

# The Confessor's Tongue for May 17, A. D. 2015

Sunday of the Blind Man; Apostle Adronicus; St. Eudoxia of Moscow

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 17

*One day some old men came to see Abba Anthony. In the midst of them was Abba Joseph. Wanting to test them, the old man suggested a text from the Scriptures, and, beginning with the youngest, he asked them what it meant. Each gave his opinion as he was able. But to each one the old man said, 'You have not understood it.' Last of all, he said to Abba Joseph, 'How would you explain this saying?' Abba Joseph replied, 'I do not know.' Then Abba Anthony said, 'Indeed, Abba Joseph has found the way, for he has said: "I do not know."'* Saying 17 in *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*

*Commentary:* It is said that 'a little knowledge is a dangerous thing.' Even more dangerous is to think one has knowledge when one doesn't—which is really what having a only a little knowledge about something readily leads one to think. St. Paul writes, "If any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know" (I Corinthians 8:2). Pride in what we think we know leads us to speak, to interject our opinions even where they have not been solicited. Paul adds, "Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth" (I Cor. 8:1). Knowledge, or supposed knowledge, quickly makes us proud, especially if it is not tempered with love for God and others.

The path to true knowledge begins with humility, with the ability to say, "I don't know." Having a teachable spirit, recognizing that one needs to be taught, is the beginning point for learning. He who thinks he already knows and his full of himself and his cherished opinions and supposed knowledge can be taught little or nothing.

St. Anthony, as a wise elder, tests his disciples, seeking to teach them a needed lesson. In response to his question, the younger monks in their zeal and pride of their own opinion speak readily. The eldest, Abba Joseph, on the other hand, confesses his ignorance. Anthony declares this to be the way to understanding the Scripture and to knowledge of God: to admit our ignorance, that whatever we think we know, we really know nothing as we should know it. A little honest reflection on God as uncreated, without beginning, eternal, and without limit in contrast with our own created existence should persuade us of this.

We should not take this to mean that the Truth cannot be known, or that we must always abide in ignorance. Knowledge is the virtue of the mind, whereas ignorance is a vice. We are to know the Truth that the Truth may set us free. We are to learn the Faith, summarized in the Creed, and hold to it, ever growing in it. We dare not spend our whole lives sampling a religious smorgasbord as so many do, "always learning, but never coming to a knowledge of the Truth" (2 Timothy 3:7). Rather, we hold to the Truth we have received in the Church from the

Apostles (Tradition), living in it, *doing* it—and by doing it we grow in knowledge. But we should never be ashamed to say "I don't know" as we recognize how far short our knowledge of Christ falls of the reality, as we recall that we shall have eternity to go ever deeper into knowing Him without ever exhausting Him.

*Fr. Justin Frederick*

## The Church: Her Nature and Task, Part 2

*Fr. Georges Florovsky*

The main contention of all these utterances is obvious. Christians are incorporated into Christ and Christ abides in them—this intimate union constitutes the mystery of the Church. The Church is, as it were, the place and the mode of the redeeming presence of the Risen Lord in the redeemed world. "The Body of Christ is Christ Himself. The Church is Christ, as after His Resurrection He is present with us and encounters us here on earth." And in this sense one can say: Christ is the Church. "*Ipse enim est Ecclesia, per sacramentum corporis sui in se... eam continens.*" [For He himself is the Church, containing it in himself through the sacrament of his body.] Or in the words of Karl Adam: "Christ, the Lord, is the proper Ego of the Church."

The Church is the unity of charismatic life. The source of this unity is hidden in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper and in the mystery of Pentecost. And Pentecost is continued and made permanent in the Church by means of the Apostolic Succession. It is not merely, as it were, the canonic skeleton of the Church. Ministry (or "hierarchy") itself is primarily a *charismatic* principle, a "ministry of the sacraments," or "a divine oeconomia." Ministry is not only a *canonical* commission, it belongs not only to the *institutional* fabric of the Church—it is rather an indispensable constitutional or *structural* feature, just in so far as the Church is a body, an organism. Ministers are not, as it were, "commissioned officers" of the community, not only leaders or delegates of the "multitudes," of the "people" or "congregation"—they are acting not only *in persona ecclesiae*. They are acting primarily *in persona Christi*. They are "representatives" of Christ Himself, not of believers, and in them and through them, the Head of the Body, the only High Priest of the New Covenant, is performing, continuing and accomplishing His eternal pastoral and priestly office. He is Himself the only true Minister of the Church. All others are but stewards of His mysteries. They are standing *for* Him, *before* the community—and just because the Body is one only in its Head, is brought together and into unity by Him and in Him, the Ministry in the Church is primarily the Ministry of unity. In the Ministry the organic unity of the Body is not only represented or

exhibited, but rather rooted, without any prejudice to the "equality" of the believers, just as the "equality" of the cells of an organism is not destroyed by their structural differentiation: all cells are equal as such, and yet differentiated by their functions, and again this differentiation serves the unity, enables this organic unity to become more comprehensive and more intimate. The unity of every local congregation springs from the unity in the Eucharistic meal. And it is as the celebrant of the Eucharist that the priest is the minister and the builder of Church unity.

