

The Confessor's Tongue for November 18, A. D. 2018

25th Sunday After Pentecost: Martyrs Plato & Romanus

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 3

Someone asked Abba Anthony, "What must one do in order to please God?" The old man replied, "Pay attention to what I tell you: whoever you may be, always have God before your eyes; whatever you do, do it according to the testimony of the holy Scriptures; in whatever place you live, do not easily leave it. Keep these precepts and you will be saved."
Antony Saying 3 in *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*.

Commentary: These three words are not quite what one might expect as an answer to such a question. So what is their significance?

"*Always have God before your eyes.*" We are to live in such a way that we always remember God, always think of Him present and observing us in all that we do. This is not so easy. It is easy to confess faith in Christ and then live great portions of our life as 'practical atheists', thinking not of God, asking not His help and blessing on all that we do, seeking not to know Him and please Him in all, carelessly falling repeatedly into sin. But He is our Creator who is "everywhere present" and who fills all things. In Him we live, and move, and have our being. Without Him, we can do nothing. Keeping God always before our eyes, doing all the we do for the sake of Christ, and giving thanks to God always for all things keeps us from sin and keeps our lives focused on their true end and sanctifies all that we do. If we achieve this, we shall have made significant progress toward the fullness of life in Christ. St. Justin of Chelije puts it this way: "For someone to believe in Christ entails his waiting on Christ, and only on Christ, with every event of his life." There is no area of life which is exclusively man's to the exclusion of Christ, no area of which Christ as Lord and King does not say, "Mine." When we say 'mine' and shut God out as irrelevant, we do not have Him before our eyes.

"*Do everything according to the testimony of the holy Scripture.*" In holy Scripture, inspired by the Holy Spirit, we find God's will for us revealed. If we are truly His children, we shall seek to do His will. But how can we do it if we don't know it, or are indifferent to it? As St. John Chrysostom says, "This is the cause of all evils, the not knowing the Scriptures." How many sins and mistakes we would avoid, how much unnecessary suffering would not be ours if only we would "take heed to our ways according to His word." Hence at every Vespers and Matins we pray, "Blessed art Thou, O Lord, teach me Thy statutes; blessed art Thou, O Master, make me to understand Thy statutes; blessed art Thou, O Holy One, enlighten me with Thy statutes. We cannot do what we do not know; to do rightly, we must understand; and in the keeping of Christ's commandments, we gain enlightenment. In this we demonstrate our love for God: "If you love Me, keep

My commandments." The Christian who neglects holy Scripture puts himself in the position of going into the daily spiritual battle without guidance and unarmed—not a recipe for victory.

"*In whatever place you live, do not easily leave it.*" A whole book could be written on the spiritual harm in moving from place to place frequently and without good reason. Consider the man who attends a local parish for a time while he enjoys it and the people, and then begins to feel dissatisfaction with it. "The priest doesn't affirm me enough, and the people irritate me and don't understand me," he says. "I need to find another parish with a better priest and people who will understand me and not annoy me." He then leaves his parish to go to another. All too often, a pattern of such behavior develops. Notice that, in his mind, all the problems lie outside of him. It is the priest or it is the people, never himself. But moving to a new parish when things get difficult or unpleasant delivers him from ever having to take a hard look at himself. God sets in a parish to build into His temple made of living stones—us. But that requires fitting us in with others. We don't always fit at first, so God 'bashes' us against others to knock off our rough edges. (We don't think much about how our shortcomings and rough edges affect others, only about how theirs affect us!) As Fr. Hopko liked to say, "We go to church so that we may be lacerated by the Word and bashed by the Holy Spirit." God accomplishes most of that bashing and lacerating through the priest and people. We shall never grow into a mature man in Christ if we do not subject ourselves to this process. Nature itself clearly shows that a plant often transplanted will never grow to its full potential or fruitfulness. So, to put this word another way: bloom where God has planted you if you wish to please God—unless He gives you a compelling reason to go elsewhere. *Fr. Justin*

18 November: New Martyr Anastasius

Saint Anastasius and his sister were mid-18th century peasants living in Epirus during Ottoman times. When a band of Turks entered their village, its leader, Musa, was struck by the beauty of Anastasius' sister and tried to seize her, but Anastasius fought off the Turks, enabling his sister to escape. As a result, Anastasius was arrested, imprisoned, and tortured in an effort to get him to deny the Christian faith.

Moved by the manner in which Anastasius bore his sufferings, Musa wanted to know more about the faith that sustained him. Going secretly to Anastasius' cell, Musa saw two young men of shining appearance with Anastasius, but they vanished when Musa entered. Anastasius told him that these were angels who guard every Christian, especially when they suffer for Christ. He also explained the Gospel of Jesus Christ and how it had inspired him and others to

place little value on worldly things. In response, Musa expressed his desire to embrace Christianity. Anastasius told him to wait until the proper time, because his conversion would bring about a persecution of the region's Christians. A few days later, in 1750, Anastasius was beheaded by order of Musa's father, the Pasha.

