

The Confessor's Tongue for September 15, A. D. 2019

13th Sunday after Pentecost; Great Martyr Nicetas

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 14: Exaltation of the Cross

On the 14th of September, the Church celebrates the Great Feast of the Exaltation (Elevation) of the Precious Cross. The Feast is the only one of the Great Feasts that does not commemorate some occasion in the life of either Christ or His mother. The day is a strict fast day.

The Feast commemorates two events: the finding of the Cross by St. Helen, mother of the Emperor Constantine, and the return of the Cross and its elevation before the faithful in 629, fifteen years after it was taken from Jerusalem by Persian invaders.

But more than this, the Feast calls us to celebrate Christ's glory and victory won on the Cross. Christ's agonizing death on the Cross was victory over Satan and sin, and the death of death. Thus we find the Cross indeed to be "precious" and "life-creating" for us. Christ's life-giving death on the Cross transformed it from a feared symbol of Roman public execution of criminals to the symbol of Christ's great love for mankind and of His victory over evil and the evil one.

At Vigil, there is a special ceremony of venerating the Cross. During the Praises of Matins, the priest vests fully. During the Great Doxology, he censes around the altar table three times. When the "Holy God" at the end of the Doxology is sung, he bears the Cross out of the altar to before the Royal Doors, and then deposits it on an analogion in the midst of the nave. Everyone sings "Before Thy Cross we bow down in veneration, O Master, and Thy holy Resurrection, we glorify" three times, doing a full prostration each time. Then as special hymns to the cross are sung, each person comes to venerate the cross, prostrating twice, kissing the cross, and prostrating again. Having venerated the Cross, each person comes to be anointed with the blessed festal oil and to receive blessed Litia bread dipped in blessed wine.

The Church also honors Christ's Cross on August 1st, the Third Sunday of Great Lent, and every Friday (and Wednesday).

We celebrate the Feast through its Leave-taking, September 21. We may replace our usual prayers at meals with the Troparion (before) and the Kontakion (after), and use them in our daily prayers as well. All the faithful should participate in the services celebrating this Great Feast of the Church.

Troparion tone 1

O Lord, save Thy people / and bless Thine inheritance. / Grant victory to Orthodox Christians / over the enemy; / and by Thy Cross / preserve Thine estate.

Kontakion, tone 4

As Thou wast voluntarily crucified for our sake, / so grant mercy to those who are called by Thy name, O Christ God, / make all Orthodox Christians glad by Thy power, / granting them victories over the enemy, // by bestowing on them the invincible trophy, Thy weapon of peace.

The Sayings of St. Anthony the Great 38

This is the last installment of this series, which began last fall. This is the fourth time it has been serialized in this publication; the first time was in 2006 and it has run about every four years since then. Each time it runs, the author revises and expands it. The whole reason for this serious is Fr. Thomas Hopko's comment thirteen years ago: "The whole of the spiritual life is found in the 38 sayings of St. Anthony."

Abba Anthony said, "If he is able to, a monk ought to tell his elders confidently how many steps he takes and how many drops of water he drinks in his cell, in case he is in error about it."

Saying 38 Sayings of the Desert Fathers

Commentary: It is said that if anyone refuses to get spiritual guidance from others and relies on himself to figure things out, "he has chosen a fool" as his spiritual guide. The desert fathers had a deep awareness of the deceptiveness of the human heart: "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (Jeremiah 17:9) Man is very susceptible to delusion, especially in spiritual matters, and the root of delusion is pride and thinking one can manage on one's own without the help of others, especially those who are older and more experienced. Anthony takes the principle of getting counsel and submitting one's will to an experienced guide to a length that seems incredible to us—that a monk knows how many drops of water he drinks and how many steps he takes—so that his elder can correct him if he is in error about these details in his life, for if he is in error but doesn't ask, how shall he know?

In the parish, while we are not under this sort of obedience, we still make mistakes along these lines. We do not follow the counsel giving in Confession, relying on our own wish, will, and wisdom. We make important life decisions without consulting our spiritual father, whom we consult not because he runs our life, but as a check on our own willfulness, self-deception, and ready blindness to spiritual pitfalls along the way we wish to walk. For example, it is not unusual for a couple who want to marry come to the priest only after they are engaged and have set a date. "Can you marry us on June 3 at 3:00?" The wise Christian, rather, engages his confessor from the first inklings of interest, before becoming emotionally entangled or falling into sin. He seeks counsel all along the way to help him realize God's will for himself in the matter and avoid sinful pitfalls.

