

The Confessor's Tongue for November 25, A. D. 2018

26th Sunday After Pentecost: Leavetaking of the Entrance; St. Clement

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 4

Abba Anthony said to Abba Poemen, "This is the great work of a man: always to take the blame for his own sins before God and to expect temptation to his last breath."

Saying 4 in *The Sayings of Desert Fathers*

Commentary: Why is taking the blame for one's own sins a "great work"? The work is great, for the obstacles to doing the work are great.

First, man often does not see his sins. He cannot take the blame for what he cannot see. And it is no small thing for man to see his sins. To see his sins, man needs light, he needs Christ, the Light of the world. Only in the light of Christ can a man realize what he was made to be (according to the image and likeness of God) and wherein he falls short of the glory of the divine image. Without the light of Christ, man will never see his wretchedness and nakedness, nor will he see what he destined to be. Remaining blinded in the dark, he will strive to make himself after some image and likeness that he creates for himself rather than after the image and likeness of God.

In the light of Christ, man's deceitful heart is exposed. Despite the testimony of his God-given conscience, man lies to himself about his actions and intentions, justifying himself while condemning others. To overcome this self-deception is one reason the Holy Spirit is given—to convict men of their sins. Most men see themselves as 'basically good and decent', especially when they compare themselves selectively to others—but that is a delusion the Holy Spirit works to overcome. Man deludes himself into thinking he is basically good, healthy, and 'normal'. The Holy Spirit shows him just how desperately ill he is—not to plunge him into despair, but to enable him to see his malady so that he may seek healing from the Great Physician who became man to heal man.

Having overcome his blindness to see himself and sick and sinful, man must then admit his sin and fault. This requires humility. Either a man must humble himself, or God will humble him through the vicissitudes of life to put him in a state where he may begin to see and admit his fault before God. Only by humility may he overcome the powerful temptation to blame others for his sins or to make excuses for his faults. Parents, circumstances, spouse, friends, children, and others, may provoke us and make it easier for us to sin, but in the end we have to own our sins without blaming others. No matter how unjustly someone else acts first, a man is always accountable before God for how he responds. This confronts our penchant for self-justification, which goes back to Adam blaming the woman, and Eve blaming the serpent. Indeed, Abba Dorotheos of Gaza teaches that the first half of humility is blaming ourselves for

our sins, i.e., taking responsibility for them before God. (The second half of humility is giving God, the Giver of all good, the glory for all that is good in our life rather than taking the credit for ourselves.)

To see his own sins and to acknowledge them as his own without making excuses, blaming others, or comparing himself to others rather than to Christ is a great work to accomplish, one which requires much grace. That a man has this awareness in some measure is a sign of God's grace at work in him for which he should be thankful, for his salvation cannot be accomplished without it.

If taking the blame for his own sins is a great work, so is expecting temptation to one's last breath.

Man often comes to Christ expecting blessing, comfort, and ease, even health and wealth. In exchange for serving God, He wants payment here and now in terms of a comfortable, happy life—according to his own definition and expectation. God makes everything better, right? Indeed, the Gospel is often presented in this way with Christ as the essential ingredient to a better life on earth. Just have Christ, and you will have a better marriage, better children, better finances, more fun.

But St. James in his epistle speaks of "*when ye fall into divers temptations*" not "*if*." Thus, we must expect temptation, trials, tribulations, and persecution as part of being a Christian rather than being deluded by our desire for peace and pleasure. That delusion is dangerous, for many possessed by it have suffered the shipwreck of their faith when trials have come upon them contrary to their expectations. These are those represented in Christ's parable by the stony soil in which the young shoot wilts in the heat of temptation and persecution.

Moreover, not only will the Christian have diverse trials and temptations, he must rejoice in them! St. James writes, "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. . . . Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him (James 1:2-4, 12)." Likewise, St. Paul instructs us: "And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us (Romans 5:3-5)."

