

The Confessor's Tongue for January 24, A. D. 2021

33rd Sunday after Pentecost; St. Anthony the Great

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 Preciousness of Time

Bishop Jeremiah the Recluse

What is the most valuable thing on earth? Time. Because it is in time that all is acquired and in time that all the works of humans are accomplished. If you have food, clothing, enormous houses, glory, and knowledge—if you have absolutely everything—and yet do not have time, you have nothing. What is worst of all for men on earth? The loss of time. For having lost our time, we can no longer acquire anything nor have anything; by wasting time we lose everything, we lose even ourselves.

Another question: what do people treasure the least? What do they randomly squander the most? It is time as well. The majority live carelessly, according to accepted tradition, from day to day, year to year, not concerning themselves with how they have wasted their days and years, how they have spent their lives. We often lament the loss of frivolous things, yet we have neither regret nor sorrow when we waste not some small change, but precious minutes of time. That is why the Holy Apostle Paul, in warning us against the vain waste of time, commands us wisely to dispose of every minute of our lives: *See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil.* By saying 'redeeming the time,' the Apostle shows that it is with time that true good is purchased, just as all things needed for physical life are bought with money and that, likewise, the proper use of time is very similar to the use of money in expert hands. The wise householder does not waste a single penny. He properly budgets the entire sum he has, and allots a goal for every penny. He properly budgets the entire sum he has, and allots a goal for every penny. This is exactly how we should manage our time. We must properly budget it; every hour and minute should be assigned for some good goal. Each day should be spent in good deeds that benefit our neighbor and us. For it is not for idleness, nor for frivolous activity, that the Lord has assigned each minute of our life, even if it were to last a thousand years on this earth.

There is a story that has been told that can be beneficial for us to consider here:

The story holds that some time ago Satan called together the entire host of the lower realm because he wished to send another of his diabolical assistants to earth.

When they had all assembled, he asked them: "Who is willing to go to earth to assist me with the destruction of souls?"

A certain demon volunteer to go. "And what is your plan for assisting me with the destruction of souls?" asked Satan/

"I will tell them that there is no hell," replied the demon.

"No, we have tried that, it will never do," Satan said. "For it turns out that within the heart of every human there is a sense of justice; consequently, no matter how much they try to deny it, or are otherwise taught, humanity still senses that there must be a state of existence in opposition to God. They will never be convinced beyond question that there is not hell. Your plan will surely fail."

A second demon said, "I will go."

Again Satan asked, "What is your plan for assisting me with the destruction of souls?"

"I will tell humans that there is no heaven."

"No," Satan replied again. "We have tried that also, and it is no better. For as we know all too well, every human retains within himself something of the image of God his Creator; hence, while they often wish they could deny it, they will never fully be convinced that there is no heaven. No, your plan will not work."

A third demon came forward.

Satan asked this one as well, "What is your plan for assisting me with the destruction of souls?"

"I will tell them," said the demon, "that there is no hurry, that they have all the time in the world."

"Go!" shouted Satan, "for your plan will surely succeed. Every human has a sense of both heaven and hell, but if we can keep them from considering their eternal destiny, then hell will certainly grab them before they take hold of heaven."

Orthodox Life, July—December 2011

24 January: St. Xenia of St. Petersburg

Saint Xenia lived during the eighteenth century, but little is known of her life or of her family. She passed most of her life in Petersburg during the reigns of the empresses Elizabeth and Catherine II.

Xenia Grigorievna Petrova was the wife of an army officer, Major Andrew Petrov. After the wedding, the couple lived in Saint Petersburg. Saint Xenia became a widow at the age of twenty-six when her husband suddenly died at a party. She grieved for the loss of her husband, and especially because he died without Confession or Holy Communion.

Once her earthly happiness ended, she did not look for it again. From that time forward, Xenia lost interest in the things of this world, and followed the difficult path of foolishness for the sake of Christ. The basis for this strange way of life is to be found in the first Epistle to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 1:18-24, 1 Cor. 2:14, 1 Cor. 3:18-19). The Lord strengthened her and helped her to bear sorrow and misfortune patiently for the next forty-five years.

