

The Confessor's Tongue for November 4, A. D. 2018

23rd Sunday After Pentecost: Synaxis of the Unmercenary Healers

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.

Synaxis of the Holy Unmercenary Healers & Envy *First Sunday in November*

On this Sunday we celebrate the Synaxis of the Holy Unmercenary Healers, or, as they are also called, the "physicians without silver." They are those saints who, out of pure love of God and neighbor, healed the sick and mended the souls of others while asking nothing in return. It was a pure self-sacrifice born out of love. Today we remember the great saints Cyrus and John, Tryphon, Artemius, and the others, as well as Cosmas and Damian, who lived and were martyred in Roman times. And of course, we also remember and honor our great patron, the martyr and healer Panteleimon.

We are all icons of Christ in that we are made in the image and likeness of God. Yet it is in the saints, who's souls have been scoured and scrubbed clean of the black taint and deformity of sin, that this image of Christ is made clear, and it shines through in the lives of the saint – each in their own particular way. In the Unmercenary Healers, we see the image of Christ the True Physician; their whole lives and their very being pointed to Christ. The holy brothers, Sts. Cosmas and Damien, told the sick: "It is not by our own power that we treat you, but by the power of Christ, the true God. Believe in him and be healed."

The Unmercenary Healers were not self-serving. They had no ulterior motives. Rather, they showed a Christ-like love for all, and they gave themselves for all. Sts. Cosmas and Damien, on trial before the Roman emperor, said in their own defense: "We have done evil to no one, we are not involved with the magic or sorcery of which you accuse us. We treat the infirm by the power of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and we take no payment for rendering aid to the sick, because the Lord commanded His disciples. 'Freely have you received, freely give.' (Matt. 10:8)"

It is interesting to note that in the stories of the lives of both Sts. Cosmas and Damian and St. Panteleimon, the saints were martyred – yet they were given over to death by that ancient enemy: envy. In the life of Sts. Cosmas and Damian, we see that envy was able to accomplish what the hatred of the pagans and the ferocity of the Roman authorities failed to do. An older physician, who was an instructor of Sts. Cosmas and Damien and who taught them the art of medicine, became envious of their fame as great and godly healers. Driven to madness by his envy, and overcome with malice towards them, he summoned the two brothers, his once beloved students, and proposed that they go together to gather medicinal herbs. Going into the mountains alone, he cruelly murdered them and threw their bodies into a river.

St. Panteleimon, likewise, was delivered to the Emperors' tribunal by envy. As St. Panteleimon began to be well known as a loving and unmercenary healer, healing both body and soul through his medical

practice and his righteous prayer to Almighty God, his former teachers and peers – the pagan physicians – became envious at the young man. Out of spite, they turned Panteleimon over to the Emperor, denouncing him as a Christian, which was punishable by death. And so, St. Panteleimon met his martyric death in this way.

Envy. It is a silent and very hidden sin. Yet it is a sin set deep in the soul and very ancient. In envy, we can hear the ancient hiss of the serpent – the enemy of mankind – sliding slyly and almost imperceptively – hidden as in tall grass. It was envy that led Satan to first deceive Eve, bringing about the Fall, and it is envy to this day that bids all the fallen spirits to war against God and man. It was envy that led to the first murder – the first fratricide – when Cain slew his brother, Abel. Indeed, it was even envy that delivered Christ up to the Cross for Mark 15:10 says that *Pilate knew that the chief priests had delivered [Christ] for envy.*

In speaking of envy, Fr. Stephen Freeman once noted that in all his years as a priest, he strangely had never heard (or even preached) a sermon on the topic, and he did not find that the issue of envy generally arises in Confession. Yet this doesn't mean that it isn't there. Envy is often hidden by a related sin – that of *pride.*

Envy is often disguised in our lives. Envy is not simply a desire to have what someone else has, for this would be mere covetousness. Rather, envy wants the other to suffer loss and simply be deprived. This is certainly what we see in the lives of our Unmercenary Healers today, Sts. Cosmas and Damien and St. Panteleimon. They are brought to death by the very people who raised them, molded them, and helped to make them who they were – simply out of envy.

The Scriptures, as well as many traditional Orthodox cultures, describe envy as the "evil eye." It has a destructive capacity almost beyond calculation. The passions of various modern revolutions – and certainly the Russian Revolution – have often been grounded in envy. Unable to achieve a reasonable and prosperous society, revolutions turn with envy towards destruction. The end is mere destruction – not fairness or equality, but just simply destruction.

Envy is the secret sin we don't like to discuss, and which we don't want to admit, mostly out of pride. Yet this sin is just as pernicious, just as destructive, as any other – and I would say, even more so. Certainly without love of God and love of neighbor, as St. Paul says, we are nothing, and our so-called good deeds profit us nothing. Yet when we have envy towards our brother, we may not physically kill him, but we murder him in our heart. It is nothing but mutual destruction. With the poison of such secret sins still lying in our hearts, and with the sin of envy remaining unnamed and unhealed, we can expect to make little spiritual progress or growth.

