

# The Confessor's Tongue for September 1, A. D. 2019

11th Sunday after Pentecost; Church New Year; St. Symeon the Stylite

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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## Anointing at Vigil

At the All-Night Vigil on Saturday evening, it is the practice of the Church to anoint the worshippers with oil blessed for the purpose at the Litia. Although a Litia (blessing of five loaves, wheat, wine, and oil) is appointed for every Vigil, it is customarily omitted Saturday night in the interest of time, though on feast days and a few Sundays when Litia is served, we anoint with the oil blessed in the service.

Our custom at St. Maximus is to anoint those present, even if Litia is not served. After the Gospel reading, the people come to venerate the Gospel, an icon of Christ the living Word and the account of His life and teaching. Having venerated the Gospel book, they approach the priest with hands held for a blessing, and the priest anoints them on the forehead.

We use various blessed oils. We have oil blessed on the skull of St. Andrew, from the Pantanessa Icon of the Theotokos on Mt. Athos. We have oils blessed on the relics of St. Sergius of Radonizh, St. Tikhon of Moscow, St. Nicholas, St. Matrona of Moscwo, on pieces of the True Cross. We frequently use oil blessed on the relics of St. Herman and oil blessed at Holy Archangels Monastery among others. The priest blesses each person with a formula including the Saint with whom the oil is associated. Those who come with faith to partake of the anointing receive a blessing in accordance with their faith and need. Non-Orthodox Christians present may also be anointed.

## The Sayings of St. Anthony the Great 36

Abba Anthony also said, "Obedience with abstinence gives men power over wild beasts."

Saying 36 *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*

*Commentary:* We might incline first to think here of accounts of St. Gerasim and the lion or St. Seraphim and the bear, but the first wild beast to be tamed is ourselves. Our self will, our insistence on doing what seems best to us, what makes sense to us, what pleases us, is cut off by obedience to God and to the proper authorities He has placed in the life of each person.

In the desert, a monk submitted to his elder and to his brother monks. As Anthony puts it in the next two sayings, many monks fall away because of spiritual pride in trusting in their own works and not consulting with their spiritual father. Likewise, a monk should be able to tell his elders "how many steps he takes and how many drops of water he drinks in his cell, in case he is in error about it."

In the monastery, a monk submits to the abbot and to the monastery's particular way of life set by its *Typicon* (there is a saying that you do not bring your own *Typicon* with you to another place). He presumes to do nothing without the blessing of his Abbot.

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In the world, in the parish, we employ obedience, but it normally takes different forms from that in the monastery. Instead of getting a blessing for everything from a priest, we cut off self will by submitting to those God has put into our lives: the governing authorities, our parents, our teachers, our employer, our husband, our wife, our family, our bishop and priest, our local parish and its way of doing things, our Father-confessor, and the Church in general.

When we are young, our most important relationship is with our parents, and we should know that God never blesses disobedience or disrespect to them. One of the most important tasks of parents is to train their children in willing, humble obedience.

As adults, we cut off self will by obeying our boss at work. In the family, the wife submits to the husband; failure to do this can sabotage her marriage. Many marriages are damaged by the wife usurping her husband's headship and trying to correct him, repair him, lead him, and guide him. The husband also has to submit to his condition of being married and the responsibilities it requires of him. He must submit to God's command to love his wife as Christ loves the Church, command which demands right actions, not feelings. He can no longer live for himself first, but for his wife and children and what is best for them.

In the parish, we follow the guidance of our Confessor, our Priest, and our Bishop. They are not there to run every aspect of our lives, but they are there to care for our souls. As Paul writes, "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you." (Hebrews 13:17) The obedience here is limited and specific, having to do with the services, parish life in general, and whatever is said to us in Confession.

When we constantly resist the priest or our bishop and disregard their spiritual guidance, we lose an opportunity to tame the wild beast in us. Obedience freely chosen frees us from slavery to our whims and having to have it our way.

One note of caution must be sounded here. A parish priest is not an abbot and is rarely an elder. The obedience rendered to the priest is not comprehensive as is the obedience a monks renders his abbot. It happens occasionally that those who live in the world, inspired by monastic literature and feeling the need for intensive guidance, will try to get their priest to run their lives as a abbot does; sometimes it is a priest who is goes beyond proper bounds in trying to be a 'spiritual father' to his flock. While a monk in a strict monastery may need a blessing to do anything, it is not so in the parish. By virtue of being married, for example, we have a general blessing to do everything needed to care for

our families and spouses: we don't need to get a blessing from a priest every time we wish to go to the grocery store, to change homeschooling curriculum, or to buy a car. We may request our priest's counsel in the significant decisions of our lives, but he is not there to make those decisions for us.

