

The Confessor's Tongue for December 6, A. D. 2015

Twenty-Seventh Sunday after Pentecost; St. Nicholas of Myra, Wonderworker
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 33

Abba Anthony also said, "Always have the fear of God before your eyes. Remember Him who gives death and life.

Hate the world and all that is in it. Hate all peace that comes from the flesh. Renounce this life, so that you may be alive to God. Remember what you have promised God, for it will be required of you on the day of judgment. Suffer hunger, thirst, nakedness, be watchful and sorrowful; weep and groan in your heart; test yourselves, to see if you are worthy of God; despise the flesh, so that you may preserve your souls." Saying 33 *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*

Commentary: These are hard words from St. Anthony, but they are merely a compilation of our Savior's "hard" admonitions to watch, to be blessed by hungering and thirsting now, to be worthy of him by "hating" family members, and to seek first the kingdom of God and not gain the world and lose our souls. "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26). St. John the Theologian speaks in a similar vein in his first epistle: "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away and the lust thereof, but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever" (1 John 2:15-17).

"Always have the fear of God before your eyes." "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom"; it is by fear of God, remembrance of the final judgment, that man turns away from evil. Without fear of God, man lacks wisdom and lives foolishly and self-destructively.

"Remember Him who gives death and life." Remembering God at all times, relating all that he does to Him, praying without ceasing, giving thanks for all things always—these practices the Christian aims to acquire. In particular here, Anthony calls us to remember God as the one who gives life and death. Our lives are not our own, and ultimately we do not control their length. This awareness brings sobriety and a wise use of precious time.

"Hate the world." If we understand the world as the fallen order of man described by St. John's words, "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life," it is clear why we are to hate those things collectively described as "the world." Yet the words cut deeper. St. Maximus writes, "If we sincerely love God, we cast out the passions by this very love. Love for Him means to prefer Him to the world, and the soul to the body. It means to despise worldly things and to devote oneself continually to Him through self-mastery, love, prayer, psalmody, and so forth" (*400 Chapters on Love*, 3.50). Even the

good natural order, the material world God made, which He declared to be "very good", can get in the way of loving God. If we prefer our material life and all its pleasures and cares to knowing and serving God, we are no better than idolaters, for we are worshipping and serving created things rather than the Creator. Because of God's surpassing goodness, to give preference to material things over Him is like having a pile of exquisite diamonds and a pile of common gravel before us and choosing to fill our pockets with the gravel. Seeing how easily distracted from God we are by the good world, St. Anthony expresses our proper attitude towards the world in contrast with our attitude towards God.

"Renounce this life..." and "Remember what you have promised God..." speak first of the monastic life which begins with renunciation of the world and its usual way of life and a promise of devoting oneself wholeheartedly to God in poverty, chastity, and stability. For those of us who live in the world, we must remember our Baptism: when we consecrated ourselves to God, knelt before Him, and publicly acknowledged Him to be our King and Lord. We must understand what it requires of us, be constantly renewed in it, and not let ourselves be dominated by earthly values (such as the 'American Dream'). In pondering the great injustices of Communism and particularly the use of torture and harsh interrogation to get innocent people to confess to crimes and to implicate others in those crimes, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn wrote that the only way to overcome the prosecution in whose favor the odds were overwhelmingly stacked and to maintain one's integrity and purity of soul was to consider oneself dead and lost to the world, and not let the hope of returning to the world betray one into betraying others. "Before such a prisoner, the prosecution will tremble." If we become such who have renounced the world, the enemy will have no hold on us.

Anthony's admonitions to suffer hunger, thirst, nakedness, to be watchful and sorrowful is a call to the ascetic Christian life: to prayer, to fasting, to almsgiving and to repentance. His word to "despise the flesh" means we are to war against the passions that seek to rule us, that we are to subject our bodies to our minds illumined by Christ and not to let our bodies run our lives.

"Test yourselves, to see if you are worthy of God." This life is time for repentance. If during it we would judge ourselves, we will not be judged on the last day. Instead of occupying ourselves with how the world needs to repent, how others need to change, we attend to ourselves so that we may cooperate with God's sanctifying grace in us and become worthy of Him. The gift given to us in Christ is great; we cannot afford to neglect it, but must work with it so that it fill our whole life.

