

The Confessor's Tongue for November 10, A. D. 2019

21st Sunday after Pentecost; Apostles of the 70 Erastus, Olympas, Herodion, Sosipater

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 Commandments of Christ

"If ye love Me, keep My commandments." (John 14:15)

Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven.

Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly.

Matthew 6:1-4

As the Nativity Fast begins, we shall consider the commands of Christ from the Sermon on the Mount related to the three pillars of almsgiving, fasting, and prayer.

Christ's words in these four verses boil down to two simple commands, a negative one and a positive one. Do not give charitable gifts to be seen and praised by others. Do give them as secretly as possible so that your giving is not generally known to others.

Why should Christians give secretly? The answer is simple. Christ would have His disciples give in faith for His sake, not for the sake of praise from men. Much human activity, much of it good in itself, is driven by vainglory—the desire to be noticed by others and praised by them. Vainglory says, "Look at my, look what I did, look how good I am. Praise me. Acknowledge me." While vainglory can help keep a man from committing serious sins, it is a weak foundation on which to build a virtuous life. It reduces the field of charity only to what others will notice and praise. If there is no praise from men in it, the man motivated by vainglory will not do it. Yet the praise of men who only see a small portion of another's life is vain and is often little more than flattery. Only the praise of God is true. By keeping the command, the Christian learns to seek praise and reward from God alone. He frees himself from vainglory and sets himself to serve Christ out of love.

How often these simple, explicit commands of our Savior and Lord are transgressed in our parishes! To motivate people to give for earthly recognition, donors are listed in bulletins and nameplates are attached to the furnishings and decorations of the temple. Thus we teach people to give in order to receive glory from men and deprive them of a public reward from our Heavenly Father. Moreover, we disobey the explicit commandment of Christ our Lord! It does not matter how 'successful' such tactics may appear to be, they are simply wrong. Such tactics are not ultimately successful: they stunt the spiritual lives of those who are taught to give for the wrong reasons and they replace an investment with a guaranteed eternal return for an uncertain, ephemeral return in personal pride and glory from men.

Jesus uses hyperbole in saying "let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth". As much as possible, a Christian should not be aware that he is giving alms, and he certainly should not dwell upon it in his thoughts. It is also said that the left hand refers to vainglory and the right to almsgiving. Thus, when one gives, one is not to feed one's tendency to vainglory.

The focus of this passage is almsgiving, which is properly giving to others in need. Tithes are part of our worship. They represent the first part of what God gives us that we give back out of love and gratitude, seeking His

blessing on what remains in our hands. Strictly "tithes" means ten percent. Our tithes support the local church in which we worship and receive the sacraments. Offerings are gifts we chose to give over and above our tithes. Almsgiving is a manifestation of Christian love. It is a means of providing those who come to us in need for what is essential to sustain their lives. Our almsgiving begins in the family, where we take care of our own in need, especially our aging parents and any relatives who cannot take care of themselves. It begins also in the Church, as we help take care of our own. Traditionally, the church cared for Christian widows and orphans who had no other means of support. While children are the proper means of care and support. Having cared for her own, the Church also looks to the needs of those outside and applies the command of Christ "give to those who ask". This can take the form of shelters, of soup kitchens, of medical clinics and hospitals. Abiding in Christ, the Church has compassion on all, regardless of their personal worthiness or unworthiness.

Almsgiving is an essential part of Christian life. Many commands in the Old Covenant relate to the giving of alms and helping one's neighbor in need. Christ assumes the Christian will give alms in this passage, for He says "when thou doest alms" not "if". Thus the Christian must aim to live in such a way that he has means to give to those in need. This means cutting back on self-indulgent, frivolous expenditures and being content with necessities. It means not spending all one's income on oneself. Moreover, fasting makes almsgiving practically possible for everyone, regardless of means, for consuming less food on fast days provides each person with something to give to someone still less fortunate.

A Christian gives tithes, offerings, and alms out of obedience to his Savior and his love for Him. We can never repay Christ for what He has done for us, but we bring our gifts to Him in His House and give alms in His name out of deep gratitude. He knows our gifts and will reward us if we have not had reward from man; hence no one else need know. While Christ relates this explicitly to almsgiving, it seems that it is a wise policy to follow in all our giving.

November 9: St. Nectarius of Aegina

One of the great saints of the twentieth century, St. Nectarius is certainly one of the most popular, and, by his wonderworking, he has come to rival St. Nicholas.