A self-reliant attitude that disdains counsel is pervasive in our time. Disregard for the aged, for those in authority (consider the slogan "question authority"), for the wise and experienced combined with reliance on oneself is like trying to see without using one's eyes. Read the Proverbs of Solomon and

see how many times we are advised to heed the instruction of our father and the teaching of our mother, to find victory from counsel and avoiding failure by relying on our own understanding. There we are also warned of the great harm we invite by despising the teaching and counsel of our elders. Anthony would have us avoid such harm.

Fr. Justin Frederick

A Christian & His Passions

St. Ignatius Brianchaninov, The Field, cont.

A Christian's struggle with his passion must reach the levels of crucifying the flesh with its passions and lusts. In experienced spiritual warriors, it must reach even to the spilling of blood—give your blood and receive the Spirit, say the Fathers. This means that only he who suffers in his body through willing or unwilling labors is capable of withstanding the sinful desires of the flesh, to suppress and silence them in himself. The body that is coddled and pampered is the house of the passions.

The God-Man who suffered and was crucified for us requires his followers and disciples to emulate his sufferings, to sacrifice all that is temporary for the eternal, all that is perishable for the undying. We must be disciples and followers of the God-Man by our very lives!

Ascetic labors are necessary for a Christian, but the labors themselves do not free a person from his passions. Only the right hand of the Almighty can free him, only the grace of the Holy Spirit.

Suppressing and mortifying the flesh through good works done with a careful following of the Gospel commandments gives a Christian true humility. True humility consists of complete self-denial, complete loyalty to God, and constant service to God. Such humility attracts divine grace into the soul. Divine grace, having illumined the soul, gives it spiritual senses, and the passions—these sinful feelings and desires of the flesh—end up powerless.

The effect of the passions that please the carnal man is heavy and painful for the spiritual man. He is filled with revulsion for them. Even the smallest appearance or arousal of passions cause him to flee from them as though they were hungry, wild animals or a murderer. The spiritual man runs to the haven of prayer, to the protection of the teachings of the Gospels, to the cover of God.

The soul that has not fulfilled the Gospel commandments and the body that has not done good deeds of virtue are not capable of becoming the temple of divine grace, the temple of the Holy Spirit.

The essence of asceticism is found in the fulfillment of the commandments. He who refuses to deny his body through work, fasting, vigils, and prayer, instead giving power over himself to his carnal mind-set, which feeds and encourages the passion, cannot become the doer of the divine commandments.

Only death can completely free even the saints of God from the influence of sin. The passions have no shame—they can even appear inside a person on his

deathbed. Even on the deathbed one must never stop being watchful over oneself. Believe in your body's dispassion only when it lies in the coffin.

The passions, which remain in the Christian, constantly force him to be on guard, constantly call him out to battle, and in so doing end up helping his spiritual progress. Thus evil, through our bad intentions, works for good, because of the all-wise Divine providence.

The heavy and massive millstone crushes the grains of wheat into flour, making tough, hard wheat good for baking bread. The heavy battle with the passions crushes the heart of man and his proud spirit, forcing him to acknowledge his own fallen state by vividly revealing these passions within him. It forces him to recognize the necessity of redemption, it destroys his trust in himself, and transfers all his hope to the Redeemer.

We must believe that the seeds of all passions are contained in the ancestral sin and that we have been born with an inclination toward all forms of sin. Thus, we must not be shocked by the appearance of any passion within us as though it were something unusual or strange.

Because of the unique characteristics of each body and soul, because of the effect of one's environment and the particular set of circumstances surrounding each life, a particular passion acts the most obviously in one person, and a different passion acts prominently in another person. One person is inclined toward love of money, another eats too much. One is inclined toward carnal lusts, another thirst for the useless honors of the world. Whoever has not entertained a particular passion should not think that it may not uncover itself in his heart later, when the time is more appropriate for its ripening.

One must therefore be constantly ready to do battle against all the passions. One must be especially vigilant against the passions that appear more often than others, those that most bother the particular person.

Passions that are natural to our corrupted human nature differ greatly from passions that each person willingly cultivates in himself. The strength of the latter is incomparably greater than the former. But repentance, that all-powerful medicine, adequately treats all diseases in the one who desires to use it.

In spiritual warfare, one must first arm oneself against the foundational passions. The sins that come as their consequence will wither and die on their own. He who has rejected carnal pleasures, the glory of men, the gathering of riches, a scattered life, will not fall to the sins of anger and sorrow. He will not be affected by either pride or envy. Instead, he will walk without hindrance along the path of the commandments of God toward salvation, toward the complete knowledge of God that is only open to those with a pure heart. *To be continued.*

Upcoming Events 2019

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

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!