She started wearing her husband's clothing, and insisted that she be addressed as "Andrew Feodorovich." She told people that it was she, and not her husband, who had died. In a certain sense, this

was perfectly true. She abandoned her former way of life and experienced a spiritual rebirth. When she gave away her house and possessions to the poor, her relatives complained to the authorities. After speaking to Xenia, the officials were convinced that she was in her right mind and was entitled to dispose of her property as she saw fit. Soon she had nothing left for herself, so she wandered through the poor section of Petersburg with no place to lay her head. She refused all assistance from her relatives, happy to be free of worldly attachments.

When her late husband's red and green uniform wore out, she clothed herself in rags of those colors. After a while, Xenia left Petersburg for eight years. It is believed that she visited holy Elders and ascetics throughout Russia seeking instruction in the spiritual life. She may have visited Saint Theodore of Sanaxar (February 19), who had been a military man himself. His life changed dramatically when a young officer died at a drinking party. Perhaps this officer was Saint Xenia's husband. In any case, she knew Saint Theodore and profited from his instructions.

Saint Xenia eventually returned to the poor section of Petersburg, where she was mocked and insulted because of her strange behavior. When she did accept money from people it was only small amounts, which she used to help the poor. She spent her nights praying without sleep in a field outside the city. Prayer strengthened her, and in her heart's conversation with the Lord she found the support she needed on her difficult path.

When a new church was being built in the Smolensk cemetery, Saint Xenia brought bricks to the site. She did this in secret, during the night, so that no one would know.

Soon her great virtue and spiritual gifts began to be noticed. She prophesied future events affecting the citizens of Petersburg, and even the royal family. Against her will, she became known as someone pleasing to God, and nearly everyone loved her. They said, "Xenia does not belong to this world, she belongs to God." People regarded her visits to their homes or shops as a great blessing. Saint Xenia loved children, and mothers rejoiced when the childless widow would stand and pray over a baby's crib, or kiss a child. They believed that the blessed one's kiss would bring that child good fortune.

Saint Xenia lived about forty-five years after the death of her husband, and departed to the Lord at the age of seventy-one. The exact date and circumstances of her death are not known, but it probably took place at the end of the eighteenth century. She was buried in the Smolensk cemetery.

By the 1820s, people flocked to her grave to pray for her soul, and to ask her to intercede with God for them. So many visitors took earth from her grave that it had to be replaced every year. Later, a chapel was built over her grave.

Those who turn to Saint Xenia in prayer receive healing from illness, and deliverance from their

afflictions. She is also known for helping people who seek jobs. oca.org

The Commandments of Christ

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

Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up. Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.. Matthew 15:13, 14 (62)

This command of Christ is scarcely likely to come to mind in a discussion of His commands, but it retains importance for us today. But how can it be otherwise? Every word of Christ is true and remains. As He said, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away" (Mt 24:35).

"Leave them" or "leave them alone" Christ commands his disciples, who brought Him word that the Pharisees were offended that Jesus had called them hypocrites and exposed their hypocrisy. This means that that should let them do what they want and not to be troubled by them anymore. The context of this command is important, as always. Here is the full passage from Matthew 14:1-20.

Then came to Jesus scribes and Pharisees, which were of Jerusalem, saying, Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread.

But he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition? For God commanded, saying, Honour thy father and mother: and, He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death. But ye say, Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, It is a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; And honour not his father or his mother, he shall be free. Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition. Ye hypocrites, well did Isaiah prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.

And he called the multitude, and said unto them, Hear, and understand: Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man.

Then came his disciples, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the Pharisees were offended, after they heard this saying? But he answered and said, Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up. Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.

Then answered Peter and said unto him, Declare unto us this parable. And Jesus said, Are ye also yet without understanding? Do not ye yet understand, that whatsoever entereth in at the mouth goeth into the belly, and is cast out into the draught? But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: These are the things which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man.

The Pharisees accused Jesus's disciples of breaking their tradition of washing their hands before eating. This was not commanded in the law, but was a tradition what had been developed by their elders. Jesus accuses them of breaking God's law with their later tradition of excusing children from using their

goods to support their elderly parents if the children had consecrated those goods to the service of the temple. They apparently could use the goods while they lived but upon death they would go to the temple. Here Jesus reminds the scribes and Pharisees that God's law supersedes their traditions and names them "hypocrites".