Surely this is a great work: a Christian not only accepts without complaining but also rejoices in and gives thanks for temptations and trials as an essential part of the Christian life which God uses to perfect his faith! St. Isaac the Syrian says, "When you find

unchanging peace on your way, then fear; because you are far from the right path by which the righteous go with suffering feet." Again, he says, "Temptation is good for everyone.... An undisciplined son will not enter into possession of the riches of his father's house because he will not be able to use his wealth profitably. For this reason God first gives troubles and trials, and then gives grace. Glory to the Lord who by irksome treatment gives the pleasure of health! There is no one who does not suffer during his training, and there is no one who does not find the time difficult when he is given to drink the poison of temptations." May God grant us all success in this great work of man! *Fr. Justin Frederick*

A Bee or a Fly: Which Would You Be?

St. Paisios of the Holy Mountain

I know from experience that in this life people are divided in[to] two categories. A third category does not exist; people either belong to one or the other. The first one resembles the fly. The main characteristic of the fly is that it is attracted by dirt. For example, when a fly is found in a garden full of flowers with beautiful fragrances, it will ignore them and will go sit on top of some filth found on the ground. It will start messing around with it and feel comfortable with the bad smell. If the fly could talk, and you asked it to show you a rose in the garden, it would answer: "I don't even know what a rose looks like. I only know where to find garbage, toilets, and dirt." There are some people who resemble the fly. People belonging to this category have learned to think negatively, and always look for the bad things in life, ignoring and refusing the presence of good.

The other category is like the bee, whose main characteristic is to always look for something sweet and nice to sit on. When a bee is found in a room full of dirt and there is a small piece of sweet in a corner, it will ignore the dirt and will go to sit on top of the sweet. Now, if we ask the bee to show us where the garbage is, it will answer, "I don't know. I can only tell you where to find flowers, sweets, honey, and sugar; it only knows the good things in life and is ignorant of all evil." This is the second category of people who have positive thinking, and see only the good side of things. They always try to cover up the evil in order to protect their fellow men; on the contrary, people in the first category try to expose the evil and bring it to the surface.

When someone comes to me and starts accusing other people and puts me in a difficult situation, I tell him the above example. Then I ask him to decide to which category he wishes to belong so he may find people of the same kind to socialize with.

"The spirituality of a person is defined by the quality of his thoughts. One day, three men were sitting in a park chatting. Suddenly, a young man hastily ran by them. When they saw him, they all thought something.

The first one thought, "He must have stolen something, so he is running to escape. The second one thought: "He must be late for his date with some girl—that is why he is running." And the third one said to himself: "Most probably he is a chanter in a church and runs to be on time for the service."

Three men had three different thoughts about the same person. However, only the last one, who had a positive thought, was benefited, whereas the other two were spiritually harmed.

From Elder Epiphanius of Greece

The Elder urged a certain spiritual child of his who worked until late at night and would not go to vigils: "My child, look a little upward. Not all downward, on the earthly things. Look at your soul a bit, too."

"Father," he persisted, "I don't have time, I don't have the opportunity."

Once that youth became ill, and the Elder visited him in the hospital. As soon as he saw the youth lying in the bed, he put the index finger of his hand on his temple, telling him: "Do you remember what I was telling you?"

The youth replied, "You were right, Elder."

"Now you must look upward against your will," continued Fr. Epiphanius. "When you become well, you will look up of your own will."

From St. Moses of Optina (+1862)

"We must bear one another's spiritual infirmities cheerfully, without bitterness. After all, if someone is physically ill, not only are we not offended with him, but we even help him in any way we can. That is how we must treat spiritual illnesses also."

Abbot Moses counselled everyone to keep what he called St. Dorotheos's rule for being at peace: "Do not want things to turn out as you would like, but want whatever happens. That way you will be at peace with everyone.... One who does not have his own will always gets his way. Since he has no desire of his own, no matter what happens with him, he is content—and so it turns out that he always fulfills his desires, for he does not want things to turn out as he wishes, but as they do turn out."

Upcoming Events 2018

2 December: Children's Craft Fair
6 December: 9:00 a.m. Liturgy for Feast of St. Nicholas, Vigil on the Eve at 7:00 p.m.
13 December: 9:00 Liturgy for Feast of St. Herman
18 December: 7:00 p.m. Holy Unction
22 December: 10:00 a.m. Baptisms
25 December: Nativity of Our Lord
31 December: 10:00 p.m. All-Night Vigil for St. Basil and the New Year
6 January: Feast of Theophany
21 January: Parish Patronal Feast

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!