

The Confessor's Tongue for February 10, A. D. 2019

37th Sunday After Pentecost; Hieromartyr Haralambus

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 14

*Abba Anthony heard of a very young monk who had performed a miracle on the road. Seeing the old men walking with difficulty along the road, he ordered the wild asses to come and carry them until they reached Abba Anthony. Those whom they had carried told Abba Anthony about it. He said to them, 'This monk seems to me to be a ship loaded with goods, but I do not know if he will reach harbor.' After a while, Anthony suddenly began to weep, to tear his hair, and lament. His disciples said to him, 'Why are you weeping, Father?' The old man replied, 'A great pillar of the Church has just fallen (he meant the young monk) but go to him and see what has happened.' So the disciples went and found the monk sitting on a mat and weeping for the sin he had committed. Seeing the disciples of the old man he said, 'Tell the old man to pray that God will give me just ten days, and I hope I will have made satisfaction.' But in the space of five days he died. Saying 14 in *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers**

Commentary: The true Christian does not envy the gifts, miracles, or accomplishments of others, nor does he take pleasure in their sins. When the young wonderworker falls, Anthony takes no joy, but weeps, lamenting his fall. We must guard ourselves lest we, feeling threatened by others or envying their gifts, take a malicious pleasure in their shortcomings or failures. Solomon even warns us in his Proverbs not to take pleasure in the downfall of a wicked man lest the Lord cease to chasten him!

The Christian life is likened to a merchant ship. In the course of life, we gain a valuable cargo of virtues and good works to offer to God, but we must make it safely to port. The monk had a great treasure of virtues and accomplishments, but his ship foundered before reaching a safe haven. Thus we, too, must be vigilant and cautious until the end and not trust in what we have accomplished until now. The miracle the young monk worked was impressive, and St. Anthony sees in it evidence of significant accomplishment ("a ship loaded with goods"). But he has doubts, nonetheless, whether the monk will "reach harbor", perhaps based on the perception that the monk's miracle was mixed with a measure of pride and self-display that rendered him vulnerable.

Having fallen, the monk is found weeping over his sin. He asks Anthony's envoys to ask their elder to pray that God will give him ten days to make his repentance complete, but he is given only five days. Is his repentance complete and is he reconciled with God in that time? We are not told. Certainly, five minutes, let alone five days, is enough for repentance, but was it enough for this monk? Was he excessive in setting himself a need for ten days to repent? Was he deluded to think he needed any time beyond the present to gain God's forgiveness?

A saying from Abba Poemen casts light on this matter.

A brother questioned Abba Poemen saying, 'I have committed a great sin and I want to do penance for three years.' The old man said to him, 'That is a lot.' The brother said, 'For one year?' The old man said again, 'That is a lot.' Those who were present said, 'For forty days?' He said again, 'That is a lot.' He added, 'I myself say that if a man repents with his whole heart and does not intend to commit the sin any more, God will accept him after only three days' (Poemen 12 in *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*).

Some who think of forgiveness of sins as something God automatically grants upon His receiving a request for it in words may be scandalized by the concept of 'making satisfaction' and needing time to repent. Others who know the canonical penalties for serious sins may be scandalized by Poemen's leniency.

So what do we make of this? Notice that the sin is serious, one which, presumably, would deprive the monk of Holy Communion. Notice, too, Poemen's qualifying words: "if a man repents with his whole heart and does not intend to commit the sin any more". Does a quick, "Lord I have sinned, please forgive me" constitute repentance with one's whole heart? It might, but it might not—most likely not. Most usually it takes time for a sinner to come to repent with his whole heart and seriously intend not to commit the sin again. The monk in Anthony's saying wants ten days. He is given only five. Only God knows whether it was enough for him.

God is quick to forgive. He forgives in a moment, without reluctance. Man's part is to ask in repentance with the intention not to repeat the offense. When a Christians betrays his faith and his Savior by committing a serious sin, he will need time to complete his repentance so that it is wholehearted and sincere. How much time? Only God knows. But we must not presume on God's mercy and assume that we can choose to sin and still have time for repentance. That time may not be given, or we may fail to repent with all our heart.