Jesus's words offended the Pharisees, and His disciples reported this to Him. Here He delivers the command: "Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind." The disciples are not to be governed by the Pharisees' sense of offense. They are not to engage with proud hypocrites who do not have the humility to learn.

So too for us. Many in the world declare themselves "offended" by the Truth. While we Christians are not to seek to offend others, we must know that sinners find truth offensive, and giving offense to them will be unavoidable. We are not to allow them to control us by their sense of being offended. Being offended is always a sign of pride, and pride hinders true learning. Rather, we are to let them alone; do not engage them if they show themselves unable or unwilling to learn. Our time is better spent elsewhere. *Fr. Justin*

St. Cyril & the Saracens

In the Saracen [Sarcen: Muslim subjects of the Caliph] encampment, they asked St. Cyril: "How can Christians wage war and at the same time keep Christ's commandment to pray to God for their enemies?" To this, St. Cyril replied: "If two commandments were written in one law and given to men for fulfilling, which man would be a better follower of the law: the one who fulfilled one commandment or the one who fulfilled both?" The Saracens replied: "Undoubtedly, he who fulfills both commandments." St. Cyril continued: "Christ our God commands us to pray to God for those who persecute us and even to do good to them, but He also said to us, *Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends*. That is why we bear the insults that our enemies cast at us individually and why we pray to God for them. However, as a society, we defend one another and lay down our lives, so that you would not enslave our brethren, would not enslave their souls with the bodies, and would not destroy them in both body and soul." *Prolog*

On Devoutness

St. Paisios (+1994)

– Geronda, what is devoutness?

– Devoutness is the fear of God, modesty, spiritual sensitivity. A devout person may strain to make great efforts, but this straining drips honey into his heart. It does not turn his life into a martyrdom; it is an enjoyable experience. The actions of a devout person are refined and careful. He strongly feels the presence of God, the Angels, and the Saints. He senses his guardian Angel nearby, watching over him.

He always keeps in mind that his body is a Temple of the Holy Spirit, and lives a simple, pure, and sanctified life. His behaviour is always well thought-out, marked by modesty and awareness of all that is sacred. For instance, he is careful not to turn his back on the holy Icons. He does not place the Sacred Scripture or any spiritual book where he sits, and so on. If he looks upon an Icon, his heart flutters and his eyes flow with tears. Even when he merely sees the name of Christ written down somewhere, he will bow reverently and kiss it, his soul overflowing with sweetness. Even for a small piece of newspaper thrown to the ground and bearing the name of Christ or simply "Church of the Holy Trinity", a devout person will bend down, pick it up, and kiss it with reverence, feeling sadness to see it thrown away like that.

– Geronda, is piety one thing and devoutness another? [*With the term piety the Elder refers to the observation of external forms of devotion which have no inner correspondence.*]

– Piety is a perfume, while devoutness is incense. For me the greatest virtue is devoutness, because the devout person attracts the Grace of God, becomes a receiver of Grace, and the Grace of God remains naturally with him. Consequently, divine Grace reveals the devout, and everyone respects and loves him, whereas the impudent are avoided by young and all.

– Geronda, how can I acquire devoutness?

– The Fathers say that to acquire devoutness one must associate with devout people and observe how they behave. When Saint Paisios the Great was asked, "How can I acquire the fear of God?" he answered, "You must associate with people who love God and have the fear of God in their heart, so that you, too, may acquire such divine fear." This, of course, does not mean that you should do outwardly whatever you see others doing without feeling it within you, for this would not be true devoutness, it would be false. Anything false is abhorrent. Devoutness is the Grace of God in man. Whatever the devout person does, he does because he feels it in his heart. Of course, there is natural devoutness within us, but, if we don't cultivate it, the devil will use our forgetfulness to make us insensitive and not devout. But the behaviour of the devout awakens devoutness in us again.

– Geronda, why do the Fathers speak only of devoutness when they advise us to acquire it by associating with those who are devout? Why do they not say the same about other virtues as well?

– Because devoutness is a transmittable virtue.