So today, let us look to the Holy Unmercenary Physicians for our example, and let us implore them to intercede to God for us to heal us of our hidden sins. Christ is the True Physician, but we can only be healed if we allow the light of Christ into our darkest, most hidden places. As St. Macarius of Egypt said: "The heart is but a small vessel; and yet dragons and lions are there, and there likewise are poisonous creatures and all the treasures of wickedness... [Yet] there also is God, there are the angels, there life and the Kingdom, there light and the apostles, the heavenly cities and the treasures of grace: all things are there." (Homilies 43:7)

Let not shame or fear keep you away from Christ. Our true path to salvation is towards the light of Christ, and away from the darkness of the shame of Adam and Eve and the envy of the devil. May the Lord grant us the courage to come out of our darkness and into the light and with fear of God, with faith and love, draw nearer to Him. Let us emulate the Holy Unmercenary Healers, who for themselves wanted nothing, but out of love of God and their brother, gave everything. May the Lord grant this to us. Amen. *Hermitage of the Holy Cross, at <http://orthocristian.com/87759.html>*

Introduction to the Sayings of St. Anthony

Fr. Thomas Hopko of blessed memory once said that the full teaching of Christian spiritual life is expressed in the thirty-eight sayings of St. Anthony the Great found in the classic work *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*. That comment inspired the forthcoming series of reflections on those sayings. It originally ran in the *Confessor's Tongue* 2006-7 shortly after the author heard the remark, but not every saying was covered then. It ran again beginning in January of 2010 in an expanded form, but the first saying was still not covered. We ran it a third time beginning in January of 2015, covering every saying and reworking some of them considerably. Given the growth of the parish and the foundational value of this material for all of us, we shall offer it again serially over the next thirty-eight weeks. I hope to continue to refine it that it may, perhaps, one day be published as a book. Your questions and comments are welcome as aids to achieving that end.. Fr. Justin Frederick

The Sayings of St. Anthony the Great

When the holy Abba Anthony lived in the desert, he was beset by accidie, and attacked by many sinful thoughts. He said to God, "Lord, I want to be saved, but these thoughts do not leave me alone; what shall I do in my affliction? How can I be saved?" A short while afterwards, when he got up to go out, Anthony saw a man like himself sitting at his work, getting up from his work to pray, then sitting down and plaiting a rope, then getting up again to pray. It was an angel of the Lord sent to correct and reassure him. He heard the angel saying to him, "Do this, and you will be saved." At these words, Anthony was filled with joy and courage. He did this, and he was saved.

Saying 1 in The Sayings of Desert Fathers

Commentary: St. Anthony the Great (251-353) is considered the father of eremitical monasticism (i.e., those who live as hermits largely alone), thanks to the influence his living example and his *Life* written by St. Athanasius had on countless others. His first saying in *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers* expresses the basic formula he practiced in his Christian life. It is not esoteric or complicated, but simple: just "work and pray".

Acedia (see Nov 2, 2014 *Confessor's Tongue* for a detailed discussion) is one of the eight deadly thoughts, the "demon of noonday", which deprives a man of the energy and desire to work on his salvation. Boredom, distraction, and sloth all are connected to acedia. Anthony had committed himself to ascetical life in the desert, but he was tormented by thoughts of boredom, sloth, distraction, and discouragement, as, at some point, is everyone who seriously commits himself to the spiritual life. These thoughts would rob him of prayer, work, and Christian life if not countered.

Christian life is spiritual warfare, and that warfare persists until man's last breath. That warfare is not against one's fellow man politically, economically, or socially, but against the fallen spiritual powers who insinuate evil thoughts and lies into man's mind to lead him away from God and into sin. No sin is ever committed which is not conceived first in thought. To cut off sin in deed, the thoughts that come into one's mind must be watched, discerned, and dealt with. For this reason, the Savior commands His followers to "watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation".

In response to Anthony's cry for help with his thoughts, the Lord answers through an angel: work and pray, work and pray, "do this, and you will be saved." The answer given to Anthony is given to us too. All of us have to work, whether it is housework, chores, schoolwork, a profession, a job humble or exalted. That work, little though we may like it, if used properly, will help save us. If "idle hands are the devil's workshop" (and they are), work at the very least keeps man from idleness leading to temptation in thought and sin in deed. Having to work each day to make a living, or diligently embracing the responsibilities given at home or school, keeps man out of more trouble than he might think. But work alone will not save. Work as we know it is part of the fallen order of things: "you will eat bread by the sweat of your brow." Man's work must be redeemed by prayer, in which man offers himself, his work, his friends and family, and all his life to Christ and thereby wages war against thoughts. There is no spiritual life without prayer, and there will be no spiritual success without work. The desire to avoid work ("don't work too hard"!) and to have abundant leisure and pleasure undermines spiritual life. But work without prayer, without God, deadens the soul and leaves it vulnerable to idolatry, covetousness, envy, pride, and greed. But to work diligently that one

may eat (and pray while one works) and then to rise from work to pray regularly (one's private prayer rule and one's participation in public worship) provides man with the balance he needs to gain victory over evil thoughts.