Born Anastasius on October 1, 1846, he received monastic tonsure on November 7, 1875 at the Nea Moni Monastery on Chios, and the new name Lazarus. Two years later, he was ordained a deacon. On that occasion, his name was changed to Nectarius.

Later, when he was a priest, Fr Nectarius left Chios and went to Egypt. There he was elected Metropolitan of Pentapolis. Some of his colleagues became jealous of him because of his great virtues, because of his inspiring sermons, and because of everything else which distinguished St Nectarius from them.

Other Metropolitans and bishops of the Patriarchate of Alexandria became filled with malice toward the saint, so they told Patriarch Sophronius that Nectarius was plotting to become patriarch himself. They told the

patriarch that the Metropolitan of Pentapolis merely made an outward show of piety in order to win favor with the people. So the patriarch and his synod removed St Nectarius from his See. Patriarch Sophronius wrote an ambiguous letter of suspension which provoked scandal and speculation about the true reasons for the saint's removal from his position.

St Nectarius was not deposed from his rank, however. He was still allowed to function as a bishop. If anyone invited him to perform a wedding or a baptism he could do so, as long as he obtained permission from the local bishop.

St Nectarius bore his trials with great patience, but those who loved him began to demand to know why he had been removed. Seeing that this was causing a disturbance in the Church of Alexandria, he decided to go to Greece. He arrived in Athens to find that false rumors about him had already reached that city. His letter of suspension said only that he had been removed "for reasons known to the Patriarchate," and so all the slanders about him were believed.

Since the state and ecclesiastical authorities would not give him a position, the former Metropolitan was left with no means of support, and no place to live. Every day he went to the Minister of Religion asking for assistance. They soon tired of him and began to mistreat him.

One day, as he was leaving the Minister's office, St Nectarius met a friend whom he had known in Egypt. Surprised to find the beloved bishop in such a condition, the man spoke to the Minister of Religion and Education and asked that something be found for him. So, St Nectarius was appointed to be a humble preacher in the diocese of Vitinea and Euboea. The saint did not regard this as humiliating for him, even though a simple monk could have filled that position. He went to Euboea to preach in the churches, eagerly embracing his duties.

Yet even here, the rumors of scandal followed him. Sometimes, while he was preaching, people began to laugh and whisper. Therefore, the blameless one resigned his position and returned to Athens. By then some people had begun to realize that the rumors were untrue, because they saw nothing in his life or conversation to suggest that he was guilty of anything. With their help and influence, St Nectarius was appointed Director of the Rizarios Seminary in Athens on March 8, 1894. He was to remain in that position until December of 1908.

The saint celebrated the services in the seminary church, taught the students, and wrote several edifying and useful books. Since he was a quiet man, St Nectarius did not care for the noise and bustle of Athens. He wanted to retire somewhere where he could pray. On the island of Aegina he found an abandoned monastery dedicated to the Holy Trinity, which he began to repair with his own hands.

He gathered a community of nuns, appointing the blind nun Xenia as abbess, while he himself served as Father Confessor. Since he had a gift for spiritual direction, many people came to Aegina to confess to him. Eventually, the community grew to thirty nuns. He used to tell them, "I am building a lighthouse for you, and God shall put a light in it that will shine forth to the world. Many will see this light and come to Aegina." They did not understand what he was telling them, that he himself would be that beacon, and that people would come there to venerate his holy relics.

On September 20, 1920 the nun Euphemia brought an old man in black robes, who was obviously in pain, to the Aretaieion Hospital in Athens. This was a state hospital for

the poor. The intern asked the nun for information about the patient.

"Is he a monk?" he asked.

"No, he is a bishop."

The intern laughed and said, "Stop joking and tell me his name, Mother, so that I can enter it in the register."

"He is indeed a bishop, my child. He is the Most Reverend Metropolitan of Pentapolis."

The intern muttered, "For the first time in my life I see a bishop without a panagia or cross, and more significantly, without money."

Then the nun showed the saint's credentials to the astonished intern who then admitted him. For two months St Nectarius suffered from a disease of the bladder. At ten thirty on the evening of November 8, 1920, he surrendered his holy soul to God. He died in peace at the age of seventy-four.

In the bed next to St Nectarius was a man who was paralyzed. As soon as the saint had breathed his last, the nurse and the nun who sat with him began to dress him in clean clothing to prepare him for burial at Aegina. They removed his sweater and placed it on the paralyzed man's bed. Immediately, the paralytic got up from his bed, glorifying God.