But there is another and higher office: to secure the universal and catholic unity of the whole Church in space and time. This is the episcopal office and function. On the one hand, the Bishop has an authority to ordain, and again this is not only a jurisdictional privilege, but precisely a power of sacramental action beyond that possessed by the priest. Thus the Bishop as "ordainer" is the builder of Church unity on a wider scale. The Last Supper and Pentecost are inseparably linked to one another. The Spirit Comforter descends when the Son has been glorified in His death and resurrection. But still they are two sacraments (or mysteries) which cannot be merged into one another. In the same way the priesthood and the episcopate differ from one another. In the episcopacy Pentecost becomes universal and continuous, in the undivided episcopate of the Church (*episcopatus unus* of St. Cyprian) the unity in space is secured. On the other hand, through its bishop, or rather in its bishop, every particular or local Church is included in the catholic fullness of the Church, is linked with the past and with all ages. In its bishop every single Church outgrows and transcends its own limits and is organically united with the others. The Apostolic Succession is not so much the canonical as the mystical foundation of Church unity. It is something other than a safeguard of historical continuity or of administrative cohesion. It is an ultimate means to keep the mystical identity of the Body through the ages. But, of course, Ministry is never detached from the Body. It is in the Body, belongs to its structure. And ministerial gifts are given inside the Church (cf. 1 Cor. xii).

The Pauline conception of the Body of Christ was taken up and variously commented on by the Fathers, both in the East and in the West, and then was rather forgotten." It is high time now to return to this experience of the early Church which may provide us with a solid ground for a modern theological synthesis. Some other similes and metaphors were used by St. Paul and elsewhere in the New Testament, but much to the same purpose and effect: *to stress the intimate and organic unity between Christ and those who are His*. But, among all these various images, that of the Body is the most inclusive and impressive, is the most emphatic expression of the basic vision. Of course, no analogy is to be pressed too far or over-emphasized. The idea of an organism, when used of the Church, has its own limitations. On the one hand, the Church is

composed of human personalities, which never can be regarded merely as elements or cells of the whole, because each is in direct and immediate union with Christ and His Father—the personal is not to be sacrificed or dissolved in the corporate,

Christian "togetherness" must not degenerate into impersonalism. The idea of the organism must be supplemented by the idea of a symphony of personalities, in which the mystery of the Holy Trinity is reflected (cf. John xvii, 21 and 23), and this is the core of the conception of "catholicity" (sobornost). This is the chief reason why we should prefer a christological orientation in the theology of the Church rather than a pneumatological." For, on the other hand, the Church, as a whole, has her *personal centre* only in Christ, she is not an incarnation of the Holy Spirit, nor is she merely a Spirit-being community, but precisely the Body of Christ, the Incarnate Lord. This saves us from impersonalism without committing us to any humanistic personification. Christ the Lord is the only Head and the only Master of the Church. "In Him the whole structure is closely fitted together and grows into a temple holy in the Lord; in Him you too are being built together into a dwelling-place for God in the Spirit (Eph. ii, 21-22, Bp. Challoner's version).

The Christology of the Church does not lead us into the misty clouds of vain speculations or dreamy mysticism. On the contrary, it secures the only solid and positive ground for proper theological research. The doctrine of the Church finds thereby its proper and organic place in the general scheme of the Divine Oeconomia of salvation. For we have indeed still to search for a comprehensive vision of the mystery of our salvation, of the salvation of the world.

One last distinction is to be made. The Church is still *in statu viae* and yet it is already *in statu patriae*. It has, as it were, a double life, *both in heaven and on earth*. The Church is a visible historical society, and the same is the Body of Christ. It is both the Church of the redeemed, and the Church of the miserable sinners—both at once. On the historical level no *final* goal has yet been attained. But the *ultimate* reality has been disclosed and revealed. This ultimate reality is still at hand, is truly available, in spite of the historical imperfection, though but in provisional forms. For the Church is a sacramental society. *Sacramental* means no less than "*eschatological*." *To eschaton* does not mean primarily *final*, in the temporal series of events; it means rather *ultimate* (decisive); and the ultimate is being realized within the stress of historical happenings and events. What is "not of this world" is here "in this world," not abolishing this world, but giving to it a new meaning and a new value, "transvaluating" the world, as it were. Surely this is still only an anticipation, a "token" of the final consummation. Yet the Spirit abides in the Church. This constitutes the mystery of the Church: a visible "society" of frail men *is* an organism of the Divine Grace.