This word is hard for us to hear, as it challenges our comfortable lives, but that does not mean we should not hear it. We enter already into the Final Judgment in this life as we allow the Holy Spirit through the commands of Christ to judge our lives, as we accuse ourselves before God in Confession of our failure to love Him with all our heart. Without such hard words, we tend to live in self-satisfied complacency thinking we are basically good, which deposits us directly on the highway to hell. Made God grant us all "ears to hear" and the courage to face God's judgment of our lives now rather than later.

Fr. Justin Frederick

December 6: St. Nicholas the Wonderworker

He was born in about the year 280 during the reign of Emperor Valerian in the city of Patara in the province of Lycia (southern Turkey) of noble, wealthy and pious parents, Theophanes and Nonna. Signs of God's grace in his life were revealed to them from his early childhood. Later as an adolescent, he displayed an inclination for strict abstinence and the solitary life. He abandoned temporal amusements and distractions, frequently visited the temples of God and enjoyed studying the Holy Scriptures under the direction of his uncle Nicholas, Bishop of Patara. By the request of the latter, St. Nicholas was given over to the service of the Lord by his parents and on reaching maturity he was ordained a presbyter. In this capacity St. Nicholas led an even stricter ascetic life. He continually attended vigils, fasts and prayer, and more and more perfected himself in the virtuous life.

During a journey of his uncle to the Holy Land, St. Nicholas directed the Patara flock, but after his uncle returned he was sent to Jerusalem and while on the way he twice calmed a storm through his prayers. After he returned home, he, through the special inspiration of God, was transferred to the city of Myra. And soon because of his holy life he was elected bishop there and was for all an example of indestructible faith and burning zeal for it, of deep piety and immeasurable humility, meekness and gentleness, of praiseworthy purity and chastity and great abstinence, of truly Christian philanthropy and of deep concern and compassion for the unfortunate. His clothes were simple, his food was Lenten. The door of his house was open for everyone, and all day he practiced his calling by deed, always attentively listening to all requests which came to him.

During the reign of Diocletian he was imprisoned together with other Christians until the reign of Constantine the Great, "suffering hunger and thirst in an overcrowded prison". In 325 he participated in the First Ecumenical Council and showed his special burning zeal for the defense of Orthodoxy and the disgust at the false teaching of Arius. As for his own deep truly Christian love, the hierarch of Myra, Lycia during his life was known as the father for orphans and the comforter of sufferers. Being glorified by the Lord with the gift of wonderworking, St. Nicholas

"performed many great and glorious wonders on earth and at sea, helping those in trouble, and saving them from drowning, and carrying them from the depths of the sea to dry land, delighting in captivity and bringing them into his house, delivering them from bonds and prisons, interceding for them from visitation of the sword, and freeing them from death, giving healing many times to many: sight to the blind, walking to the lame, hearing to the deaf, speech to the dumb; enriching many of the latter suffering in infirmity and poverty, giving food to the hungry, and to everyone in need being a ready helper, showing himself a warm defender and quick intercessor.

And now to everyone who calls on him he helps and delivers from trouble. The great wonderworker is known in both the East and the West, and all the ends of the earth know his good deeds". St. Nicholas died in very old age in the year 342 in Myra, where he was buried. *Bulgakov Handbook*

On the Faculties of the Soul

Man is composed of body and soul, with the soul as the higher part which was intended to rule the body. The soul has six primary faculties: intellect (*nous*), desire, aggressiveness, freedom, memory, and imagination.

Intellect is the power by which man knows God, first by contemplating the divine *logoi* (reasons) in creation and second directly. Desire (*epithumia*), also called the concupiscent power, is designed to be directed towards the infinite God, but man misdirects it towards finite creatures. Aggressiveness (*thumos*) is the power of the soul by which man fights evil and rejects all that is contrary to the will of God. He also uses it to lay hold of spiritual goods. He misuses it as anger and hatred directed against his fellow man made in God's image. Freedom is part of the divine image in man. Properly, is man's power to choose to be conformed to nature—the way God intended for him to be. It is misused to pursue autonomy from God, and in its misuse, it becomes the source of evil. Memory is the power to remember God continually and to pray without ceasing. Man misuses it to focus on sensual pleasure and to remember wrongs. Imagination is the power to conceptualize what man experiences through his senses. It is misused to imagine idols, to conceive of a world without God, and to create worlds of fantasy.

From the class the Therapy of Spiritual Illnesses

Upcoming Events 2015-16

17 December Thursday, 7:00 p.m. Holy Unction
26 December Feast Day at Nativity of our Lord Monastery
31 December All-Night Vigil for St. Basil
20-21 January Visit of Bishop Maxim for the Feast of St. Maximus

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!