

The Confessor's Tongue for May 19, A. D. 2019

Sunday of the Paralytic: Fourth Sunday of 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.

The Sayings of St. Anthony the Great 25

Abba Anthony said, "A time is coming when men will go mad, and when they see someone who is not mad, they will attack him, saying, 'You are mad, you are not like us.'"

Saying 25 Sayings of the Desert Fathers

Commentary: What does it mean to be 'normal', to be 'sane'? "Normal" may be defined as "conforming with, adhering to, or constituting a norm, standard, pattern, level, or type; typical." "Sane" may be defined as "of sound mind, mentally healthy; having or showing sound judgment; reasonable." Scientists and doctors have done much research into human abnormalities and insanity but relatively little has been done to define rigorously in what constitutes human normality and sanity. In the popular mind, the concept of normalcy and sanity are derived from some sort of statistically average condition of humans based on observation. Those who differ markedly from that norm are not 'normal.'

Such a definition cannot content us. For Christians, it is Christ, and after Him, His Mother and the Saints, who show us what the sane and normal human being is. They are 'normal' according to what God intended for man when He made man in His own image. They are sane because their minds are illumined by God's Light and their bodies are in subjugation as servants to the illumined mind, which seeks to do God's will in all things as the only rational and proper course for man.

By any Christian understanding of 'normal', the vast majority of human beings are not normal and are not in their right minds, are not sane. They have 'gone mad' as St. Anthony says, though in the world and by the world, they are regarded as entirely 'normal.' Because the Christian person differs markedly from the world's daily experience of what it is to be human, the world considers the Christian to be mad and insane because he 'is not like us.' Hence, we should expect the world to consider us 'abnormal' and insane (though we should not intentionally give them reason to think so!—though all of us are called to be fools in the world's eyes for Christ's sake). Of course, we return the compliment: we gaze on the spectacle of life in our world and find insanity all around. How can they live like this, if, indeed, it can be called living at all?

Indeed, if God is come to man in human flesh, if Jesus Christ is the God-man come to reveal God to us and to open the way for us to become partakers of the Divine nature eternally, if our life is hid with Christ in God and apart from Him there is no true life, then to follow Christ and be a Christian in the fullest sense of the word is the supremely rational path to follow. To live any other way, to follow any other path is insanity and folly. It is to be in denial about the ultimate nature of reality. To be a Christian is to accept the reality of life in this universe as it is and to live in

conformity with it. Hence it is the only rational path, for every other path denies the fundamental reality of God become man.

Because of our markedly different views of what is 'normal', we should not court the world's good opinion of us at the expense of compromising the Faith or moderating the Christian way of life to be more acceptable to the mad denizens of this world. If we have any Christian savor worthy of Christ, we shall always appear out of step with the world, and in the world's eyes, our life not governed by fear of death and the philosophy "eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow we shall die" will be irrational and mad. They think to be a Christian is to be in denial of reality, to be deluded by promises of "pie in the sky." But the heavenly Bread of Life has come down from heaven to us; He is Emmanuel, God with us, God who nourishes us with Himself. He is not a fond hope of "pie in the sky bye and bye..."

Christ, His Mother, and the Saints show us what it is to be normal. We do well to keep our eyes on them and not care unduly what the world thinks of us.

Fr. Justin Frederick

Building Without Money

All his life, Father Moses was building. Another might not accomplish in a hundred years what he did in thirty-seven. And how did he do it? Always without money. Sometimes you'd see that there was none of this, and there was none of that, and yet he'd be planning a building project when there was no money. And you'd say to him, "Batiushka, you're starting such a big project, but do you have the money?" "Yes, yes," he'd say, taking out a wallet with fifteen or twenty rubles in it. "But that's nothing," you'd tell him, "that kind of construction will take thousands!" He'd just smile and say, "But you've forgotten about God. I might not have the money, but He does." And sure enough, God would send it to him. So strong was his faith in God. Another wouldn't even have thought of starting a construction project without funds, but he was so sure of God's aid and so steadfast that he wouldn't even hesitate in the least. And sure enough, his faith would not let him down.

Old timers among the Optina brethren relate that once a certain bishop visited Optina Hermitage on his way to the capital. After touring the monastery, he stopped by the skete, marvelled at its secluded location and arrangement, and then asked the Father Superior, "Who build all this?" Father Moses answered in a few evasive words to the effect that it had all been gradually built there over a period of time. The bishop responded, "I can see for myself that the skete is situated here—what I want to know is, who is it that built the skete?" "It was the superior and the brethren," answered Father Moses. "They say you built it all," continued the bishop. "Yes, I was

there too," answered Father Moses. After this, the visitor did not feel like questioning him further.