Obedience is to be supplemented with abstinence, which is another way of saying 'fasting.' Fasting is necessary to subject the body to the soul, so that the body does not tyrannize the soul through addiction to pleasure and the ensuing misuse of the good things God has given us. Instead of eating what we want (what will taste good to us at the moment), we limit our freedom by eating only fast-worthy foods; instead of eating when we want, we wait until the appointed time to eat, and then we eat a due measure avoiding excess. In fasting this way, we daily teach the body to be subject to the soul which rationally provides what the body needs for health and strength without letting the body enslave the soul to serve its desires.

Fasting is especially important in our time of general abundance, when, thanks to the global economy, we can eat just about anything we want all year long. We readily become accustomed to indulging our desires and whims for particular foods and tastes, having such abundance readily available and the means to purchase what we want. Few of us have the experience of having to 'tighten our belts' due to not having enough to eat or of eating the same two or three basic foods at every meal for a month at a time. The relative weakness of our faith in our time is due in large part to abundance and ease of life and our indulging our bodies.

While the monk abstains completely from sexual pleasure, this abstinence is also practiced by those who are married. The marriage bed is undefiled, and in marriage, the physical union between man and woman is blessed. But this relation is not the primary end or good of marriage, and not everything that can be done with two bodies is something worthy of people made in God's image. Thus, both what we do sexually and how often we do it are governed by God's purposes for us. We must learn to use these things correctly. As St. Maximus says, "He, therefore, who seeks in [sexual intercourse] only sensual pleasure uses it wrongly, for he reckons as good what is not good. When such a man has intercourse with a woman, he misuses her." The emphasis in the saint's words is on the "only". With the advent of contraception and legal abortion and the growing acceptance of unnatural relations, sensual pleasure has become the primary end for most and the only end for some.

Through obedience and fasting, the wild beast that is the man untamed by Christ's yoke gains power to govern himself and not live as a slave to passions and sins. Freedom in any meaningful sense is this ability gained to govern oneself so that one may carry out Christ's commandments. Self-government of this sort is not only essential to Christian life, it is also the only firm basis for freedom in society. If we fail to

govern ourselves, a stronger authority will be needed to force us to keep in our place.

Having gained power over ourselves by obedience with abstinence, we may also have power over other wild men. The man in his right mind submitted to Christ has a power and authority that will also influence others. It is impossible to teach another with authority what one has not been able to accomplish for oneself. Those who teach the correct things without having acquired for themselves the practice of what they teach will not speak with the authority and wisdom needed to tame the wild beast in others. Those, whoever, who teach what they themselves have acquired in deed and practice will have great power to instruct others. May God give us all power over the wild beast within by obedience with abstinence.

### **On the Holy Spirit, the Comforter**

Homily by St. Nicholas of Zicha (+1956)

*But the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He shall teach you all things and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." John 14:26*

What practical meaning have these words other than that we must pray every day that the Holy Spirit be sent to us, just as we pray every day for our daily bread? God is willing every day to send us the Holy Spirit, but He seeks from us that we pray every day for Him to be sent to us. For as, with regard to bread, there is sometimes abundance and sometimes dearth, so it is with regard to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit comes to us and leaves us according to our good works and our patience. Therefore, the Church has ordained that the first morning service in church begin with the invocation of the Holy Spirit: "O heavenly King, the Comforter, the Spirit of Truth--come!", and after that comes the prayer: "give us this day our daily bread." Why? Because, without the Holy Spirit, we cannot even make use of bread in the way that we must for our salvation.

"He shall teach you all things." That is: every day and every night, according to the situation in which you find yourself, He will instruct you, advise you, and direct you in what you must think, say, and do. Therefore, ask God only for the Holy Spirit, and He will Himself bring all that you need in any given moment. When He has descended upon you, you will know all things and be capable of all that is needful.

"And bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." That is: do not fear that you will forget My teaching and My words. The Holy Spirit knows all that I know; so, when He is present with you, then all My teaching will be present in you together with Him. O Lord, the Holy Spirit, be pleased to descend upon us, not according to our merit but according to the merit of the Lord Jesus and according to Thine endless goodness. To Thee be glory and praise forever. Amen.

### **Upcoming Events 2019**

13 October: Octoberfest  
31 October: All Saints Party  
10 November: Parish Thanksgiving Meal

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