

The Confessor's Tongue for January 13, A. D. 2019

Sunday After Theophany; Martyrs Hermylus & Stratonicus; St. Maximus Hutburner

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 10

Abba Anthony said, "Just as fish die if they stay too long out of water, so the monks who loiter outside their cells or pass their time with men of the world lose the intensity of inner peace. So like a fish going towards the sea, we must hurry to reach our cell, for fear that if we delay outside we will lose our interior watchfulness."

Saying 10 in *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*

Commentary: This Thursday we celebrate the Feast of St. Anthony. The monk has a special vocation, to leave the world and all ties thereto and to live separated from the affairs of the world so he can devote himself to prayer. In the desert, the advice to monks was always to "stay in your cell" for "your cell will teach you everything." Even in the desert, the monk was tempted to "make the rounds", to "hang out" with other monks, to fall into idle chatter. Even worse was the monk who was frequently absent for business in town. The canons of the Church affirm the special vocation of the monk; he is to remain in his monastery, subject to his bishop, engaged in prayer and whatever work he is given. To be outside for long is to be in the wrong environment and to run a serious spiritual risk.

Likewise, the first (but not only) place of a Christian in the world is the Church. The natural expectation she has of all Christians is that they gather every Lord's Day in the Lord's house. So strong is that expectation and she has decreed in a holy canon that to be voluntarily absent for three or more weeks in a row is to excommunicate oneself from the Church. If we are absent for long, we begin to die spiritually. Just as the employee goes to work every day appointed for him by his employer, so the Christian sets aside the time asked of him by his Lord.

In the *Apostolic Constitutions*, a third-century document containing material still more ancient, Christians are urged to "assemble yourselves together every day, morning and evening, singing psalms and praying in the Lord's house.... And on the day of our Lord's resurrection, which is the Lord's Day, meet more diligently, sending praise to God who made the universe by Jesus, and sent him to us, and condescended to let him suffer, and raised Him from the dead" (Bk 2.59). This was written for laity in the world who had to work six days a week, not for monks! Of course, it was written long before the coming of our many addicting, time-wasting technologies which serve well to kill time but have little eternal value.

Most parishes do not even bother to try to serve daily services, fearing that no one would come. But certainly it is not too much for our Lord, who made us and died for us, to ask that we be present at the

Vigil for two hours Saturday evening (especially if we plan to partake of Holy Communion), the Hours and Divine Liturgy for two hours Sunday morning, and perhaps an hour at a midweek service? Altogether, that would represent five hours a week in church of the 168 given to us each week, or 2.9% of our time. Take another five hours for prayer and reading at home, including time preparing for Communion, and you have ten hours, just under 6% of our time each week. Even if we exclude from our calculations eight hours per night for sleep, that ten hours still represents only 8.9% of our waking time, not even a 'tithe' of time offered to God. Even if you attended all the services here during a typical week (Vigil, two or three Liturgies, three Vespers, three Matins—about 12 hours) and spent four more at home, that 16 hours would still be but 9.5% of your total time each week and 14% of your waking time (if sleeping 8 hours)—not a lot to ask when eternity is at stake.

Sometimes we wonder why our spiritual lives are weak and why we make little progress. The answer may well be how little time we devote to preparing for eternity. If nearly all our time is spent in the world engaged in worldly activities, attending to the cares of life (or simply amusing ourselves), how can we expect to become fit for heaven? Many of us would be ashamed to see how much time we spend each week watching television or movies, listening to music, playing sports or video games, reading novels or newspapers or surfing the web compared to how much time we spend on the One we call our Lord.

Since this life is preparation for the life to come, let us, for a moment, compare our Christian practice with college, which is popularly thought to prepare us for adult life 'in the real world'. How likely would you be to graduate if, while signed up for a full load (15 credits), you attended ten of your scheduled fifteen hours of class each week and studied just five more hours (instead of the 2-3 hours of study outside of class are required for each hour spent in class, which means 30 to 45 hours of study outside class each week) for a total of fifteen spent each week on college of the needed 45 to 60? Good luck. As Christians, how can we expect progress and success in spiritual life and entrance into the Kingdom if we (grudgingly) give God but two or three hours a week? Sunday Liturgy alone with minimal preparation and a hurried "our Father" as we fall into bed each night won't cut the bonds of sin and distraction tying us down to this world.