The primary task of the historical Church is the proclamation of another word "to come." The Church bears witness to the New Life, disclosed and revealed in Christ Jesus, the Lord and Savior. This it does both by word and deed. The true proclamation of the Gospel would be precisely the practice of this New Life: to show faith by deeds (cf. Matt, v, 16).

The Church is more than a company of preachers, or a teaching society, or a missionary board. It has not only to invite people, but also to introduce them into this New Life, to which it bears witness. It is a missionary body indeed, and its mission field is the whole world. But the aim of its missionary activity is not merely to convey to people certain convictions or ideas, not even to impose on them a definite discipline or a rule of life, but first of all to introduce them into the New Reality, to *convert* them, to bring them through their faith and repentance to Christ Himself, that they should be born anew in Him and into Him by water and the Spirit. Thus the ministry of the Word is completed in the ministry of the Sacraments.

"Conversion" is a fresh start, but it is only a start, to be followed by a long process of growth. The Church has to organize the new life of the converted. The Church has, as it were, to exhibit the new pattern of existence, the new mode of life, that of the "world to come." The Church is here, in this world, for its salvation. But just for this reason it has to oppose and to renounce *"this"* world. God claims the whole man, and the Church bears witness to this "totalitarian" claim of God revealed in Christ. The Christian has to be a "new creation." Therefore he cannot find a settled place for himself within the limits of the "old world." In this sense the Christian attitude is, as it were, always revolutionary with regard to the "old order" of "this world." Being "not of this world" the Church of Christ "in this world" can only be in permanent opposition, even if it claims only a reformation of the existing order. In any case, the change is to be radical and total.

Historical failures of the Church do not obscure the absolute and ultimate character of its challenge, to which it is committed by its very eschatological nature, and it constantly challenges itself.

Historical life and the task of the Church are an antinomy, and this antinomy can never be solved or overcome on a historical level. It is rather a permanent hint to what is "to come" hereafter. The antinomy is rooted in the practical alternative which the Church had to face from the very beginning of its historical pilgrimage. *Either* the Church was to be constituted as an exclusive and "totalitarian" society, endeavoring to satisfy all requirements of the believers, both "temporal" and "spiritual," paying no attention to the existing order and leaving nothing to the external world — it would have been an entire separation from the world, an ultimate flight out of it, and a radical denial of any external authority. *Or* the Church could attempt an inclusive Christianization of the world, subduing the whole of

life to Christian rule and authority, to reform and to reorganize secular life on Christian principles, to build the Christian City. In the history of the Church we can trace both solutions: a flight to the desert and a construction of the Christian Empire. The first was practiced not only in monasticism of various trends, but in many other Christian groups and denominations. The second was the main line taken by Christians, both in the West and in the East, up to the rise of militant secularism, but even in our days this solution has not lost its hold on many people. But on the whole, both proved unsuccessful. One has, however, to acknowledge the reality of their common problem and the truth of their common purpose. Christianity is not an individualistic religion and it is not only concerned for the "salvation of the soul." Christianity is the Church, i.e. a Community, the New People of God, leading its corporate life according to its peculiar principles. And this life cannot be split into departments, some of which might have been ruled by any other and heterogeneous principles. Spiritual leadership of the Church can hardly be reduced to an occasional guidance given to individuals or to groups living under conditions utterly uncongenial to the Church. The legitimacy of these conditions must be questioned first of all. The task of a complete recreation or re-shaping of the whole fabric of human life cannot or must not be avoided or declined. One cannot serve two Masters and a double allegiance is a poor solution. Here the above-mentioned alternative inevitably comes in—everything else would merely be an open compromise or a reduction of the ultimate and therefore *total* claims. *Either* Christians ought to go out of the world, in which there is another Master besides Christ (whatever name this other Master may bear: Caesar or Mammon or any other) and in which the rule and the goal of life are other than those set out in the Gospel—to go out and to start a separate society. *Or* again Christians have to transform the outer world, to make it the Kingdom of God as well, and introduce the principles of the Gospel into secular legislation.

There is an inner consistency in both programmes. And therefore the separation of the two ways is inevitable. Christians seem compelled to take different ways. The unity of the Christian task is broken. An inner schism arises within the Church: an abnormal separation between the monks (or the *elite* of the initiated) and the lay-people (including clergy), which is far more dangerous than the alleged "clericalization" of the Church. In the last resort, however, it is only a symptom of the ultimate antinomy. The problem simply has no historical solution. A true solution would transcend history, it belongs to the "age to come." In this age, on the historic plane, no constitutional principle can be given, but only a regulative one: a principle of discrimination, not a principle of construction.

