

The Confessor's Tongue for September 8, A. D. 2019

12th Sunday after Pentecost; Nativity of the Theotokos

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.

September 8: Nativity of the Theotokos

On the eighth day of the Church's new year, She celebrates the Great Feast of the Nativity of the Theotokos. The Feast has a pre-feast of one day and a post-feast of four days.

This feast marks the birth of Mary to her parents Joachim and Anna in their old age. The Church attributes great importance to the birth of Mary, the Mother of God, because it was through her and her acceptance of God's will that our Lord became man. This Feast occurs at the beginning of the Church year because Mary's birth marks the beginning of the process that led to our salvation. Without her cooperation and freely-given assent, the eternal Word of God would not have become man. The following hymn from Vespers of the Feast expresses much of the Feast's meaning:

Today is the beginning of joy for all the world; today the winds blow that bring tidings of salvation. The barrenness of our nature hath been loosed: for the barren woman is revealed as the mother of her, who, after bearing the Maker, still remained virgin. From her He who is God by nature taketh what is alien and maketh it His own; through her Christ worketh salvation for those gone astray in the flesh, He who loveth mankind and is the Deliverer of our souls.

The Feast marks the "beginning of joy," for through the godly inheritance of many generations, the way had been prepared for the birth of the woman who would be fitting to give birth to God in the flesh. God's plan awaited the coming of the suitable vessel who could bring His Son into the world, giving Him human flesh.

Man's nature, rendered barren by the curse, unable to fulfill his potential for achieving God's likeness, enslaved to sin, death, and the devil, is ended; for Anna, long barren, gives birth to the perfect flowering and offering of the human race, her pure daughter Mary, and Mary, through her purity and willing submission to God, permits "He who is God by nature" to take "what is alien" (i.e. human nature) and to make that created human nature His own. Through her, Christ comes to work salvation for man whom He loves.

The Troparion of the Feast, which expresses the external meaning of the Feast, gives the reason for the claim that Mary's birth is "the beginning of joy for all the world" which "hath brought joy to all the inhabited earth." Through her, Christ is born who delivers us from the curse and from death and pours out upon us blessing and eternal life.

The Kontakion of the Feast, which expresses the internal, or hidden, meaning of the Feast, describes the cosmic effects of Mary's birth: Adam and Eve are set free from death and corruption, and God's people are delivered from sin. A barren woman, Anna, bears a

woman, Mary, who sustains our lives, and she does this because of whom she bore: Christ our God.

As usual, we sing or say the troparion and kontakion of the feast at meals and as part of our daily prayers from the Vigil of the Feast through the Leavetaking on September 12th.

Troparion tone 4

Thy birth, O Theotokos, / hath brought joy to all the inhabited earth: / for from thee hath shone forth the Sun of Righteousness, Christ our God. / He hath loosed us from the curse and given the blessing; / He hath made death of no effect and bestowed on us eternal life.

Kontakion tone 4

O Undeiled, by thy holy nativity / Joachim and Anna were set free from the reproach of childlessness, / and Adam and Eve from the corruption of death. / Delivered from the guilt of sin, Thy people keep the feast as they sing unto thee: / The barren woman beareth the Theotokos who sustaineth our life.

The Sayings of St. Anthony the Great 37

Abba Anthony said, "Nine monks fell away after many labors and were obsessed with spiritual pride, for they put their trust in their own works and, being deceived, they did not give due heed to the commandment that says, 'Ask your father, and he will tell you.'" (Deuteronomy 32:7)

Saying 37 *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*

Commentary: It is often said that it is the condition in which Christ finds us at our death or at His return that will determine our eternal destiny. The best beginning to life in Christ will avail us nothing if we do not end well. Here Anthony speaks of nine monks who labored long and hard in prayer, fasting, vigils, poverty, almsgiving, labor and so on. Yet they fell away, and unless they later repented before the end, it was that state of fallenness that determined their destiny, not all their prior struggle and virtues. For this reason, at ever service in the Church, we pray for a Christian end to our lives and that we may end our life in repentance. Christian life begins with repentance, but unless it also ends in repentance, it will fall short of Christ.

Pride was the sin that brought about the fall of these zealot monks. Solomon writes in the Proverbs, "Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall." Pride is a luxury we cannot afford, for it will always bring us down. These monks looked at their lives and works, probably compared themselves to others who weren't doing as much, were deceived into thinking that they were better than they were, and began to trust in themselves and their own virtue.