From *The Elder Moses of Optina*

'Crazy John', the Early Years

Crazy John lived in a tiny, humble apartment that he had inherited from his mother, one of the twenty apartments that comprised the condominium building. He worked at the neighborhood bakery and began work at daybreak. From that bakery where he worked, he would fill two bags of bread and bread rolls every day and would rush to distribute them to the elderly men, women, and students in his neighborhood. "Here you are—I thought I might give Apostoly the baker, so that you will commemorate him in your prayers," he would say. The truth was that Crazy John would use up a large part of his wages to provide bread to the poor of his neighborhood. He would tell Mr. Apostoly that he was only helping out some sick friends and that he was being paid for his trouble.

But how did he know who the poor in his neighborhood were? As a little boy, he had made it a habit to indiscriminately ring the doorbells, not only in his own condominium, but also in neighboring apartment buildings. He would introduce himself to everyone and would ask them if they needed anything that he could help them with: "And how did you wake up this morning? Has any problem come up that I can be of assistance to you? How are your children?"

At first, some snubbed him. Others, obviously annoyed by his unexpected presence, slammed their door in his face, refusing to speak to him. But there were others who actually waited for Crazy John to come so that they could hear a kind word from him. Eventually, he came to know all of them; he came to know their peculiarities, but also the basic elements of their characters.

In the evenings, Crazy John would retire to his humble home and pray. He liked to recite the books of Psalms, claiming to someone who asked him why that "They were intended to drive away the little critters (demons) from the neighborhood." He used to read it so loudly, that a newly-arrived tenant who didn't know him that well called the police, complaining about him disturbing the peace! Also, on a daily basis, the fool would cense all the apartments, beginning from the top floor and working down. He would even go out to the backyards and cense there also. And when someone was sick, he would visit him and—after censing him and making the sign of the cross over him—he would read haltingly, with his limited education, the words of the Epistle of James. "Pray for one another, that you may be healed," he would tell him. He would urge him to go to Confession and receive Communion "to get well by the greatest of doctors, our Christ."

Quite often, after coming home from the bakery, he would grab a broom and sweep the entire apartment building "to keep it clean," as he used to say.

He enjoyed intervening with a smile between those who quarreled publicly in cafes about political parties (in older times, there used to be heated arguments over political parties). "Ah, you guys," he used to tell them, "why do you count on and pin your hopes on tin cans and cymbals? Instead of quarrelling, you should be praying to God to send us a David for king. He could solve problems because his knees had bled from prolonged supplications and prayers. But what do your wise guys do? Their supplications are only for commission, and they become one with corruption. They take you for idiots, and they mock you."

"Get lost, Crazy John," they would reply, and, to avoid him altogether, they would send him off on an errand. But he would always say, "Don't pin your hopes on the rulers. Have your hopes only in God."
from *Crazy John: A Saintly Fool for Christ vol. 1, Athens, 2010.*

Orthodox Asceticism

The term "asceticism" in the Orthodox Church does not have the narrow sense that has often been given to it in the West. Rather, the word points to what every Christian must accomplish in order to benefit effectively from the salvation wrought by Christ. From the point of view of the great Tradition of the Orthodox Church, the work of salvation appears as a cooperation between divine grace bestowed by the Holy Spirit and the effort each baptized person must make personally in order to be open to this grace and to take hold of it. One makes this effort throughout one's life, at every moment and in every act of existence. Besides this, the Greek word *askesis* means "exercise," "training," and "way of life." In addition, the corresponding Russian words *podvig* and *podvizhnichestvo*, derived from the Slavonic verb *podvizatsya* (meaning 'to move or go forward') translate an eminently dynamic conception of spiritual life. These words make it clear that the spiritual life is conceived of as a process of growth; namely, that of the gradual actualization of the grace received in the sacraments and particularly in Baptism. Likewise, the process is that of the progressive assimilation of the grace of the Holy Spirit that effectively incorporates the baptized into the dead and resurrection Christ. Such grace allows man to acquire for himself the human nature that is restored and deified in the person of the God-man.
Dr. Jean-Claude Larchet, in Therapy of Spiritual Illness, volume 1, p. 8

From The Diary of a Russian Priest

We must not put our vices to sleep—we must uproot them. Here lies the advantage of life in the world: through conflict with other people and through situations which expose us to temptation, it reveals our own heart to us.

Upcoming Events 2019

22 May, Wednesday: Midpentecost Liturgy and Blessing of Water 6:00 a.m.
27 May, Monday at noon: Memorial Day Picnic

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!