

The Confessor's Tongue for December 23, A. D. 2018

Sunday Before Nativity, the 30th after Pentecost

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.

December 25: Nativity of Our Lord in the Flesh

This week we celebrate the Great Feast of the Nativity of our Lord. We do well to keep the Feast by attending as many of the services celebrating it as we can manage: Royal Hours Monday 8:00 a.m., Vespers Liturgy (with the Old Testament Readings for the Feast) Monday at noon, Vigil Monday evening at 6:00, and the Feastday Liturgy Tuesday at 8:00.

We celebrate the Feast by greeting each other with the greeting, "Christ is born!" and the response, "Glorify Him!". We do not fast again until January 5, the Eve of Theophany. We sing the troparion (before) and kontakion (after) of the Feast in place of our usual prayers before and after meals through the Leavetaking December 31.

Nativity, Troparion, tone 4

Thy Nativity, O Christ our God / hath shone upon the world the light of wisdom. / For by it, those who worshipped the stars / were taught by a star to adore Thee, / the Sun of Righteousness, / and to know Thee, the Orient from on high. // O Lord, glory to Thee!

Nativity, Kontakion, tone 3

Today the Virgin giveth birth to the Transcendent One, / and the earth offereth a cave to the Unapproachable One! / Angels with Shepherds glorify Him! / The wise men journey with the star: // since for our sake the eternal God was born as a little child!

The Preciousness of Time

Bishop Jeremiah the Recluse

Given the nearness of the New Year, we shall do well to ponder how to use the time God gives us for this life.

What is the most valuable thing on earth? Time. Because it is in time that all is acquired and in time that all the works of humans are accomplished. If you have food, clothing, enormous houses, glory, and knowledge—if you have absolutely everything—and yet do not have time, you have nothing. What is worst of all for men on earth? The loss of time. For having lost our time, we can no longer acquire anything nor have anything; by wasting time we lose everything, we lose even ourselves.

Another question: what do people treasure the least? What do they randomly squander the most? It is time as well. The majority live carelessly, according to accepted tradition, from day to day, year to year, not concerning themselves with how they have wasted their days and years, how they have spent their lives. We often lament the loss of frivolous things, yet we have neither regret nor sorrow when we waste not some small change, but precious minutes of time. That is why the Holy Apostle Paul, in warning us against the vain waste of time, commands us wisely to dispose of every minute of our lives: *See then that ye*

walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. By saying 'redeeming the time,' the Apostle shows that it is with time that true good is purchased, just as all things needed for physical life are bought with money and that, likewise, the proper use of time is very similar to the use of money in expert hands. The wise householder does not waste a single penny. He properly budgets the entire sum he has, and allots a goal for every penny. He properly budgets the entire sum he has, and allots a goal for every penny. This is exactly how we should manage our time. We must properly budget it; every hour and minute should be assigned for some good goal. Each day should be spent in good deeds that benefit our neighbor and us. For it is not for idleness, nor for frivolous activity, that the Lord has assigned each minute of our life, even if it were to last a thousand years on this earth.

There is a story that has been told that can be beneficial for us to consider here. The story holds that some time ago Satan called together the entire host of the lower realm because he wished to send another of his diabolical assistants to earth. When they had all assembled, he asked them: "Who is willing to go to earth to assist me with the destruction of souls?"

A certain demon volunteer to go. "And what is your plan for assisting me with the destruction of souls?" asked Satan.

"I will tell them that there is no hell," replied the demon.

"No, we have tried that, it will never do," Satan said. "For it turns out that within the heart of every human there is a sense of justice; consequently, no matter how much they try to deny it, or are otherwise taught, humanity still senses that there must be a state of existence in opposition to God. They will never be convinced beyond question that there is not hell. Your plan will surely fail."

A second demon said, "I will go."

Again Satan asked, "What is your plan for assisting me with the destruction of souls?"

"I will tell humans that there is no heaven."

"No," Satan replied again. "We have tried that also, and it is no better. For as we know all too well, every human retains within himself something of the image of God his Creator; hence, while they often wish they could deny it, they will never fully be convinced that there is no heaven. No, your plan will not work."

A third demon came forward.

Satan asked this one as well, "What is your plan for assisting me with the destruction of souls?"

"I will tell them," said the demon, "that there is no hurry, that they have all the time in the world."

"Go!" shouted Satan, "for your plan will surely succeed. Every human has a sense of both heaven and

hell, but if we can keep them from considering their eternal destiny, then hell will certainly grab them before they take hold of heaven."