Fr. Justin Frederick

On the Basis for Christian Unity

Fr. George Florovsky

In modern times, it has been widely believed and often suggested that it was precisely theology that was primarily responsible for the tensions and divisions in the Church and in the wider world of religion. And possibly the same prejudice still prevails in many quarters in our day too. It has often been contended that "tensions" and divisions were initiated exactly at the moment when the Church, or rather, her leaders

and teachers, decided or attempted to stabilize and formulate beliefs. If only people could escape once again into the realm of personal religion (it was contended), all dissensions would have been overcome.

A freedom of "personal religion" is in fact the main divisive and disrupting factor of our spiritual life. Unity and "agreement" can be achieved only on the level of doctrine.

Religion and doctrine (i.e. precisely, theology) are usually still contrasted in our day. Men in pews sometimes pretend that they would have been united across all historical borders had they not been prevented by men in pulpits who impose upon them divisive "doctrines." An average believer is inclined to apply the famous dictum of Goethe to the word of religion also. "All theories, i.e. doctrines, are gray and dull, but the tree of life is ever green."

Yet precisely at this point the major doubt arises. Berdiaev has recently suggested that, as a matter of fact, it is exactly our actual life that is gray and dull and hopeless, and often dirty, and only in "theory," in *theoria*, i.e. in contemplation, can we recover the dimension of truth.

It is a very helpful suggestion indeed. And, first of all, in the world of "personal religion" (of an "immediate" religious experience) we meet exactly a hopeless "variety of religious experience" which evades any integration and provides no unity at all. A freedom of "personal religion" is in fact the main divisive and disrupting factor of our spiritual life. Unity and "agreement" can be achieved only on the level of doctrine.

Historically speaking, in the Christian Church, theology was usually a remedy and a safeguard against an utter confusion of free experience, an only means to overcome the vagueness of an immediate experience. *From volume 13 of Collected Works, "Theological Tensions Among Christians", pp. 9-10.*

Housekeeping Matters

1. Sometimes those bringing a child to Communion will point with their finger to the chalice to direct the child to kiss it. That is fine—but sometimes, they end up poking or touching the chalice with their fingers. Please do not let this happen. We are privileged to kiss the chalice with our lips, but we should not be touching it with our hands, other than those blessed to handle it.

2. At festal vigils, candles are distributed for the faithful to light and hold at the polyeleon when the festal icon is brought out. These candles are held lit by the faithful until they venerate the icon after the Gospel. You may take these candles home or leave them, as the priest and readers use them to read.

3. For good order and to avoid offering causes for stumbling to others, I ask everyone to follow the instructions given at coffee hour as to the order of

those lining up. I have observed people each week not following instructions and placing themselves in the line before their proper time—cutting, in other words. Please don't.

4. Please take no more than one plate of food your first time through the line. Children should take no more than one dessert. Remember: there are people behind you who would like to have something to eat too.

5. Please wipe children's runny noses before presenting them at the chalice.

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. Ephiphanios. "When you become well, you will look up of your own will."

Hymns of Repentance from the Octoechos *Sunday Vespers, tone 4*

O Thou who lovest mankind, I have sinned against Thee not according to my natural state as man so that I may beg forgiveness, but more than man and beyond nature and beyond pardon. But Thou, O my Savior, who hast become man in a manner that transcendently the laws of nature and that is beyond the grasp of the mind, and whose love for mankind is past understanding: have mercy upon me as I turn to Thee.

Thou hast imposed repentance upon those who transgressed against Thee and not just upon the just, O Christ, for we have before us the examples of thief and the prodigal, of Manasses and the harlot, of the torturer, of the publican, and of him who denied Thee: I find it, then, hard to despair, for knowing Thy love and Thy supreme goodness, O my Savior, I turn to Thee and I shed tears, and I am in good hope that Thou wilt receive me.

Sunk as I am now in bodily passions, and far from Thee as I now find myself, O God and King, grant me contrition, aversion from evil and complete amendment, and because of Thy great goodness save me, prodigal with no possible hope that I am, O all-powerful Jesus, Savior of our souls.

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