

The Confessor's Tongue for November 8, A. D. 2015

Twenty-Third Sunday after Pentecost; Synaxis of the Archangel Michael

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 29

A brother in a monastery was falsely accused of fornication, and he arose and went to Abba Anthony. The brethren also came from the monastery to correct him and bring him back. They set about proving that he had done this thing, but he defended himself and denied that he had done anything of the kind. Now Abba Paphnutius happened to be there, and he told them this parable: 'I have seen a man on the bank of the river buried up to his knees in mud, and some men came to give a hand to help him out, but they pushed him further in up to his neck.' Then Abba Anthony said this about Abba Paphnutius: 'Here is a real man, who can care for souls and save them.' All those present were pierced to the heart by the words of the old man and they asked forgiveness of the brother. So admonished by the Fathers, they took the brother back to the monastery.
Saying 29 Sayings of the Desert Fathers

Commentary: How ready we are to accuse others falsely! True, we usually don't do it maliciously and consciously, but how often we jump to false conclusions about our brother and pass judgment on him, often on the sketchiest of evidence. This readiness to leap to conclusions, think the worst, and condemn does great harm to ourselves and others and reveals a lack of love in our hearts for our brother. Love demands that we think the best of others, that we put the best possible construction on their ambiguous words and actions rather than thinking the worst, and that we soberly and deliberately assess evidence before rushing to judgement. How much trouble we suffer ourselves and inflict on others due to our thinking the worst and rushing to judgement!

This sin afflicts not only life in the church but public life as well. A story is posted online and within six hours the case has been tried and sentence passed in the court of public opinion long before all the facts are known. When the facts do become known and the rushed judgment is shown to be false, the damage has been done to a person's life and reputation, and most people have moved on to other matters and remain unaware of the correction. Civilized life is impossible where the spirit of the lynch mob prevails. The Prophet Moses recognized this human weakness when he wrote in the Law: "'You shall not follow the masses in doing evil, nor shall you testify in a dispute so as to turn aside after a multitude in order to pervert justice'" (Exodus 23:2 NAS). The truth needs to be sought out dispassionately and judgment made on the merits of the case, but how easy it is to go with the flow of the multitude and how difficult to speak out against that flow.

When the accused brother and his accusers come before Anthony and elder Paphnutius, notice how quickly the monks repent when corrected by the two elders and ask forgiveness for their mistaken words

and actions. When they realized they were wrong, they immediately humbled themselves and asked forgiveness. They recognized their error and forsook it, rather than trying to justify and defend or excuse themselves.

Their quickness to repent bears further reflection. It shows that they were sound monks who had been caught up in the passion of partial perception and rushed judgment. Sound, good, sincere Christians and leaders can fall prey to this (and other sins). When it happens, the sign of the true Christian is humility to acknowledge his fault and to repent quickly. This the monks did.

Now suppose that the brother had committed the sin of which he was accused, a serious matter. Even in such a case, one must be careful: one may be right but still be wrong: right concerning the sin and judgment on it, but wrong in dealing with the sinner. The brethren had come to correct the brother and bring him back to the monastery. This reveals their good intent: to restore their brother. But they knew not how, and through a lack of love and discernment on their part for their brother they fell to arguing with him about his supposed guilt, which helped no one. Their sense of being right and their brother wrong kept them from helping him effectively.

We tend to notice and judge sins in which we ourselves are guilty or complicit. Hence we must always be on guard when dealing with the sins of others lest we be proud or condemning and thereby end up shooting the wounded and then falling ourselves, often into the same sin. St. Jude thus writes, "Keep yourselves in the love of God...Have mercy on some who are doubting; save others, snatching them out of the fire; and on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment polluted by the flesh." (Jude 21-23 NAS). *Fr. Justin Frederick*

On Legislating Morality

In response to Christian attempts to preserve the moral order of our society, those opposed to the natural law and the law of God often retort "you can't legislate morality." Legislation informed by God's revealed law is portrayed as being contrary to freedom and to a free country, and unjustified imposition of religion on people who want none of it. And so, in response to every attempt by Christians and others who acknowledge the existence of a moral order given by God to have that order reflected in the law of the land is met with the dismissive words "you can't legislate morality."