St Nectarius was buried at the Holy Trinity Monastery on Aegina. Several years later, his grave was opened to remove his bones (as is the custom in Greece). His body was found whole and incorrupt, as if he had been buried that very day.

Word was sent to the Archbishop of Athens, who came to see the relics for himself. Archbishop Chrysostomos told the nuns to leave them out in the sun for a few days, then to rebury them so that they would decay. A month or two after this, they opened the grave again and found the saint incorrupt. Then the relics were placed in a marble sarcophagus.

Several years later, the holy relics dissolved, leaving only the bones. The saint's head was placed in a bishop's mitre, and the top was opened to allow people to kiss his head.

St Nectarius was glorified by God, since his whole life was a continuous doxology to the Lord. Both during his life and after his death, St Nectarius has performed thousands of miracles, especially for those suffering from cancer. There are more churches dedicated to St Nectarius than to any other modern Orthodox saint.

On Anger

The passion of anger (*orge*) proceeds from the soul's irascible power (*thumos*) and includes all the pathological manifestations of aggression. As we have seen, God bestowed the irascible power on man at his creation and [it] is part of his very nature. Its function—according to the Creator's plan—was supposed to be to allow man to fight against the temptations and the Tempter and to avoid sin and evil: thus was the definition of its normal use and natural end-goal in the beginning. As we have shown, however, man turned this away from its end-goal through sin and diverted his anger against his neighbor, thus making a contranatural use of it. It is this contranatural use of the irascible power that constitutes the passion of anger in all its forms, turning it into a sickness of the soul. This point has been sufficiently developed in the first part of our study, so that we shall not return to it here.

Anger appears as a passion any time it takes one's neighbor as its object. Consequently, no grounds of any kind can justify it. It is fitting to become angry against the evil one, but not against the man who falls victim to him,

for, as the Apostle says: "We are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places." One must fight against sin, and not against him who commits it: "Hate the illness, but not him who is ill," recommends St. Syncletica.

The exteriorized and violent displays which we normally classify under the term "anger" and which are usually episodic and in particular affect certain people with a so-called "quick temper," is not the only component in the ascetical tradition's understanding of "anger." The Fathers think of it as a passion just as developed as the others, and likewise use the term to cover all forms of aggression—exteriorized or internalized, open or hidden, overt or subtle—[of which] man is capable and which generally take one's neighbor as their object. Thus, besides what we usually call anger, constituting its most exterior, visible, and violent manifestation—the acute form of the passion in which "the *thumos* arises and starts to move"—the Fathers distinguish resentment (*menis*), which is a sustained anger continuing in a more interiorized and hidden form and founded on the remembrance of some suffered offence, humiliation, or injustice; rancor (*mnesikakia*); hatred (*misos, kotos*); and also all forms of grudges, hostility, animosity, enmity—in short, of wickedness. Bad moods, acrimony, forms developed to a greater or lesser degree of irritation (*oksukholia*) and manifestation of impatience are all part of this passion. Additionally, indignation, mockery, scoffing, and irony with regard to people are linked to it; one can further mention feelings—even barely developed ones—of ill-will, ranging from the coarsest kind (which translates to spitefulness and the overt will to cause harm) to the most subtle (consisting on the one hand in rejoicing—even for the briefest moment—in some misfortune or disappointment affecting one's neighbor and on the other in not being saddened at the woes befalling him or even at no rejoicing in his happiness). The opposite of these oft-times very fine, interior, and unnoticed feelings—the extreme forms of violence such as various rivalries, battles, acts of aggression, fights, and even crimes or wars—can likewise spring from the passion of anger as it is broadly understood within the ascetical tradition. One sees then that this passion includes a vast gamut of human states and reactions and one understands that it can affect fallen man almost permanently, just like the other passions.

The Fathers note that man experiences in every form of anger a certain pleasure that causes him to become attached to it. St. John Chrysostom remarks:

He cares little about the evil that the soul does to itself; it resolves to do it and makes of it a kind of pleasure that must be satisfied at all costs. Indeed, this blaze of the heart is not without a certain pleasure, tyrannizing the soul more harshly than any other pleasure.

