

The Confessor's Tongue for September 20, A. D. 2015

Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost; Greatmartyr Eustathius & Martyr Theopistes

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 24

It was revealed to Abba Anthony in his desert that there was one who was his equal in the city. He was a doctor by profession, and whatever he had beyond his needs he gave to the poor, and every day he sang the Sanctus with the Angels.

Saying 24 *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*

Commentary: Sometimes people think that only monks or perhaps clergy have the chance to be close to God. 'How can we who live in the world fast, pray, give alms as the saints did? they think, and they have little hope for ourselves. This saying of St. Anthony reveals that one need not be a monk to attain St. Anthony's level of spiritual life.

St. Anthony as a great ascetic who sold all his goods and gave them to the poor to flee to the desert to become a monk, a man of prayer and strict fasting, a spiritual warrior with much experience of warfare against the demons, a man who had seen God's uncreated light, seems nigh impossible to equal. Yet a man living in the city (probably Alexandria) was his equal before God. This man had not gone to the desert, had not given up all his possessions to give to the poor, had probably not seen the demons fighting him as Anthony had, yet he still pleased God greatly. He worked, he lived frugally on his income, spending just enough to meet the necessities of life and giving away the rest in alms. He maintained daily prayer and worship of God in such a way that he was joining the angels in their singing the thrice-holy hymn, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord of Sabaoth [hosts], heaven and earth and full of Thy glory."

Like children, the people of our time fixate upon the unfairness of life. Some are born rich, some poor. Some get a good education, others do not. Some are born in peaceful, stable, prosperous lands, others are born into war, unrest, anarchy, or famine. Some are born into Christian families in Christian lands, others grow up not knowing the name of Jesus. Life is clearly not fair. Yet, we must insist that every man born on earth, whatever his circumstances, has an equal opportunity to please God. It does not seem so to us. Does not the man who grows up a Christian have a better opportunity to please God than one who does not? But to whom much is given, much is required. God's light of revelation is diffused through the universe in His work of creation, giving all the possibility of knowledge of Him. And as Judge of the contest, God judges not as we do, by outward appearance. He takes every possible factor into consideration. What did each person do with the talent entrusted to him? To some were given many, to others few. Some of the former waste most of what they were given. Some of the latter, although starting with very little, show an increase. Each

person will be judged based on what he does with what he was given.

Now consider the three major elements given in the life of the holy doctor equal-to-Antony. First, he earned his living by working in his profession. Work in life is unavoidable because of the ancestral sin. Rather than the freely given abundance of Paradise, man faces a world subjected to a curse which forces him to "eat bread by the sweat of [his] brow." In the Church, St. Paul affirms this need when he says regarding who may be supported by alms from the Church, "If a man will not work, neither shall he eat." To live in this world, man must work, and that work is part of his salvation. To disparage work or try to avoid it harms the soul and hinders man's salvation.

All work (other than what is immoral) is honorable. All useful work involves some sort of service to others. Thus, all honest work, no matter how humble, when done for the sake of Christ, done as serving the Lord and not man, becomes a form of ministry and means of glorifying God.

It should be said that not all honest work is monetized, that is, done in exchange for money wages. Children do chores around the house and property. Mothers care for children. Children care for aged parents. All this is work, and by means of this sort of work many earn their daily bread and serve others. Participation in the household economy is work just as much if not more than participation in the monetary economy.

Furthermore, while work is a means of eating, it is not ultimately who man is or his means of fulfillment. Man's task is to love God and man, and in doing this he finds himself and his fulfillment. Work alone will not provide it, though many seek it in work.

Second, the holy doctor did not spend all his income on himself. He used of it what he needed to eat and to clothe and house himself, and the rest he gave in alms. This pattern is common in the lives of the saints. Indeed, almsgiving is one of the three pillars of Orthodox Christian spiritual life, along with prayer and fasting. Almsgiving should never be equated with or reduced to tithing, which supports the local church. Christians think it difficult to give even ten percent of their incomes to God, but the ancient Hebrews were to give at least twenty percent. One tithe went to support the Levites and Priests, another went as alms to those in need. And Christians struggle to give even a tenth? Shameful it is when Christians, whatever their income, claim they cannot give, when they live in such a way that all income goes out for expenses or they even go into debt, which is so easy to do in our time. To live in this way shows that one's priorities are mistaken and that one is living beyond one's means. The doctor, in contrast, instead of accumulating wealth and

possessions, spent on himself only what he needed to maintain his live and gave the rest to the poor around him, knowing that in so doing he was giving to Christ. His example challenges us.