For again each of the two programmes is self-contradictory. There is an inherent *sectarian*

temptation in the first: the "catholic" and universal character of the Christian message and purpose is here at least obscured and often deliberately denied, the world is simply left out of sight. And all attempts at the direct Christianization of the world, in the guise of a Christian State or Empire, have only led to the more or less acute *secularization* of Christianity itself."

In our time nobody would consider it possible for everyone to be converted to a universal monasticism or a realization of a truly Christian, and universal, State. The Church remains "in the world," as a heterogeneous body, and the tension is stronger than it has ever been; the ambiguity of the situation is painfully felt by everyone in the Church. A practical programme for the present age can be deduced only from a restored understanding of the nature and essence of the Church. And the failure of all Utopian expectations cannot obscure the Christian hope: the King has come, the Lord Jesus, and His Kingdom is to come.

### **Giving Thanks in All Things: The Life of St. Arethas of the Kiev Caves**

It is indeed fitting to give thanks to God for all that comes to pass. We should thank the Lord not only for what is good but for misfortunes as well, for both the righteous, like Job, and sinners are benefited by trials. Truly, a great sinner may be transformed into a perfect saint by ill fortune as was the case with the holy man of whom we shall now tell.

There was a monk named Arethas who lived in the Monastery of the Caves. He came from the city of Polotsk, and in his cell he had much hidden wealth. So greedy was he that he never gave a penny as alms to the poor nor spent anything even on himself. But one night, thieves came and stole all that he possessed. Because of this, he was cast into great sorrow and almost died of grief. He began to make accusations against the innocent, troubling many without cause, and all the brethren besought him to cease his search for the robbers. They sought to comfort him, saying, "Brother, cast thy care upon the Lord, and He will nourish thee." But Arethas did not wish to hear them and drove them all away with his sharp replies.

A few days later, Arethas fell into a grievous illness and was near death, but he still did not cease to complain and to blaspheme. The Lord, however, who loves man and "who willeth that all men be saved," showed mercy to him. As Arethas was lying sick on his bed like a dead man, not having spoken for many days, he suddenly began to cry out, wailing, "Lord, have mercy! Lord, forgive me! I have sinned, O Lord! All things are Thine, and I regret not the loss of my riches."

Arethas then quickly arose from his bed of illness and explained to the brethren the reason why he had cried out. He described to them the vision, saying, "I saw both angels and a company of demons, who came to me and began to quarrel over the riches which had

been stolen from me. The demons said, 'He did not thank God that these things were stolen from him: he cursed Him. Therefore, he is ours, and you must hand him over to us.'

"Then the angels said to me, 'O wretched man! If you had thanked God that your wealth was stolen, it would have been counted as alms as were the possessions Job lost. Whoever gives alms willingly has great merit before God, but when riches are stolen from a man, it is clear that he has been tempted by the devil. He has not willed this to happen, even if he does endure it thankfully. The devil brings this upon a man to make him blaspheme. But the grateful man ascribes all things to the will of God, and so his loss is counted as almsgiving.'

"When the angels said this to me, I cried out, 'Lord, forgive me! I have sinned, O Lord! All things are Thine, and I regret not the loss of my riches!'

"Immediately the demons vanished, and the angels were filled with joy. They counted as alms the silver I had lost and then departed."

When the brethren heard this, they glorified God, who guides sinners to the path of repentance and reveals to them the great power of gratitude. Thus corrected by God, the blessed Arethas entirely changed both his thoughts and ways for the better. All were amazed and said with the Apostle, "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound."

St. Arethas' feast is celebrated October 24.

### **May 17: St. Euphrosyne of Moscow**

Saint Euphrosyne, in the world Eudokia, was the daughter of the Suzdal prince Demetrius Constantovich (+ 1383), and from 1367 was the wife of the Moscow Great Prince Dimitri of the Don. Their happy union was for Russia a pledge of unity and peace between Moscow and Suzdal. St Alexis, Metropolitan of Moscow, and even St Sergius of Radonezh, who baptized one of the sons of Demetrius and Eudokia, had a great influence upon the spiritual life of Princess Eudokia. St Demetrius of Priluki (February 11) was the godfather of another son. The holy princess was a builder of churches. In 1387 she founded the Ascension women's monastery in the Moscow Kremlin. In 1395, during Tamerlane's invasion into the southern regions of Russia, the Vladimir Icon of the Mother of God was transferred to Moscow upon her advice, miraculously defending the Russian land. During Lent, the princess secretly wore chains beneath her splendid royal garb. By her patronage the famous icon of the Archangel Michael was painted, and later became the patronal icon of the Kremlin's Archangel Cathedral. After raising five sons (a sixth died in infancy), the princess was tonsured as a nun with the name Euphrosyne. She completed her earthly journey on July 7, 1407 and was buried in the Ascension monastery she founded.

### **Upcoming Events 2015**

21 May Holy Ascension  
25 May Memorial Day Picnic

**GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!**