

The Confessor's Tongue for March 29, A. D. 2020

5th Sunday of Lent: Sunday of St. Mary of Egypt

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."

Ye have heard that it hath been said, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy.' But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you, that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven. . . Matthew 5:43-44

Jesus Christ gives the one born again in Him the inestimable privilege of calling the eternal God, his Creator, "Father", and the power to become a child of God not in name alone but in character. And what is God's character? Christ tells us of His Father "He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust" (Matt 5:45). The Apostle Paul adds "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). In other words, God indiscriminately loves man made in His image, each one alike, and Christ commands us to do likewise. The Christian may not limit himself to loving his friends and relatives but must extend his love to his enemies if he is to take on the character of his heavenly Father.

"Who is my enemy?" one might ask. Our enemies are not only those who have set themselves against us, who hate us, who try to harm us, but also those with whom we are angry, who have offended us, who have not treated us as we would like, who make life difficult for us, whom we are disinclined to like, those whom we would never choose as friends. In short, it is anyone whom we wish 'would just go away.' And we are to love them! This love is not in essence a warm feeling we somehow concoct towards them like a person who receives a hideous gift forces himself to find words of thanks to offer the giver. Rather, as Christ says, it consists in choosing to do good to one who does us wrong: instead of returning curse for curse, we return a blessing; instead of returning hatred with the same, we do good to the one who hates us; instead of seeking the damnation of those who abuse and persecute us, we pray for them. Love of enemy consists in such discrete actions in response to enmity.

Evil is not effectively overcome by evil. As St. Paul commands the Romans, "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good" (12:21). We are to overcome any evil they may do to us by doing good to them in return. Though returning violence for violence and hate for hate may produce an armed truce, true victory comes when the enemy's enmity is disarmed and through our doing good he is won over as a friend. This is the victory Christ came to achieve in each person at enmity with God.

Moreover, to use evil means, to curse, to hate, to take revenge, to do harm in response to enmity is to be defeated by evil. It enslaves us to hatred, to bitterness, to anger—in short, to sin—and it does harm to our souls. Thus Christ gives the command not only to accomplish reconciliation and friendship with an enemy but also to keep our hearts free from enslaving passion.

By showing love to our enemies in this way, we become children of our heavenly Father, for He is love and shows love to all, whether they receive it gratefully or scornfully reject it. As a further incentive to embark upon this path, consider the teaching of a desert father who insisted that if you want your prayers answered speedily, pray fervently for your enemies before you pray for yourself, and your request will be quickly met.

St. Silouan of Athos (+1938) considered love for enemies to be the criterion of whether or not a man has true faith and true communion with God and a sign of the real action of grace in his life (*St. Silouan the Athonite, p. 114*). He would often say, "The Holy Spirit is love, and He gives the soul strength to love her enemies. And he who does not love his enemies does not know God." This work of loving enemies is beyond our natural strength. But if we are willing to obey the command and ask Christ for strength to do it, He will give it.

May God grant us much grace to love our enemies and so become like our Father in heaven. *Fr. Justin Frederick*

The Eight Deadly Vices from St. John Cassian Conference 5

Here is a summary of St. John's valuable Fifth Conference. Quotations are St. John's own words.

1. Gluttony. There are three kinds of gluttony: eating before the scheduled hour, eating to excessive fullness, and being a picky eater, desiring 'refined and delicate foods.

2. Fornication. There are three kinds of fornication: sexual relations with another person not one's spouse, self-abuse or masturbation ('impurity' in Scripture), and indulgence in lustful looks, thoughts, and fantasies.

3. Avarice, or Love of Money. There are three kinds of Avarice: the first hinders us from giving away wealth and property, the second persuades us to take back what we have given away, and the third 'demands that we long for and acquire what in fact we did not possess before.

4. Anger. There are three kinds of anger: an internal blazing up called *thumos* in Greek, a breaking out in word and deed called *orge* in Greek, and a long-simmering resentment called *menis*.

5. Sadness. There are two kinds of sadness. "The first is begotten once anger has ceased, or from some hurt that has been suffered or from a desire that has been thwarted and brought to naught. This can include a sadness, or envy, that others have what one does not possess oneself. The other comes from an unreasonable mental anguish or despair.

