

# The Confessor's Tongue for February 3, A. D. 2019

36<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost; Righteous Simeon, Prophetess Anna

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.

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## The Sayings of St. Anthony the Great 13

*A hunter in the desert came to find Abba Anthony enjoying himself with the brethren and he was shocked.*

*Wanting to show him that it was necessary sometimes to meet the needs of the brethren, the old man said to him, 'Put an arrow in your bow and shoot it.' So he did. The old man then said, 'Shoot another,' and he did so. Then the old man said, 'Shoot yet again,' and the hunter replied, 'If I bend my bow so much, I will break it.' Then the old man said to him,*

*'It is the same with the work of God. If we stretch the brethren beyond measure, they will soon break. Sometimes it is necessary to come down to meet their needs.' When he heard these words, the hunter was pierced by compunction and, greatly edified by the old man, he went away. As for the brethren, they went home strengthened.*

Saying 13 in *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*

**Commentary:** This same wisdom is found in the cycles of fasting and feasting in the Church. We are called to make a considerable ascetic effort in prayer, fasting, and almsgiving during the four fasts of the year, especially during Great Lent. But at the end of each season of fast comes a festive season and a relaxation of ascetical effort. Few of us could bear it if we had to try to live life at the level of effort demanded by Great Lent. Like the overstressed bow, we would break.

Though the feasts bring us a relaxation of ascetical effort and a time to rejoice and be glad, we must not conceive of this 'relaxation' as though it were a sort of 'spiritual vacation', during which we are freed from prayer, temptation, and struggle. There is no such thing as a spiritual vacation, for our adversary the devil relentlessly prowls about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. To take a spiritual vacation will always spiritually disarm us and harm us. It is for this reason that St. Anthony the Great was always urging others to hold on to their ascetic labors and not relax them, and why he himself throughout his life increased his own.

King Solomon writes in Ecclesiastes, "To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven.... A time to weep, and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance.... A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away.... A time to keep silence, and a time to speak..." (Ecc 3:1-8). Though this life generally is a time for us to lose our life that we may find it, to give that we may receive, to weep and cultivate repentance so that we may rejoice in the age to come, yet even this life in this fallen world and evil generation has its joys, its rewards, its times of laughter, rest, getting, and dancing. The Optina Elders often referred to these little relaxations and joys along the way as "consolations" sent by God. Such times help us who

are weak from breaking under the strain of constant effort.

Yet every such consolation and joy in this life is only relative compared to the joy to come, a foretaste, a glimpse. We cannot live here in rest, relaxation, and meeting the needs of the body, for these pleasures are only a pale reflection of much greater goods to come; the joys here are not the ultimate end. In this life, we get only a foretaste of the Kingdom, not the fullness of it. God grants us consolations along our difficult way so we do not lose heart, but we cannot long tarry in them. Even though we cannot linger long in them, we should not disdain them, or be ashamed of our need for them, or judge others over them as the hunter did. *Fr. Justin Frederick*

## The Path to Confession

*Fr. Artemy Vladimirov*

*This is an excerpt from a book written to help children prepare for Confession but which also holds much benefit for adults who peruse it.*

### Anger, Irritability, & Fighting

Now it is time to repent of our sins of anger and irritability. You all know how captivating this passion is. It begins with small things, like the loss of affection and attentiveness, and little by little we become less tenderhearted, thoughtful, and amiable toward others. Just watch, scarcely has cold indifference taken up residence in our soul, that we begin to see other uninvited guests: hard-heartedness, secret hostility, a feeling of vexation, displeasure, neglect...

*Forgive us, Merciful Lord!*

If you have never repented of this, if you haven't accused yourself of it before God, if you haven't admitted it in confession to the priest, your soul is already oppressed by irritability. In such a state we easily say sharp, thoughtless words. We sting our neighbors and then try to offend them even more deeply...evil is ready to celebrate its forthcoming victory over us! *Forgive us, Merciful Lord!*

It is terrifying, my friends, to forget even for a moment that each man is a highly valued creature of God, for whose sake the Savior shed His Blood on the Cross. If we remembered this, would sarcastic and biting remarks drop from our lips? Would we be able-like filth flies on a dung heap—to carry unchecked rumors about our neighbors, to slander, and even smear them...? *Forgive us, Merciful Lord.*

And now let's turn to those who quarrel. Even wolf and bear cubs don't do the things done by children who are bitten with irritability! How their faces change, how their expressions become hideous and deformed! Where, in the wink of an eye, do that jolly smile and happy childish laughter vanish? Why to the eyes become dark and glimmer strangely with malicious fire, the face distorted, the lips pale, the

chin trembling? This is how the passion of anger outwardly defiles a person.