Prayers for Faithful at Divine Liturgy

The priest offers many prayers for the faithful gathered at the Divine Liturgy that are not usually heard. The prayers are powerful and well suit the needs of the faithful present (and those absent for worthy cause). To know what the priest is praying for you during Divine Liturgy may encourage you to come and actively participate with faith that God will meet you and minister His grace to you. Being present at Divine Liturgy means that what follows is being prayed for you.

As the faithful come to turn their attention to God as the Church, they desire that He look down on them with favor and compassion. During the early litanies, the priest asks God to look down and grant all who pray with him God's rich mercies and compassion. He asks that God will sanctify those who love the beauty of His house and glorify them by His divine power and not forsake those who hope in him. He asks that God will grant the requests of those gathered as is beneficial for them and give them knowledge of the truth in this age and life eternal in the age to come.

The faithful need to understand Christ's teaching better that they may do it. At the Gospel, the priest prays that God would open the eyes of the minds of those gathered to understand the preaching of the Gospel and instill in them a fear of His commandments that they may trample down all carnal desires and pursue a spiritual way of life, doing what is pleasing to God.

Christian prayer involves waiting upon the Lord—putting oneself before Him and waiting for him to come in power. At the Litany of Fervent Supplication, the priest requests that God accept the people's supplication and send down compassion on all His people who are waiting for his rich mercy. Catechumens, too, await something from God. For those of the Catechumens present who have bowed their heads, the priest prays that God would look upon them, grant them in due time the "laver of regeneration" (Baptism), forgiveness of sins, and the robe of incorruption (the result of baptism). He asks God to unite them to His Church and number them with the elect. So it is always a good thing to be a catechumen present, bowing your head!

Called by God to serve God's people, the priest depends on God's grace to carry out that service. Before the Great Entrance, the priest prays for himself and any other clergy serving that God will make them worthy to offer prayers and sacrifices on behalf of the people and be always able to call on Him in every place with a clean conscience, that he may stand uncondemned before God's holy altar. He prays that God would grant the faithful joining in the

prayer of the Liturgy progress in life, in faith, and in spiritual understanding—movement towards our goals of purity of heart and true knowledge of God. Due to the danger the Holy Mysteries present to the unworthy, the priest prays for the faithful that they may always adore God with fear and may partake of Holy Communion guiltless and uncondemned and so be made worthy of the heavenly kingdom.

During the Litany following the Great Entrance, the priest prays that the good Spirit of God's grace may abide upon all God's people as it abides in the Holy Gifts and in the serving clergy.

After the consecration of the Gifts, the priest prays that those who will partake of them may do so unto the cleansing of soul, unto forgiveness of sin, unto communion of the Holy Spirit, unto fulfillment of the kingdom of heaven, and not unto judgment or condemnation.

At the prayer of inclination (bowing of heads) just before Communion, the priest calls upon God to look upon those who have bowed their heads and to meet the individual need of each person, whatever it may be. After Communion during the Litany, He gives thanks for the partaking in the Mysteries and prays for all that God make their way straight, establish them in the fear of God, guard their lives, and make firm their steps as they go back out into the world.

Besides what is clearly heard during the Divine Liturgy, there is a quiet waging of war in prayer for the souls of those present. For this reason (among others), to be present at Divine Liturgy even when one is not able to receive Holy Communion benefits and strengthens that person. The more we come with faith and expectation, the more we nail our thoughts to Christ and give Him our full attention from the depths of our soul, the more we are able to receive from Him during the Divine Liturgy. *Fr. Justin*

Just to Hear the Word Will Not Make One Good

St. Macarius the Great, from Homily 27

13. *Question:* Some say that, once grace is accepted, a person passes from death to life. Is it possible for one who is in the light to entertain impure thoughts?

Answer: It is written: "Having begun in the Spirit, do you now finish in the flesh?" Again it says: "Put on the whole armor of the Spirit so that you may be able to stand against the attacks of the devil." These texts speak of two different levels: one where a person was after he put on the armor, and the other where he is when he wars against the principalities and powers: namely, in light or in darkness. Again it is written: "That you may be able to quench the fiery darts of the wicked one!" And again: "Sadden not the Holy Spirit of God". And again: "It is impossible that those who once were enlightened and tasted the gift of God and were made participators of the Holy Spirit and fell away, be renewed." See, there are those who have been enlightened and have tasted the Lord and still fall. You see that a man possesses the free will to live in harmony with the Spirit and also has the free will to grieve him. Surely he takes up arms to go into the

battle and struggle against the enemies. Surely he was enlightened so as to war against the darkness.