Moreover, we notice that it is not just time out of the cell that is a threat to the monk but time spent with 'men of the world,' or worldly people. "Bad company corrupts good morals," as St. Paul says. Our choice of friends plays a decisive role in the quality of our spiritual life, as we become like those with whom we spend time and open ourselves to. If most or much

of our time is spent with people who drink too much, do drugs, doubt God, scoff, and otherwise live sinful lives, it should not surprise us if we find ourselves doing such things too and that our love for God and His people and Church is growing cold.

Our life is found in Christ and His Body, the Church. As Christians, that is our natural environment (through baptism) just as a fish lives in the water. May we all be found more commonly in our natural element for the salvation of our souls!

St. John of Kronstadt on Candles in Church

Do not grudge burning a wax taper before the image of the Lord during prayer; remember that you burn it before the Light inaccessible, before Him who enlightens you with His light. Your candle is as though a burnt offering to the Lord. Let it be a gift to God from your whole heart. Let it remind you that you yourself should also be a burning and shining light. *He was*, says our Lord of John the Forerunner, *a burning and a shining light*.

I offer light to the Lord in order that He may bestow the light of grace, spiritual light, upon me, that He may lead me from the darkness of sin into the light of the knowledge of God and of virtue; I offer fire that the fire of the grace of the Holy Spirit may be kindled in my heart, and that I may quench the fire of the vices of that miserable heart. I bring a light that I myself may become a light, burning and shining to all that are in the church.

It is well to place candles before the icons. But it is still better if you bring as a sacrifice to God the fire of your love for him and your neighbor. It is well that the one should accompany the other. But if you place candles before the icons and have no love for God and your neighbor in your heart, if you are grasping, if you do not live in peace with others—then, your offering to God is useless.

I am an infirm, carnal, sinful man. I am not always able to bring to my Lord a heart burning with faith and love—but at least I bring, as a carnal, material man, a material gift as a gift to heaven, a lighted candle. May the Lord look down from heaven upon this little gift of my zeal, and may he give me more in return. He alone is rich, and enriches all, whilst I am poor and needy. He dwells amid light inaccessible, whilst I am in darkness. I am of little faith; may He grant me the gift of faith. I am poor in love; may He enrich my heart with this priceless heavenly treasure. I am powerless to do good; may He give me that power. From *Spiritual Counsels: Select Passages from My Life in Christ*, SVS Press

On Offerings of Temple Wine & Oil

Another way of making offerings to God for the sake both of loved ones and enemies, both of the living and the departed, is offering wine or oil for use in the Church in their name.

Typically, those who make use of this custom remember loved ones on namedays, birthdays, or

anniversaries, in time of blessing or in time of sickness, need, or danger. The departed may be remembered at any time, but especially at the anniversaries of their departure. For the living, we ask for God's blessing on them, particularly for their health and salvation. For the departed, we ask blessed eternal memory (that God will ever know them and not say to them, "I don't know you").

Making an offering for others is a way to intensify our prayers for them. We demonstrate the importance of our request by making a material gift to God in addition to the words of prayer we offer. Making an offering for enemies or those who have wronged us can be especially effective for overcoming our anger, bitterness, and unforgiveness towards them. It is a way of fulfilling Christ's command, "Do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who despitefully use you and persecute you."

To make an offering, take a slip for it from the candle table and fill it out. Circle whether the offering is for oil (\$5) or wine (\$10), include the name of the person to be commemorated, your name, and the occasion of the offering. The offering itself may be put in the slot of the candle table or in the basket, while the filled-out slip goes in the basket. Gifts in kind may be brought also: regular olive oil or port wine. Please note that the number of names to be commemorated per offering should normally be limited to one person or one family at most. If you have questions, see Fr. Justin.

Please take a moment to pray for those for whom temple wine and oil are offered when you see their names in the bulletin, or pray for them throughout the week.

The offering of temple wine and oil has become and increasingly common practice here at St. Maximus, but we are far from making full use of this avenue.

From St. Gregory Palamas on Illness

There are times when illness is better for sinners than good health, because it helps them towards salvation and blunts their inborn evil impulses. Inasmuch as it repays the debt of sin by means of suffering, it makes them able to receive healing of their souls in the first instance, then healing of their bodies. This happens most of all when the sick person, understanding that the affliction is a remedy from God, bears it courageously, falls down before God with faith, and asks for forgiveness, through whatever works he can manage. *Homily 10 on Mark 2:1-12*

Upcoming Events 2018

21 January: Feast of St. Maximus, Mark Tarpley speaks on the reconciliation of male and female in Christ.

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!