Anthony explains in what form their pride manifested itself: they did not follow the commandment to "Ask your father, and he will tell you." Monks from early on have understood this to mean that they cut off their self will by submitting to

an abbot or an elder, and they do nothing without his blessing and they open their thoughts fully to him and hide nothing. These nine monks after considerable monastic experience had neglected to submit themselves fully to their abba. Perhaps it was small, seemingly insignificant matters that they did not ask him about at first, but as they neglected the command in little things, their neglect grew and with it the pride and self will that overthrew them.

The great nineteenth century abbot of Optina Monastery, St. Moses, had little tolerance for self-will in his monks. He expected them to ask for a blessing for everything they did and to do nothing on their own, knowing that self-will indulged would allow vainglory to grow in the soul and damage it.

“For example, Father Moses noticed on one occasion that the steward was giving certain direction on his own without asking Father Moses’s blessing, though he continued to come to the Superior daily for instructions. Without saying a word to him about this, the Father Archimandrite looked for an occasion to expose him in the normal course of events. While making the rounds of the monastery, he saw the steward, called him over, and asked, ‘There was a pile of trash lying over there, but I don’t see it any more—where did it go?’ ‘Oh, that—I told them to get rid of it, Batushka.’ ‘Why didn’t you ask me?—I had something in mind for that trash. You’re always doing things on your own without a blessing. You should ask before you do anything.’ And he went on so long about this insignificant pile of trash that it was brought home to the steward that the Superior kept track of everything, even though he might not say anything. And from then on, the steward was careful to refrain from doing things on his own....

We may not be under obedience to an elder as monks are, but we have our parents, our husbands, our wives, our employers, our teachers, our clergy who serve in limited ways a similar role. Neglecting to get counsel from the wise people God has put in our lives and failing to submit to our authorities (parents, spouse, etc.) is always a recipe for spiritual disaster.
Fr. Justin Frederick

A Christian & His Passions *St. Ignatius Brianchaninov, The Field*

A certain great ascetic said, “We must endure our own deficiencies in the same way as we bear the sins of others, and to be condescending to the soul’s sicknesses and incompleteness. At the same time, you must not become lazy, but rather must be zealous in the work of improving and perfecting the self.

“Don’t become angry or shocked when you see in yourself the working of some passion. When a passion rise up in you, fight against it, trying to rein it in and root it out with humility and prayer.”

The confusion and shock we feel when we find the action of a passion in us is proof that the person has not come to know himself.

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Every person is conceived and born in sin. Consequently, passions or sinful diseases of the body and soul are typical of our fallen nature.

But the passions are unnatural to our untainted human nature in the way that it was created. The passions are also unnatural to renewed human nature; they are only natural to fallen nature. Just as the symptoms of a disease of the body follow from a given ailment, sickness and death are natural to our body, which has lost its immortality and the qualities of eternity. Before our fall, immortality was natural to our body and disease and death were unnatural.

Passions are also called sins in the general meaning of the word. When the Apostle Paul speaks of sin that dwells in man, he means “sin” to be the general infection of evil in the whole human nature, in other words, passions. This state is called also a *carnal* state and a state of death.

Before the redemption of human nature by our Savior, mankind could not fight against passion. They forced him to listen to them; they lorded over him against even his will. With the help of holy baptism, the Christian himself casts off the yoke of sin; he received the power and ability to fight against the passions. Thus, the redeemed man, the renewed man, who has been settled in the spiritual Eden, the Church, is also given freedom. With his free will, he can act against the passions and defeat them in the Lord, or instead be subjected and enslaved to them. Thus, also in the earthly Eden, a choice was given to the first man—to be obedient to God’s commandment or to break it.

Every time you resist the insistent desires of the passions, they weaken in you. Constant resistance destroys the passion. Every time you fall to the passion, it becomes stronger, and constant enjoyment of the passions makes you their slave. *To be continued.*

Sayings of the Desert Fathers

Abba John the Dwarf prayed God to take his passions away from him so that he might become free from care. He went and told an old man this: ‘I find myself in peace, without an enemy,’ he said. The old man said to him, ‘Go, beseech God to stir up warfare so that you may regain the affliction and humility that you used to have, for it is by warfare that we make progress.’ So he besought God, and when warfare came, he no longer prayed that it might be taken away, but said, ‘Lord, give me strength for the fight.’

Upcoming Events 2019

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

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!