Indeed, it is not immediately upon hearing the word of God that a person is ranked among the good. If the mere hearing brought him into the ranks of the good, there would no longer be any struggles or times of war or any race. But without any labor, if one merely heard the word, he would come into complete rest and perfection. But things are not quite like that.

For you deprive man of his free will in saying this and you also deny the opposing power that is struggling against the mind. This is what we say, that one who hears the word comes to repentance, and after this, through God's providence withdraws for the development of the man. He enters into training and tactics of war. He enters into the struggle and conflict against Satan. And after a long race and struggle, he carries off the victory and becomes a Christian. If anyone, by merely hearing the word, without any work, would be numbered among the good, then also actors and all prostitutes would enter into the kingdom and the life. But no one will give them this without effort and struggle because the road is straight and narrow. Along this bumpy road we must travel and patiently endure afflictions and thus enter into life.

For if it were possible to succeed without effort, Christianity would not be "a stumbling stone and a rock of scandal". There would be no faith or disbelief. You would in fact make man into a bound creature of necessity, unable to turn toward good or evil. For it is only for a person capable of turning to both sides that a law is given, namely, to one possessing free will to do battle against the opposing force. No law is given for a nature that is bound by necessity. For neither the sun nor the heavens and the earth are governed by a law, because these creatures are by nature bound by necessity and for this reason they are neither subject to reward nor punishment. Reward and glory are prepared for a nature that is capable of turning toward the good. Hell and punishment are meted out for that changeable nature that is capable of turning away from the evil and throwing its lot toward the good and the right side. Look, should you say that a man is unchangeable, you make a good man unworthy of praise. For a man who is gentle and good by nature is not deserving of praise, even if he desires it. What good is not freely chosen is not praiseworthy, even if it be desirable. That person is worthy of praise who by his very own diligence with struggle and battle makes the good his own by a free will choice.

Take the example of the Persian camp and the camp of the Romans opposite them and there should come out for both camps two winged young men, equal in strength, and they engage in battle. Likewise also the opposing power and the human mind are equally pitted in strength against each other. Satan has equal power to exhort and entice a person toward his own will, and yet a person has equal power to resist and in no way obey him. Powers of both evil

and of good can be turned by persuasion but not by force. Divine assistance is given to such a free choice and is able, as it battles, to receive the heavenly arms and by means of them to uproot and conquer sin. To resist sin is within a man's power, even though without God he cannot conquer and uproot evil. Those who say that sin is like a mighty giant and the human soul like a child speak wrongly. For if things were so dissimilar, so that sin would be as a giant and the human soul as a child, then the Lawgiver would be unjust, in giving a law to man to battle against Satan.

This is the foundation of the road to God, in much patience, in hope, in humility, in poverty of spirit, in gentleness to travel along the road of life. By such means one can possess justification for himself. We mean by justification the Lord himself. These commandments, which so enjoin us, are like milestones and sign posts along the royal highway that leads a journeyer to the heavenly city. For it says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit; blessed are the meek; blessed are the merciful; blessed are the peacemakers." Call this Christianity. If anyone does not pass along this road, he has wandered off along a roadless way. He used a bad foundation. Glory to the mercies of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit forever. Amen.

St. Cyril of Jerusalem on Faith and Works

Vice mimics virtue, and the tares strive to bethought wheat, growing like the wheat in appearance, but being detected by good judges from the taste.... We have need, therefore, of divine grace, and of a sober mind, and of eyes that see, lest from eating tares as wheat we suffer harm from ignorance, and lest from taking the wolf to be a sheep we become his prey, and from supposing the destroying Devil to be a beneficent Angel we be devoured.... For the method of godliness consist of these two things, pious doctrines and virtuous practice: and neither are the doctrines acceptable to God apart from good works, nor does God accept the works which are not perfected with pious doctrines. For what profit is it, to know well the doctrines concerning God, and yet to be a vile fornicator? And again, what profit is it, to be nobly temperate, and an impious blasphemer? A most precious possession therefore is the knowledge of doctrines: also there is need of a wakeful soul, since there are many "that make spoil through philosophy and vain deceit." *St. Cyril of Lecture 4*

Upcoming Events 2018

- 11 November: Parish Thanksgiving Meal, 3:30
- 15 November: Nativity Fast Begins
- 21 November: Feast of the Entry of Theotokos into the Temple. Divine Liturgy 9:00 a.m., Vigil at 7:00 the night before.
- 2 December: Children's Craft Fair

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!