

# The Confessor's Tongue for May 12, A. D. 2019

Sunday of the Myrrhbearers: Second Sunday after Pascha

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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**Modern-day Myrrhbearers:  
Reflections on Preparing the Body**

by Lois Lyda

The call came from Andrea, "We have our first customer." It was just seven days since we had introduced ourselves as The Myrrhbearers of St. Maximus at the 2012 Annual Meeting. We were going to do no less than redeem the process of burying the dead, and we were now going to be doing it sooner than we expected. In flurry of phone calls, we made arrangements to meet up at the Denton Funeral Home (where the body was refrigerated) the following morning at 9:30am. At 9:45am Monday, five women in headscarves gathered in the foyer. Louise & Mary were waiting quietly, Andrea pulled up with dry ice and our supply kit, Isabel & Lois arrived with the psalter & Myrrhbearer icon. Nervous but ready, we quietly greeted each other. Then there was an unexpected delay. The weekend desk guy had misconstrued our arrival time, and the preparation room was in use; an embalmed body was awaiting a hairdo. So we were ushered into another room where we talked over our plans, prayed, & waited.

At 10:30, we entered the preparation room. It was a jarring experience to walk into that room. It looked like a back entrance to a sub par restaurant kitchen that seconded as a dental clinic with a revoked license. The whole room was tiled, with a sloping drain in the center of the floor. A stainless steel table laid with a white cloth was littered with scissors, wire, and various metal tools. Nothing was particularly clean. In the corner there was an industrial trashcan with a warning: "Formaldehyde Contaminants Do Not Open." Louise, a retired hospice nurse, was uneasy enough about the setting to go ask if we were in any danger. "Yes, there are hazardous chemicals, but they are contained," we were assured, as Lois lit the votive and started the incense.

It wasn't a place of prayer, but we were going to make it one. And the reader began: "Almighty God, our help and refuge, fountain of wisdom and tower of strength, who knowest that we can do nothing without thy guidance and help; assist us, we pray thee, and direct us to divine wisdom and power, that we may accomplish this task of preparing the body of thy departed servant Nina for burial . . ."

It became apparent that Nina's body was going to be challenging to work on given that she had already been dead for almost two days. Ashen gray, Rigor Mortis had stiffened her limbs, her jaw we could not close, & there was already a slight foul odor of decay. Furthermore, the body appeared to have been carelessly placed, so that her fingers were gnarled and her body was bent. Louise and Mary, both nurses, went capably to work undeterred, moving limbs and

massaging the abdomen while Isabel helped with the equipment. Washing and cleaning every part, details mattered; even facial hair was tended, and toe nails trimmed. We diligently laid out her body with the honor due her.

Fr. Justin arrived to bless the anointing oil mixed with myrrh before we covered Nina's body with it. Her countenance was visibly changed to a lovely yellow hue; we all agreed she looked beautiful. She was dressed in her own clothes provided by the family.

At 1 p.m., the last step was to transfer her body to the hand-crafted pine casket. Created overnight by parishioners Reader Vladimir & George Rovny, it was made using free online plans by novice woodworkers with a will strong enough to keep them building until 5 a.m. Their \$180 contribution and voluntary labor saved the bereaved family a minimum of \$1500 and furnished Nina with a simple & beautiful place of repose.

Louise and Andrea lined the casket beautifully with a white sheet, placing two king pillows along the bottom, and then positioning her body to look comfortable atop. Some attention was given to her hairdressing. Though she had always worn a wig to church, the family most often knew her with her stringy gray hair draping down to her shoulders, and so had not provided us a wig in which to dress her. Various styles were tried; a bun on top, hair tucked behind her head. We finally settled on her hair down to cover her ears (which were showing signs of decay) with the ends tucked neatly under. No makeup was applied.

Together we prayed the concluding prayers, kissed Nina, and then solemnly departed, armfuls of bags and towels and various supplies in tow.

On Lois' way out to the car, Nina's son and daughter-in-law were standing outside having a smoke. They were hovering, reluctant to enter the facility. She slipped passed them, but the daughter ran, tear-filled, up to the car (perhaps the head scarf gave her away, as we had never met) and said simply, "Thank you."

Of the five Myrrhbearers present, only one ever knew Nina in her life, but in her death, we cared for her as if we had loved her all her life. May we too die surrounded by such love.

Mary said, "It was an honor to work together to give Nina a respectful and meaningful ending to her life. Not really having had this experience before, we needed the guidance and were given it. Christ was really in our midst."

That someone gave us this privilege was a sacred trust. Beloved sister in Christ, Nina, forgive us if at any time we have offended you by anything we have done or have left undone. May your memory be eternal.