St. John Climacus mentions regarding the remembrance of wrongs and rancor: "Remembrance of wrongs is...a nail stuck in the soul, a pleasureless feeling cherished in the sweetness of bitterness." But here there is a secondary relation to pleasure that allows us to understand how pleasure can maintain anger (and, in particular, rancor), not how it conditions its appearance. The source of the various manifestations of this passion can be grasped through the preliminary and more fundamental link between pleasure and anger. Evagrius, taking up the words of another Father, sates: "I know that anger constantly fights for pleasures." St. Maximus and St. Dorotheus likewise see a fundamental cause of anger in the

love of pleasures (*philobedonia*). Anger is born in man not only when he is saddened at not being able to obtain the pleasure he seeks, but also—and principally—when he feels, fears, or finds himself deprived of a pleasure in which he once delighted and "when love of self dines itself thus murdered by suffering." Anger then turns against the person who is or seems to be the cause of this frustration—or who at least threatens to be or appears to do so. This is why Evagrius defines anger as "a boiling and stirring up of wrath against one who has given injury—or is thought to have done so."

Sensual pleasure correlates to sensual desire, so the desire for sensible goods and the attachment to them are also fundamental causes of anger. This fact allows us to understand the other monastic affirmation cited by Evagrius: "I have this reason for putting aside pleasure—that I might cut off the pretext for growing angry." Evagrius himself says elsewhere: "Armed as you are against anger do not submit to any powerful desire. For it is these which provide fuel for anger." St. Isaac the Syrian writes in the same vein: "If we attach ourselves to sensible things (these things that arouse aggression against nature)...we change...natural gentleness into savagery." Here we see an echo of St. James' teaching: "What causes wars, and what causes fightings among you? Is it not your passions that are at war in your members?"

Man falls into the passion of anger through love of material goods and the pleasures they procure, and because he prefers them to spiritual goods and delights. St. Maximus says this clearly: "We have preferred profane and material things to the commandment of love, and because we have attached ourselves to them we fight against men, whereas we ought to prefer the love of all men to all visible things and even to our own body." He explains further:

Because we are taken by love of material things and the attraction of pleasure, and because we prefer all this to the commandment, we are unable to love those who hate us; rather, it happens that we oppose those who love us because of these very things.

As we have seen, the love for sensible things and their correlative pleasures manifests itself in the passions in various ways. According to a classic ascetical understanding there are three great categories of passions or three main types of attachment to sensible reality which can constitute a pretext for anger in man if he finds himself deprived of the pleasure they procure or threatened by their loss or hindered in their attainment: the attachment to food (the passion of gluttony); the attachment to money, riches, and more generally speaking, material objects (passions of love of money and greed); and the attachment to oneself (passions of vainglory and pride).

These, however, are only the most important, most frequent, and widest causes of the passion; anger can have a great number of causes, such that it is difficult to delimit them in simple manner. St. John Climacus points this out, using once again the language of the spiritual physician:

As bodily fever is one thing, but the causes of this are not one but many, so also the boiling up of anger and the movement of our other passions have many and various causes. That is why it is impossible to prescribe one identical rule for them. Instead, I would rather suggest that each of those who are sick should most carefully seek out his own particular cure. The first step in the cure should be a diagnosis of the cause of each disease; for when this is discovered, the patients will obtain the right cure from God's care and from their spiritual physicians.

Besides the previously mentioned passions, one must also include among the primary causes of anger the passion of lust as well as an excess of bodily rest. This last etiology can be understood in like manner as the one constituted by intemperance. By taking too much rest as well as feeding

the body over-abundantly, one furnishes the body with a wealth of energy which can easily be used to strengthen the soul's aggressive power; simultaneously, one relaxes the attention of his mind and the tension of the will, which control and direct the soul. But even this is just one reason among man.

Judging from all the sources of anger that we have presented, it is certain that vainglory and pride are the most fundamental causes. St. Mark the Ascetic writes on the subject of hatred: "This sickness affects those who pursue the first place among honors." More generally on the topic of anger, he writes: "Pride chiefly consolidates and strengthens it." Man is moved to different forms of angers when he is injured in his love for self and when he feels humiliated, offended, and discredited (especially regarding the conceited image he has of himself and which he expects others to have of him in return), with the result that what appears to be the external cause and real motivator of anger is in fact only the revealer or catalyst of an anger proceeding directly from the subject himself and from his pride. St. Basil, for example, notes the following: "It is not words that hurts us, but rather our pride which rebels against us and the high opinion we have of ourselves." The contrary is proven by the fact that the humble man remains peaceful and gentle even when violently attacked. Through anger, rancor, and the desire for revenge, man seeks to restore—both in his own eyes and in those of him who has offended him—his own image to which he is attached and which he feels has been disparaged.