Third, the doctor "every day...sang the Sanctus with the Angels." Daily he remembered God, to honor Him as God, to give Him thanks for everything, to worship him, and to pray. He was a man of prayer. We may suppose that he prayed faithfully at home and while he worked and also did not neglect his attendance at divine services. To pray in such a way that one sings the Sanctus with the Angels (the "Holy, holy, holy" or the thrice holy hymn the angels sing in heaven as reported by the Prophet Isaiah and St. John the Theologian) indicates a man purified through repentance and experienced in prayer and able to enter the presence of God. The deep things of God are not revealed to the casual inquirer but to those who seek diligently with their whole hearts.

For us to live as the doctor and be equal to St. Antony is within our capacity—though it would undoubtedly force us to make some significant changes to our way of life. Work, alms, and prayer, thanksgiving, and worship would be the main elements of our lives, and our way of life, though at first glance, would not appear outwardly as strange. But once those in the world came to know our life, they would be struck by its priorities radically different from the norms of the world.

Brethren, wherever we live, whatever our circumstances, what we need for our salvation and knowing God intimately is at hand. Let us seek the Lord with all our hearts and do His will by following the path of Christ's commandments. Let us not live beyond our means, rather limiting our wants to what we truly need. Let us be generous in almsgiving, and let us be faithful to pray daily and diligent to come together for worship. Let us make ourselves available to God to do His will each day, and we, too, may find ourselves in Anthony's company with the anonymous doctor who was his equal before God.

Fr. Justin Frederick

Building Christian Community

The word "community" is much used and abused in our time. You may decide for yourselves whether such usages as "the business community", "the homosexual community", "the gamer community", "the hunting community", "the educational community", "the online community", etc., are valid, but I would contend they abuse language and trivialize the meaning of the word.

Fundamentally, a community is "a social group of any size whose members reside in a specific locality, share government, and often have a common cultural and historical heritage." The groups above, to the degree that they are groups at all, are ostensibly united by a common interest and perhaps some common experiences. But there is no common life

together in a locality, no shared government or way of life, and often no personal knowledge of one another.

The Christian Church from the beginning was a community of those called out of the world to follow Jesus Christ as Master and Lord. While the Church submitted to the local authorities, it largely governed its own life, its members urged to settle their disputes in the Church rather than to go to secular law. It was Christ's commands that guided them in a common way of life. They were united by sharing the one Faith in the One Risen Lord, having received the one Baptism and partaking regularly of the one loaf and one cup. They were urged to love one another as Christ had love them, and this love was not a feeling but a willingness and commitment to take care of one another.

True community has largely been destroyed in the modern Western world for many reasons. If we are not to be lost in the crowd as atomistic individuals with no meaningful connections to anyone and nothing to unite us other than living under a common national government, we need community. And if we are to survive whatever hard times may be ahead of us, it is through community and God's mercy that it will be accomplished.

To be the member of the Church is to be the member of a local community, where, united by our common faith and worship, we learn to love one another, even when we don't find one another particularly lovable. (We must always remember that we ourselves are not always particularly lovable.) Such community does not happen automatically. It takes an effort on the part of each. We choose to come to church regularly, and not just Sunday morning. We partake regularly of Confession and Holy Communion. We embrace the path of Christ's commandments and seek to live by them in all our relations. We make the effort to get to know others at coffee hour, picnics, classes as well as outside formal parish gatherings. We pray for one another. We look out for one another. If someone is absent, we care enough to enquire. If someone is ill or in need, we make it our business to render whatever aid we can. If we have differences with someone, we humble ourselves and in love seek to be reconciled rather than running away.

Community of this sort is truly community, and such a community will sustain us through all manner of hardships. Consider the existence of Christian communities in the Middle East that survived for 1400 under alien Muslim rule. Without community, though, we are weak in the face of a world which would conform us to its own image.

Fr. Justin Frederick

Upcoming Events 2015

27 September Annual Meeting, noon
31 October All-Saints Party 3:00 p.m.

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!