

The Confessor's Tongue for January 10, A. D. 2016

Sunday after Theophany; St. Gregory of Nyssa, St. Theophan the Recluse, St. Dometian
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.

On The Need for Caution For Those Who Think That They are Secure

St. Nikolai of Zicha

*Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he
fall. I Corinthians 10:12*

The Apostle who gives such advice knew human nature and all its weakness perfectly. Day after day, this experience is confirmed: as soon as a man straightens up from the mud of sin, he sways and falls again. As soon as he is cured of the sin of avarice, he falls into the vice of vainglory. Or as soon as he becomes accustomed to prayer, he opens wide his mouth to degrade those who are not yet accustomed to prayer. Or, as soon as he feels the Spirit of God directing him to the path of salvation, he immediately sets himself up as a teacher to the entire world until, unfortunately, through this, he completely drives the Spirit from himself.

When the Lord foretold to His disciples that they would all deny him and flee, then Peter, confident in his stability, cried out: *Thou all men shall be offended because of Thee, yet will I never be offended.* Discerning his very heart and seeing him already fallen into self-conceit and pride, the Lord responded to him: *This night, before the cockcrow, thou shalt deny me thrice.* And when such a fall happened to the apostle in the immediate proximity of the Lord, why would it not happen to us? This is why, brethren, when we rise and turn from a certain sin and stand erect, we should ascribe this to the power and mercy of God and not to ourselves, and we should be very vigilant to protect ourselves and implore God that we do not fall again, be it to one side or the other, but walk on the right path of the Lord.

O All-seeing Lord, help us to stand straight before Thee by the Spirit, and, when we become upright, uphold us that we do not fall again. Amen. *From the Prologue of Ohrid*

St. Nikolai gives us our assignment for the new year. The verse on which he preaches encapsulates the mechanics of repentance, to "shun evil and do good." The more we build good in our lives, the less room there is for evil.

January 10: St. Gregory of Nyssa

The younger brother of St. Basil the Great, rather similar to him in appearance, he received a fine education. He was an eloquent preacher and interpreter of the Word of God at first in the rank of presbyter, and then (about the year 372) in the rank of Bishop of Nyssa in Cappadocia. He was present at the Second Ecumenical Council and the addition to the Nicene Creed concerning the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is attributed to him. Like "a sickle cutting down the assaults of the heretics" and as "fire consuming the brushwood of heresy", he wrote much against the intrigues of the Arians, for which he was deposed and

A publication of St. Maximus Orthodox Church, 2026 West Oak, Denton, TX, 76201 (940) 293-3032

spent eight years in exile. Emperor Gratian returned him to the rank of bishop. "Herald of truth, foundation of piety, source of higher dogma, torrent of teachings sweet as honey", St. Gregory was distinguished by fervent zealotness for the right faith, with co-suffering with the poor, by patience, with love of peace, directness and with rare respect for his spiritual children. He died after the year 394. He left a few studies and books in defense of Orthodoxy and on the intrigues of the Arians and Macedonians. He is considered a great orator, a sound interpreter of Holy Scripture, and a great theologian.

The Sayings of St. Anthony the Great 38

Abba Anthony said, "If he is able to, a monk ought to tell his elders confidently how many steps he takes and how many drops of water he drinks in his cell, in case he is in error about it." Saying 38 Sayings of the Desert Fathers

Commentary: It is said that if anyone refuses to get spiritual guidance from others and relies on himself to figure things out, "he has chosen a fool" as his spiritual guide. The desert fathers had a deep awareness of the deceptiveness of the human heart: "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (Jeremiah 17:9) Man is very susceptible to delusion, especially in spiritual matters, and the root of delusion is pride and thinking one can manage on one's own without the help of others, especially those who are older and more experienced.

Anthony takes the principle of getting counsel and submitting one's will to an experienced guide to a length that seems incredible to us—that a monk knows how many drops of water he drinks and how many steps he takes—so that his elder can correct him if he is in error about these details in his life, for if he is in error but doesn't ask, how shall he know? In the parish, we are not under this sort of obedience, but still, we make mistakes along these lines, making important life decisions without consulting our spiritual father—not because he runs our life, but as a check on our own willfulness, self-deception, and ready blindness to spiritual pitfalls along the way we wish to walk. For example, too often a couple who want to marry come to the priest only after they are engaged. The time to get counsel about such an important matter is when you first start to have serious thoughts that you might like to marry someone, not after the question is popped and wedding plans made.