These latter considerations in no way disagrees with what we have said previously with regard to the importance of the role pleasure plays in anger. As we shall see in the following, man takes from vainglory and pride a certain pleasure that finds itself threatened, diminished, and even eliminated by offenses and humiliations of every sort. Here again, anger appears as a rebellious reaction faced with the loss of a pleasure; but even more often it is a defensive reaction aimed at preserving a threatened pleasure or restoring a lost one.

As with all the other passions, the Fathers consider anger in all its form so be a sickness of the soul. "It is a sickness that disgust our nature as much as a bodily illness does," says St. John Chrysostom. By reason of the disturbances constituted by anger, the passion is considered above all as a form of madness. St. John Chrysostom states: "There is no difference between anger and madness." He says further: "The angry man absolutely resembles a mad man." For his part, St. Basil notes that "anger is a momentary madness."

In its acute and violent manifestations—especially when taking the form of fury—anger obviously merits being considered as a kind of madness. St. John Climacus does not hesitate to characterize it as spiritual epilepsy. St. Gregory the Great in presenting a more precise table of the paroxysmal manifestation of this passion clearly shows that these symptoms permit one to equate anger with a form of madness:

Pricked by the thorn of anger, the heart throbs, the body trembles, the tongue stutters, the blood rushes to the face, the eyes sparkle: man becomes unrecognizable to those who know him. The mouth brings forth sounds, but the intellect no longer knows what it is saying. So how does a man who is no longer aware of what he is saying differ from a madman in agony? It also often happens that anger descends even to the fists, and that it rises vehemently in accordance with the degree of his insanity. The mind no longer has any control, for it has become the plaything of an alien power; and if this

rage acts outwardly upon his members by making them swing blows, it is because inwardly this rage captivates the soul, which ought to be its master.

The Fathers often similarly show how the man seized by these violent forms of anger resembles someone possessed, and there it is fitting, moreover to recall the direct link they see between certain agitated forms of madness and demonic possession.

If anger is related to and even identified with certain forms of madness and possession, this is because one finds in both cases a large number of similar symptoms. Let us examine in detail this pathology that is revealed especially clearly in the most violent forms of anger, but which is also found to various degrees in other manifestations of this passion.

On the bodily level, anger calls forth a characteristic agitation easily visible from the exterior. St. John Chrysostom and above all St. Basil give us a typical description of this reaction comparable to the one presented by St. Gregory the Great, which we have quoted at length above. Within the body, anger translates into various physiological disorders. Its suppressed and chronic forms likewise imply such afflictions. All these disorders that upset the usual functioning of the body damage its health. "Anger corrupts the body"; "I have known several [people] whom anger has made ill." St. John Climacus, for his part, notes the effects this passion can have on the digestive system, giving rise either to anorexia or bulimia.

But above all, it is in the soul that anger produces disorders that allow it to be considered as a grave illness of the soul and as a form of madness. "The incensive power usually troubles and confuses the soul more than any other passion," notes St. Diadochus of Photike, and following him St. John Climacus. St. Gregory the Great on his part writes that anger "perturbs the soul and, so to speak, rends it asunder and hacks it up," "it casts confusion into it." St. Mark the Ascetic remarks: "[Anger] lays waste the entire soul, and throws it into confusion." St. John Chrysostom speaks in like terms: "It ruins the soul...it upsets its normal state from top to bottom." He also states that anger deforms the soul, "since it mars, we see, not the body only, but the very health likewise of the soul is corrupted by it."

The troubles engendered within the soul by the passion of anger are manifold. First of all, anger disrupts the use of reason to the point of seeming to exclude it. "Aggression tyrannically destroys the exercise of reason and causes thought to depart from the law of nature," writes St. Maximus. St. Basil on his part notes: "This passion banishes reason; it forbids man to use his reasoning."

With "his reason being entombed in drunkenness and gloom," man becomes incapable of properly judging things. Thus St. John Cassian writes: "As long as anger lurks in our hearts and blinds our mind's eye with its evil darkness, we are incapable of acquiring the discretion to decide rightly...or even to perceive the true spiritual light, for "my eye is troubled with wrath"... We shall have no hope of acquiring mature deliberation...for "a passionate man acts without deliberation." from *Jean-Claude Larchet, Therapy of Spiritual Illnesses, vol. 1, pp. 203-211*

Upcoming Events 2019

15 November: Nativity Fast Begins
21 November: Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple
31 December—1 January: All-Night Vigil

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!