To say that you cannot legislate morality is true in a trivial way, but it is false in the most significant way. It is true only in that people will not become good and moral simply through legislation. Outlawing adultery does not keep people from committing

adultery. (It does, however, help undermine the pernicious concept of a 'no-fault' divorce, provides some measure of protection for the injured parties, and expresses the norm of virtue to which a society aspires.) Though law in itself does not render citizens virtuous, when enforced it serves to restrain evildoers and to protect the innocent. Though pointing to the good, it cannot *make* people good. Thus, in the sense that by passing laws you cannot *make* people good, the slogan is true.

Apart from the foregoing, the claim that 'you can't legislate morality' is false. After all, what is law? It is the legal standard which defines what is considered to be bad, unacceptable behavior in a particular civil society. Hence, the law is always legislated morality—it is always reflects someone's standard of right and wrong. When it is said in these United States that "you can't legislate morality," what is usually meant is that the one making the statement does not want Christian morality reflected in the law. But keeping Christian morality out of the law does not keep us from legislating morality; it only means that some other morality can and will be legislated.

Make no mistake: all law is legislated morality, a legal definition of right and wrong for a society. In the Soviet Union, law was based on Communist morality and the revolutionary consciousness of those who overturned the old order. In Nazi Germany, law was based on Nazi morality. Given Nazism's principles of Social Darwinism (survival of the fittest) and the superiority of the Teutonic race, it was good and right to exterminate lesser peoples, much as men kill vermin such as rats and cockroaches, to protect the long-term viability of the human race. Every ideology provides a 'moral' way of looking at the world; in power, every ideology naturally will attempt to construct a social order based on that vision of the world.

Though the prevailing notion today is that morality, right and wrong, are relative, as Christians, we hold that God has created a moral universe, a moral natural order. He has designed us to live and interact in certain ways; other ways in which we can act are contrary to the way He made us—contrary to nature. The goal of the Christian and past Christian societies is to conform to nature, to God's moral order to God's will, and to have that order reflected in the social order. The Christian recognizes God as the higher legislative power, the Lawgiver and King, to whom he must ever strive to submit himself and conform himself to His will. In this view, God's law trumps human legislation and human notions.

So why in these largely Christian United States Christian attempts to influence legislation should be effectively dismissed with this slogan is not at all evident. In a Christian land, it is natural that the law should largely reflect Christian notions of right and wrong, just as in a Muslim land, Islamic notions of right and wrong prevail. In a Communist country, notions of right and wrong determined by the theories of Marx, Engels, Lenin, are enshrined in law.

Our problem in these United States is that we are not nearly so Christian as we think we are, and our thinking has become contaminated with the anti-Christian slogans and animus of the so-called "Enlightenment". The fruit of the Enlightenment may readily be seen in the French Revolution (1789-99) in which the revolutionaries sought to recreate French society from the foundation up even to the point of rejecting the Church, the seven-day week (because it is grounded in the Biblical account of creation), instituting a new civil religion of their own making and a new calendar with 1792 as year one, ten-day weeks, and new names for the months. The Revolution sought to reject decisively the Christian heritage of the French people and replace it with a new one based on Reason (as they perceived reason, in any case). It failed (by 1806, the old calendar was back), but its anti-Christian principles are alive and well in our midst to this day.

Those who say morality cannot be legislated are being duplicitous. They seek to replace the prevailing moral system with a new one more to their own taste. The day is evil when man loses the moral compass with which God created him. When he says that "good is evil" and "evil is good", when he arrogates to himself the right of defining right and wrong, he has been deluded by our great enemy, the destroyer of souls. Unfortunately, not only those who actively promote the "new" anti-Christian morality are harmed; many souls passively take it in (primarily through our media and educational system) and are set up for destruction.

We can no more give the despisers of Christianity and Christian morality a free pass to dismiss our moral vision of the world with the words "you can't legislate morality". Let it be seen, at least, that our choice is between competing moralities to enshrine in our laws, not between morality and some sort of rational, value-free legislation. *Fr. Justin*

On Correcting the Faults of Others

If you wish to correct the faults of anyone, do not think of trying to do so solely by your own means: you would only do harm by your vices, for instance, by pride and the irritability arising from it; *but cast thy burned upon the Lord*, and pray with all your heart that God Himself will enlighten the mind and heart of that man. If he sees that your prayer breathes love, and that it really comes from the depths of your heart, he will undoubtedly fulfill it, and you will soon see, from the change that has taken place in him for whom you prayed, that it is the work of the most high God. *St. John of Kronstadt*

Upcoming Events 2015

15 November Nativity Fast begins.
21 November Great Feast Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple
6 December Feast of St. Nicholas
17 December Thursday, 7:00 p.m. Holy Unction

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!