Subsequently, Musa was granted a vision of Anastasius encircled in light, who urged him to continue on the road to Christ. Musa fled his father's domain to the Peleponnese where he was instructed in the faith by an aged ascetic. After he was baptized, he became a monk on Corfu, receiving the monastic name of Daniel, and founded a church dedicated in honor of Saint Anastasius.

From *The Hermitess Photini* (+1928)

Indeed, man has a high calling because he was created in the image and likeness of God. That is, he came from God and will go back to God again to partake of His divine glory and blessedness. Since God is the source of blessedness, he who communicates with God also becomes blessed. Eternal life, blessedness, the Kingdom of Heaven, joy, paradise, gladness, delight: this is what God is. 'I am the resurrection and the life,' said the Savior. Everyone who communicates with God has blessedness. Whereas hell, which the Savior calls outer darkness, gnashing of teeth, torture, fire, abyss, etc., is nothing but the deprivation of divine grace and a departure from God—not spatially but morally. Wherever there is no light, there will definitely be darkness. What is darkness? Absence of light. This is also how it is with the blessedness of heaven. God is the Ultimate Good. The more man approaches God through the virtues, the more blessed and happy he becomes.

Sin, though, is the ultimate evil. The more a person distances himself from God—not physically, as we said, but spiritually through sin—the more unhappy he becomes. Who is gnashing his teeth? He who is unhappy, due to sin. Who is burning in the unquenchable fire of torture? He who perceives that he himself is the cause of his plight! So where is the seat of eternal fire? In the heart of the sinner. The Savior implies this in the parable of Lazarus and the rich man. Thus hell is essentially the complete deprivation of divine grace. What is illness? Lack of health. What is sorrow? Lack of joy. The demons used to be bright, good angels, as the Holy Scriptures say. But by sinning, they lost divine grace and became dark, evil, miserable. Since they lost the divine illumination that enlightens and gladdens, they were darkened, and, so to speak, they got drunk with ignorance so that, just as a drunk person under the influence wants to drink even more, likewise those who are drunk with sin always desire evil. They think that by doing evil they will find rest, but this is in vain. They will always be unhappy, because the evil distance them even more from the light until it throws them into the utmost misery, which the Savior calls 'the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.'

So distancing oneself from God is the most terrible punishment. That becomes clear from observing the workers of sin in the world, who are always in fear; they always have inner disturbance and anxiety. The purpose of man is to work at the virtues through which he partakes of divine glory and becomes like God, not by nature, but by grace.

The Church as the Assembly of the New Humanity

The Church comprises an assembly of people who are somehow "different". You know how sci-fi films often revolve around aliens living among us. I would put it this way: in a certain sense, the Church is an assembly of "aliens", and not even aliens, but something more than that. It is an assembly of people in whom certain energies are at work, energies from beyond the very borders of outer space. These are the energies of God. For God is beyond the limits of outer space. Hence, the Church is an assembly of people in whose personalities not only the human nature is at work but two nature: the divine and the human. This is why the Church is called a humanity. There is ordinary humanity—also called the "world community", "progressive humanity", or whatever. And then there is another humanity, a new humanity, called the Orthodox Church. This new humanity was called into being by God on Golgotha, by the suffering of Christ the Savior on the Cross, by His redeeming Sacrifice. And this community of men is not only created by God, but also headed by God. You do know that the Universal Orthodox Church has not single head on earth? All Orthodox Christians have Christ Himself as their head. *Fr. Daniel Sysoev, Catechetical Talks*

What To Do When the Line Is Long

While our long line to receive Holy Communion may daunt you and cause you to long for a day when we can have two or three chalices, the line and wait can be put to good use. If you didn't finish all the Precommunion prayers at home, pray the ones you omitted while you wait. If you do not typically pray the whole rule (opening prayers, three psalms, Canon for Holy Communion, and the ten prayers or so), pray what you normally omit while waiting to commune. (Please, though, do not use Communion as your primary or only time to prepare yourself. The primary place and time for that is at home before Liturgy or the night before.) If you would rather not stay after Liturgy to hear the Prayers of Thanksgiving read, you may read them after you have communed while others are communing. If neither of these options suits you, consider praying for each person in the line while you wait, or give yourself to praying the Jesus Prayer contemplatively. Do try to avoid stepping out of the church and getting caught in conversation before Liturgy ends. Despite the inconvenience a long line for Communion represents, there are many ways in which you can make it work for you spiritual good.

New Gospel Book

You may notice that our new Gospel Book, which appeared for a time and then disappeared, is back. Although new, it had a slight defect on the back cover, which led to it being purchased at considerable discount. Then a page fell out, and we shipped it to Fr. Thomas Moore, an Orthodox bookbinder, for repair at the publisher's expense. Both matters have been addressed, so the book is back in service.

Upcoming Events 2018

- 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!