*Forgive us, Merciful Lord!*

Have you seen fighters like this? Like young roosters, they fly at each other with claws, feet, and teeth; clumps of hair fly; sleeves are ripped to shreds. How ashamed their parents feel... Most of the time it is boys that fight, but now we even see it among girls.

*Forgive us, Merciful Lord!*

Even after the brawl, a fire of anger continues to smolder in the heart already blackened with soot and ashes. The devil is the complete master of such an unhappy person.

*Forgive us, Merciful Lord!*

The violent, bitter soul, sickened with resentment, nurses its plans for revenge, shouting aloud at his absent enemy, reviling and wreaking vengeance upon him in his imagination. Truly the demons are overshadowing this soul!

*Forgive us, Merciful Lord!*

Probably the most terrible sin is when we take malicious delight in evil: the dismal, unnatural joy we feel when we hear about the misfortune of someone who has offended us.

*Forgive us, Merciful Lord!*

Repent, fighters, squabblers, bullies! Repent, also, those of you who love to pour oil on the fire, egging on the fighters to even more deadly sins.

*Forgive us, Merciful Lord!*

Has any of us fallen to such a low level that we helped gang up on someone—one boy cruelly attacked by many? (The mark of cowards!)

*Forgive us, Merciful Lord!*

My friends, swiftly climb from the dismal depths of evil and anger, which deliver the soul to death, the soul which was crated to charity, compassion, love, and self-sacrifice. Who can soften the sorrow brought about by the remembrance of our own sins or by brooding over the imperfection of others?

Let us turn for help to the Holy Great Martyr and Trophy-Bearer George, the renowned warrior whose heart manifests the noble qualities of courage and decisiveness. He is ready to lay down his life for his friends, and his demeanor is full of gentleness, respect for his elders, and charity to the sick and infirm. How noble, how beautiful is the image of the victorious Great Martyr! His countenance is lined with suffering, his armor denotes a will as firm as steel, ready at every moment to fulfill the commands of Christ the Savior....

Before we continue, we must understand that it is not forbidden for Christians to stand up for the helpless, to snatch the weak from the hands of the evildoer, to rise up and defend the downtrodden and persecuted truth. The Savior clearly said, "Greater love hath no man that this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." Christ did this Himself, and among the countless martyrs who have trodden the path of sacrificial love, the Church counts all those Christian warriors who have fallen on the field of battle for the faith and the Motherland.

*Forgive us, Merciful Lord!*

Afflicted by the disease of pride and self-love, children and teenagers often ignore the wise advice and warnings of their parents and brush aside their rightful requests like pesky flies. Instead, they trust in their own nonexistent experience and upset mother with rudeness, caddishness, and disrespect. Often they provoke an argument, causing a scene. Captured by the devil, they use foul language and even dare to raise their hand against the one who gave them birth.

*Forgive us, Merciful Lord!*

My dear readers, I grieve with you for these unhappy youths who hold nothing sacred. It is sternly said about them in the Bible, "Cursed is he who provokes his mother's anger and who leaves his father without help, the same is a blasphemer."

*O Merciful Lord, enlighten all disrespectful teenagers and help them repent of these heavy sins!*

We write about these harsh sins so that you will know that it is only a single step from a small transgression to a great: "He that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much."

But now, let us look to our holy Guardian Angel, who was given to us by God at the hour of our baptism and who is woven from the virtues of meekness, obedience, and humility! Do you see, my friends, how unutterably beautiful his face is, how light the countenance of this heavenly being! True meekness and humility have nothing in common with being a weak, spineless "loser," as the ignorant say. Obedience to God's law not only did not diminish this blessed creature but actually strengthened his will for good, making his mind light-bearing and his heart pure. Keep watching—a holy, imperishable energy of unearthly joy, peace, and love shines forth from him. Angel of God, our holy guardian, teach us how to overcome the dismal pride in our souls!

**Hymns of Repentance from the Octoechos**

*Sunday Vespers, tone 3*

I have greatly sinned and grieved Thee, O good Master, merciful by nature. As I turn back to Thee, receive me the prodigal son, making me one of Thy hired servants, O heavenly Father.

I have spent the measure of my life in slothfulness and now, miserable that I am, the end is at hand. I have taken no thought for the judgement and the distance from God that await me. but turn me back, O Savior, and pluck me from all these ills.

Deliver my humble soul from Gehenna, O Lord of goodness, and from the gnashing of teeth and from all the other eternal torments, that I may sing Thy praises in faith, O merciful God who by nature lovest mankind.

**Upcoming Events 2018**

9 February: St. David Brotherhood Men's Meeting

with Fr. Nilus of St. Arsenius Skete. 8:00 a.m.

10 March: Forgiveness Vespers, 6:00 p.m.

11 March: Great Lent begins.

28 April: Great & Holy Pascha

**GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!**