The movements and behaviour of a devout person are transmitted like perfume, provided the recipient possesses good will and humility. And let me tell you, if one is not devout, one has nothing. A devout person can clearly recognize all things sacred as they truly are, even though he may not be educated. For example he will not err in anything that has to do with divine meanings. It is much like small children who do not have any negative thoughts about their

father and mother, because they love and respect them, and are able to see clearly and properly what their parents are doing. How much more so in this case, where we have to do with God, who is incomparable and perfect in all things! One who is not devout falls into errors and falsehood regarding the doctrine of the faith. I can see what errors are made when those who are not devout write interpretations and commentaries on the sacred texts of Holy Scripture.

All spiritual things require devoutness and heart. When everything begins with devoutness, everything is sanctified. Specifically in order to write a Service for a Saint, one must love the Saint and have reverence and devoutness for that Saint, so that everything one writes will be heartfelt and exude authentic devoutness. When one reaches a state of divine *eros*, diving madness, the verses flow naturally from within.

—What else can help us acquire devoutness?

—Study with the mind everything that is sacred and truly digest these readings, but also make use of any opportunities afforded; this will gradually awaken devoutness in us. For instance, if I have the chance to pass by a Church to pray and I don't take it, I am deprived of Grace. But if I want to go and something prevents me, then I am not deprived of grace, because God sees my good intention. Much help in acquiring devoutness is also found in becoming familiar with the Saints of our region, our country, so that we can love them and feel a link with them. God rejoices when we love the Saints and show devotion to them. And if we show devotion to the Saints, our devotion to God will of course be greater.

—Geronda, what can help us to move about in Church with devout reverence?

—When you set out to go to the Church, you should say to yourself, "Where am I going? I am now entering the House of God. What do I do? I revere the holy Icons and I worship God himself." From your monastic cell or from your assigned obedience, you go to the Church. From the Church you go to heaven and beyond Heaven to God Himself.

—How is this done?

—The Church is the "House" of God. And our own true home is in Paradise. Here the nuns are chanting. There the Angels, the Saints... If we politely knock at the door, wipe our feet, and sit reservedly upon entering a worldly home, how are we then to behave when we enter the House of God where Christ is being sacrificed? With one drop of divine Blood He once redeemed us from sin, and now continues to heal us with kilos of His Blood, and to nurture us with His all-holy Body. Therefore, when we recall all these awe-inspiring divine events, it helps us to move about in the Church devoutly. But I see in the Divine Liturgy, even when the priest says, *Let us lift up our hearts*, and we respond, *We have lifted them up to the Lord*, few are those who truly raise their mind to the Lord Jesus Christ! Perhaps it is better for us to pray with our mind, "May our hearts be raised to the

Lord," because both our mind and our heart have a tendency to be drawn downward. Otherwise, we are lying when we say, "We have raised them to the Lord," when, in fact, our mind is not there at all. Of course, if our heart is indeed turned toward Heaven, then everything will surely go toward Heaven.

From Spiritual Awakening, chapter 4.

Notes on the Calendar

Everyone should have a church wall calendar for 2021. If you do not, they are available in the bookstore.

Please note the following dates and try to keep them free from any avoidable conflicts.

Everyone who makes St. Maximus his home should plan on attending Forgiveness Vespers Sunday, March 14 at 5:00 p.m. The following week is Clean Week, the first week of Great Lent. We should keep this week free from vacations, parties, trips, and entertainments so that we may focus on repentance and the services and getting the Fast off to a good start. Likewise, Great & Holy Week, April 26 to May 1, should be kept free from conflicts so that we may contemplate the Lord's Passion in Church.

Holy Pascha will be celebrated May 2 this year. The following week is known as Bright Week, which we normally observe with Paschal Vespers, Matins, and Divine Liturgy each day. Its other name is "Renewal Week", and it has the power to renew those who partake of it as fully as they can.

We do well to get in the habit of consulting the Church calendar as an integral part of planning our lives.

Upcoming Events 2021

2 February: Meeting of Lord in Temple
14 March: Forgiveness Sunday
15-20 March: Clean Week
25 March: Annunciation
25 April: Palm Sunday
26-30 April: Great & Holy Week
2 May: Holy Pascha
3-8 May: Bright Week

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!