6. Accidia (Acedia). There are two kinds of acedia: one puts us to sleep (sloth), so we don't work; the other causes us to give up our work.

7. Vainglory (Boastfulness). There are two basic kinds of vainglory: feeling lifted up and wanting to be noticed because of externals (possessions, appearance, ability), and desiring the empty praise of others for our spiritual and hidden virtues and deeds. Sometimes, however, vainglory has the benefit of restraining us from the destructive sins of fornication.

8. Pride. There are two kinds of pride: the first is bodily (carnal), thinking ourselves superior to others over physical things and our own appearance and ability. The second is spiritual and more dangerous, for it attacks those who have made progress in the virtues, leading them to look down on those who have not made their progress and to judge them.

All other sins, and their number is legion, arise out of these basic eight.

In comparison, the "Seven Deadly Sins" in the West, dating to St. Pope Gregory the Great in 590, differ just a bit.

1. Lust
2. Gluttony
3. Avarice (Greed)
4. Acedia (Sloth)
5. Anger
6. Envy
7. Pride

Sins of concupiscence (the soul's power to desire), or appetite, include, Gluttony, Fornication, and Avarice; sins of irascibility (another power of the soul properly directed against evil) include Anger; while sins of the intellect, or *nous*, include Pride, Vainglory, Acedia, and Sadness.

Some of these vices are natural, in the sense that they are tied to natural functions of the body. Others are unnatural, in that they have no necessary place in us. Natural vices include gluttony and fornication. The others are unnatural. Some such as gluttony and fornication require bodily action to be accomplished; others reside in the soul or mind alone without the body, such as pride and vainglory. Some, such as avarice and anger, are motivated from without; others, such as acedia and sorrow, are motivated from within.

Carnal passions, connected to the body, require a two-fold remedy involving both soul and body. Those passions which are spiritual, "those that, having arisen at the prompting of the soul alone, not only give no pleasure to the flesh but even inflict it with serious sufferings and merely provide the sick soul with the

food of a miserable enjoyment", admit "the medicine of a simple heart" to cure them. *Fr. Justin*

On Almsgiving

St. Isaac the Syrian, Homily 4

If you have something above your daily needs, give it to the poor, and then go with boldness to offer your prayers, that is, to converse with God as a son with his Father. Nothing can bring the heart so near to God as almsgiving, and nothing brings such serenity to the mind as voluntary poverty. It is better for you to be called an ignoramus by the many because of the generosity of your hands and your measureless liberality because of your fear of God, that to be called wise and sound of mind by reason of your niggardliness. If someone on horseback should stretch out his hand and ask alms of you, do not refuse him, for at that moment he is certainly in need, just as one of the destitute. When you give, give generously, with a joyous countenance, and give more than you are asked for, since it is said: 'Send forth thy morsel of bread toward the face of the poor man, and soon you will find your recompense.' Do not separate the rich from the poor, nor try to discriminate the worthy from the unworthy, but let all men be equal in your eyes for a good deed. In this way you can draw even the unworthy toward the good, since the soul is easily led to the fear of God by means of bodily things. The Lord ate at table with publicans and harlots and did not alienate the unworthy, that He might in this way bring all to the fear of God, and that through bodily things they would approach the spiritual. For this reason, and especially because they are your brethren, of your very nature, and have erred from the truth unwittingly, deem every man equally worthy of benefaction and honor, be he a Jew, and unbeliever, or a murderer.

St. Isaac the Syrian

God's commandments excel all the treasures of the world. A man who has gained inward possession of them finds the Lord in them. The man who always goes to bed with rumination upon God has gained Him as his Chamberlain; and he who desires the fulfilment of God's will, will have the angels of heaven as his guides. A man who fears sins will traverse a terrible passage without stumbling, and at a time of darkness he will find light before him and within himself. The Lord carefully watches the steps of the man who fears sins, and God's mercy forestalls him when he slips. A man who considers his transgressions to be slight, falls into worse sins than he formerly committed, and he will pay his penalty sevenfold. Sow your alms in humility, and you will reap mercy at the judgment.
From *Homily 5*

Upcoming Events 2019

13-18 April: Holy Week
19 April: Holy Pascha, the Feast of Feasts

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!