Since this article was writing, we have also carried out this ministry for a dear parishioner known to all, John Cassian, just a year ago January. We want to continue to be able to carry out this necessary ministry in a prayerful, respectful, competent way, and with your help and engagement, we shall.

### The Sayings of St. Anthony the Great 24

*It was revealed to Abba Anthony in his desert that there was one who was his equal in the city. He was a doctor by profession, and whatever he had beyond his needs he gave to the poor, and every day he sang the Sanctus with the Angels.*

Saying 24 Sayings of the Desert Fathers

*Commentary:* Sometimes people think that only monks or perhaps clergy have the chance to be close to God. 'How can we who live in the world fast, pray, give alms as the saints did? they think, and they have little hope for ourselves. This saying of St. Anthony reveals that one need not be a monk to attain St. Anthony's level of spiritual life. (Moreover, a look at the Church's canonized saints reveals that there are few married clergy there outside the ranks of martyrs!)

St. Anthony as a great ascetic who sold all his goods and gave them to the poor to flee to the desert to become a monk, a man of prayer and strict fasting, a spiritual warrior with much experience of warfare against the demons, a man who had seen God's uncreated light, seems nigh impossible to equal. Yet a man living in the city (probably Alexandria) was his equal before God. This man had not gone to the desert, and not given up all his possessions to give to the poor, had probably not seen the demons fighting him as Anthony had, yet he still pleased God greatly. He worked, he lived frugally on his income, spending just enough to meet the necessities of life and giving away the rest in alms. He maintained daily prayer and worship of God in such a way that he was joining the angels in their singing the thrice-holy hymn, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord of Sabaoth [hosts], heaven and earth and full of Thy glory."

Hereby are revealed the shortcomings of human judgment. Besides warning us against judging others because we shall be held to the same standard we use to judge them, Christ commands us not to judge according to outward appearance but to judge righteous judgment. This case shows our inability in that matter of judging righteous judgment—no one but God looking on the outward appearance would have judged the doctor to be St. Anthony's equal—God who sees all the secrets of the heart and knows the true meaning and value of everything.

Hence, we commend all things into God's hands. We leave them for the righteous judge to evaluate, for all judgment has been given to Christ, and we presume not to take it from Him into our own hands.

Herein each of us may find great hope, for wherever we live, whatever our circumstances, what we need for our salvation and knowing God intimately is at hand. We can seek the Lord with all our hearts and do His will by following the path of Christ's commandments. We may choose not to live

beyond our means, limiting our wants to what we truly need. We may be generous in almsgiving, faithful to pray daily, and diligent to come together for worship. In doing this and making ourselves available to God to do His will each day, we, too, may find ourselves in Anthony's company with the anonymous doctor who was his equal before God.

Fr. Justin Frederick

### Receive the Eucharist with the Fear of God, or Stay Away!

When the time for the Holy Communion comes and you are close to the altar, you should firmly believe that Christ, King of the Universe, is present there. When the priest is about to offer you the body and blood of Jesus, you should not think that the priest does so, but you should believe that the hand that offers you the Eucharist is Jesus' hand. He is the One who glows brightly with His presence the table of the Last Supper, He now decorates the Altar of Divine Liturgy.

He is actually present and examines everybody's will and observes which one receives the Eucharist with reverence equivalent to the Holy Mystery, which one has a wicked conscience, with filthy and unclean thoughts, and with infamous acts.

You should consider which defect you have corrected, what virtue you have acquired, which sin you have erased through confession, what you have achieved and made you better. If your consciousness tells you that you have taken care of enough to heal your internal wounds, if you did more than fasting, you should receive the Eucharist with fear of God. Otherwise, stay away from the Holy Sacraments. And when you are cleansed of all your sins, then you should come closer.

You should come to the church to receive the Holy Communion with fear and terror, with pure consciousness, with fasting and prayer. Without making noise, without stamping and elbowing your neighbors. Because this is the greatest madness and the worst contempt of the Holy Sacraments.

Tell me why are you making noise? Why are you in a hurry? Do you need to fulfill your duties? At the moment of the Holy Communion, are you thinking of the duties you need to fulfill? Do you feel that you are on the earth? Do you think you are with people and not with the angels? But this is person with a cold heart... *St. John Chrysostom*

*A fellow priest recently read these words. He commented: I read this and was dismayed that a priest would write something like this without bringing out the other aspects of our most intimate moment with our 'man-loving' God. Then I read it again more slowly and saw the wisdom of the article. Lastly, saw WHO wrote it and felt like an utter idiot—and maybe, for a moment, the sobriety I should remain in.*

#### Upcoming Events 2019

27 May, Monday at noon: Memorial Day Picnic

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!