceticism, seeing no one.

Having gathered many monks, Ven. Theodosius did not like to gather provisions for the monastery, but this is why the brethren sometimes suffered want and daily bread. But quite often unknown benefactors appeared and delivered what was needed for the brethren in the monastery.

Great princes, especially Iziaslav, enjoyed talking with Theodosius in the temple, in the kellia, and in his palace. The Venerable One was not afraid to accuse the powerful of this world. Inspired with zeal for God, Theodosius walked on the Jewish streets to talk about the Christian faith to the Hebrews. He especially loved the poor. He built a special court in the monastery for them and here all sorts of the poor were fed. Worried about the moral well-being of the brethren, Theodosius did not disregard their external situation. . . .

The venerable one, being informed beforehand of his demise, peacefully departed to the Lord on May 3, 1074, being 65 years old.

He was buried, according to his own wish, in the cave dug out by him where he retired during Lent. His relics were found incorrupt in 1091 (see Aug. 14). Ven. Theodosius was added to the community of Saints in 1108. Ven. Theodosius left behind 6 treatises, 2 epistles to Prince Iziaslav and a prayer for all Christians. *Bulgakov Handbook, Fr. E. Tarris, trans.*

Upcoming Events 2015

25 May Memorial Day Picnic

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!