Orthodox Life, July—December 2010

The Sayings of St. Anthony the Great 7

Abba Anthony said, "I saw the snares that the enemy spreads out over the world, and I said, groaning, 'What can get through such snares?' Then I heard a voice saying to me, 'Humility.'"

Saying 7 in *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*

Commentary: The snares the enemy lays out by which to catch and destroy souls are many and powerful. Looking at our own world, how shall we escape gluttony, with so many varied foods to suit every taste in such great quantity available around the clock? How shall we escape lust and fornication in a when sensual images assail us from all sides, modesty and virginity are lost virtues, and sexual encounters are nearly free for the asking? How shall we escape greed, stinginess, and envy in a society that glories in conspicuous consumption? How shall we avoid telling and being enslaved by lies in a world of spin and image over substance? How shall we avoid error when even the notion Truth is denied and all opinions and positions are treated as being of equal value? How shall we avoid sloth in a culture of entertainment, whose constantly expressed desire is "don't work too hard" and "take it easy"? How shall we be motivated to undertake the hard work of repentance when there are so many means of escape available to us to numb the pain of guilt and feelings of inadequacy? And if we by some means escape the common pitfalls and sins of our age, how shall we avoid judging those who do not and taking pride in our own righteousness?

Who, if not the Lord, will save us from this wicked and perverse generation?

St. Anthony was granted to see the snares that the enemy spreads, and he groaned in despair of escaping them. How may one escape them? How can we sinners resist the compelling advertising of the enemy?

The answer given to Anthony is not one our world prescribes for troubles: humility. The world celebrates pride, but who sets holidays to celebrate humility? Humility says, "I am weak; of myself, I can do nothing good. Left to myself, I will be overcome and will fall. If I haven't fallen today like my neighbor, I surely will tomorrow. Unless Christ stretches out His hand to catch me, I shall surely sink in the sea like Peter. If there is any good in me, any resistance to sin, any victory over my passions and over the enemy, it is entirely due to God's grace at work in me. Let me cry out to God for help now and always that I not fall into any snare."

Humility places no confidence in man and all its trust and hope in God. God gives grace, not to the proud, but to the humble, to those who recognize their need (James 4:10, I Peter 5:6). "Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift

you up." Man's task is to humble himself; God's task is to lift up. He lifts up those who, recognizing their weakness and susceptibility to sin, persist in crying out to Him for help in every need and in giving glory to Him for every victory.

The man with humility sees his own sins and reproaches himself and does not see the sins of others. As St. Macarius of Optina says, "Let the following be for you signs of humility or pride: the latter scorns everyone, reproaches them, and sees darkness in them, while the former sees only his own faults and does not dare to judge anyone." Such is humility which delivers from demonic snares.

Amma Theodora [one of the Desert Mothers] said that neither asceticism, nor vigils, nor any kind of suffering are able to save, only true humility can do that. There was an anchorite [hermit] who was able to banish demons; and he asked them, "What makes you go away? Is it fasting?" They replied, "We do not eat or drink." "Is it vigils?" They replied, "We do not sleep." "Is it separation from the world?" "We live in deserts." "What power sends you away then?" They said, "Nothing can overcome us, but only humility." "Do you see how humility is victorious over the demons?" Humility is alien and repellent to the proud hosts of hell.

God, on the other hand, is humble. "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Philippians 2:5-8). Christ, who had every right to glory over man by virtue of His Divinity humbled Himself rather, and in so doing won Himself the name above every name at which every knee will bow. We are to have the same mind of humility in us, and that humility is our only path to victory over the proud hosts of hell.

So powerful is humility, that St. Barsanuphius of Optina says "With only humility, one can be saved, even without any works." In the *Prologue from Ochrid*, there is a story (March 30) that illustrates this point. A monk was lazy, careless, and lacking in his prayer life. But when he lay dying, he was happy. When the brethren, who knew his faults, asked how it was that a monk with so many sins could die joyfully, he replied: "I now see angels who are showing me a page containing my numerous sins. I said to them, 'Our Lord said: *Judge not, and ye shall not be judged.* I have never judged anyone, and I hope in the mercy of God that He will not judge me.' And the angels tore up the paper with my sins." Upon hearing this, the monks were astonished and edified.

Humility allows us to receive the grace of God we need to stand. Only through humility can we escape the enemy's snares. *Fr. Justin Frederick*

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!