A self-reliant attitude that disdains counsel is pervasive in our time. Disregard for the aged, for those in authority, for the wise and experienced and reliance on ourselves is like trying to see without using our eyes. Read the Proverbs of Solomon and see how many times we are advised to heed the

instruction of our father and the teaching of our mother, to find victory from counsel and avoiding failure by relying on our own understanding. There we are also warned of the great harm we invite by despising the teaching and counsel of our elders.

The fathers loved to quote Deuteronomy 32:7, "Ask your father, and he will tell you." In our case here, Anthony speaks of one's 'elders.' Thus it is not just anyone of whom one asks advice. It is one's spiritual father and the elders God has placed in one's life. King Rehoboam, son of Solomon, asked counsel; but besides asking counsel of the elders (who gave him good counsel), he also asked his friends and contemporaries, whose counsel cost him ten of the twelve tribes. A father is one who knows you well, even thoroughly, cares for you, is committed to you, and to whom you have given yourself for guidance. Elders are those more experienced both in your community and also outside, whom you may consult. One's father is one's elder also, but not all elders are one's father. In all cases, it is those who have gained wisdom from long experience of whom we seek counsel and correction, if we would be wise.

This concludes the sayings of St. Anthony the Great found in the work The Sayings of the Desert Fathers, and concludes the third run of reflections on them in the Confessor's Tongue (much developed from the first two).

Fr. Justin Frederick

The Blessing of Homes

Homes are customarily blessed after the Great Blessing of Waters at Theophany. This is a brief service in the home of prayer and sanctifying the house through the sprinkling of holy water. A longer order of blessing is often used for the first blessing and cleansing of a new home.

With the house cleaned and ready, we dress as we would for a church service. When the priest arrives, we turn off the television, radio, stereo, etc. Pets that may interfere are placed out of the way. A small table may be set up before the Icon Corner, upon which a wide-mouthed but small bowl full of newly blessed water is placed. A lit candle, censer (if you have one), and icon are placed on the table. These things should be arranged before the priest arrives.

Family members and any guests gather and stand before the small table. The first names of those residing in the home are printed on a piece of paper and placed on the table. Proper baptismal names should be used.

One family member may carry the lit candle, going before the priest and leading him through the house, turning on lights, opening doors, etc. The other family members may accompany the priest or may stay at the table (children, though, usually want to see their rooms blessed).

After the service, some of the faithful will make an offering to the church or give a gift to the priest. There is no obligation to do this, but if done, it is done following the service.

Take advantage of having the priest in your home for the house blessing to ask questions or to voice any concerns you may have. Some parishioners desire a more extended visit or to have a meal with the priest. This should be arranged beforehand.

Here at St. Maximus, many of you graciously desire to share a meal with the priest's family. We enjoy this, and appreciate it; we can, however, do this with only a limited number of people each year. Thank you for your understanding. It may be possible, however, if you desire, to arrange to have lunch or teach with the priest alone at your house blessing.

Schedule for Bishop Maxim's Visit

Wednesday, January 20

6:00 p.m. Meet & Greet at Church

7:00 p.m. Vigil: Bishop will preach at end.

Thursday, January 21

8:45 a.m. Hours

9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy: Bishop Maxim will preach.

11:00 a.m. Coffee Hour potluck: Bishop Maxim will give an informal talk directed at mothers trying to raise children in the Orthodox faith.

7:30 p.m. Keynote Address "World, Nature, and Church according to St Maximus the Confessor" Question & Answer to follow. Light refreshments, childcare available.

On the Profit of Spiritual Teachings— Even When One Does Not Recall Them

A brother said to an old man, "See, abba, I frequently ask the Fathers to give me an earnest reminder for the salvation of my soul, and I do not remember a thing of what they tell me." Now the old man had two empty vessels, and he said to the brother, "Go, bring one of the vessels and pour water in it: rinse it, pour it out, and put it back in its place, all shiny." The brother did this several times, and the old man said to him, "Bring both vessels at once." And when he had brought them, the old man said, "Of the two, which is cleaner?" The brother answered, "The one I put water in and cleaned." Then the old man said to him, "Son, thus it is with the soul that frequently hears the word of God; though the soul remembers nothing of what she asked, she is nonetheless cleansed more than the soul that did not inquire."

Upcoming Events 2015-16

20-21 January Visit of Bishop Maxim for the Feast of St. Maximus

13 March: Forgiveness Vespers, 6:00 p.m.

14-19 March: Clean Week: Plan now to set aside as much of this week as possible for prayer.

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!