

The Confessor's Tongue for November 7, A. D. 2021

20th Sunday After Pentecost: Synaxis of Unmercenary Healers

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.

First Sunday in November

On the first Sunday in November, the synaxis of the Holy Unmercenary Healers is celebrated. Holy Unmercenarys are a class of saint characterized by their ability and willingness to heal the sick by both natural means and the power of God without taking payment. Though St. Panteimon and SS Cosmas and Damian (celebrated November 1, see below) are the most famous of these, there are a goodly number whom the Church commemorates: St. Luke the Evangelist and Physician, St. Luke of Crimea, Saints Antipas, Charalambus, Blaise, Spyridon, Modestus, two other sets by the names of Cosmas and Damian, Cyrus and John, Hermolaus, Diomedes, Sampson, Mocius, Photius, Anicetus, Artemius, Thalaleus, and Tryphon. O holy unmercenary physicians, pray to Christ our God for the healing of our souls and bodies!

Preparing for the Nativity Fast

The Nativity Fast, the 40-day period of preparation for the Nativity of our Lord, begins Monday, November 15 and lasts until the Liturgy the morning of the Nativity of Our Lord, December 25. The Fast is a time of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving given to us for repentance, healing, cleansing, growth, and, ultimately—for knowing Christ more intimately and being filled afresh with His Spirit. The Fast is a time to lay aside the lesser things choking out the Gospel in our lives to pursue higher things.

The Fast is a wholistic effort of the whole man consisting of three main elements: prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. Now eight days before the Fast is the time to prepare. The Nativity Fast is difficult, as the world parties before Nativity, and then, wearied of its excesses, turns to dieting when we are celebrating the twelve days of Christmas. So we do well to plan ahead.

Prayer: During the Fast, we seek to advance our prayer life, keeping our rule of prayer more strictly and adding to it if we can—Psalms, prostrations, prayer ropes, short prayer at the canonical hours of 0900, 1200, and 1500, etc. In everything, we should strive to develop a more constant awareness of God throughout the day. We should attend the corporate prayer of the Church more frequently, as the services will support us.

Almsgiving: Almsgiving helps give our prayer wings. It is an act of love to give up some of the resources God has given us to benefit others who are in need. We offer several outlets for almsgiving: the almsbox and our own “food pantry” for those in need, and the collections of items needed by the local charities. The important thing is that we give alms, which is giving for those in need above and beyond our normal tithes and offerings.

Fasting: In many people's mind, this is what is meant by the Fast, but this is but one part. We abstain from meat, dairy products, fish, wine, and olive oil (see wall calendar for when fish, wine, and oil are permitted) and marital relations (see priest if you have questions) so that we can give ourselves to prayer and have extra means for almsgiving. We eat less: when we get up from the table, we still have “room” in our stomachs. The money we save by eating less and more simply we give as alms (above and beyond our usual tithes and offerings); here fasting has its practical social benefit. We also seek to minimize or eliminate influences in our lives that draw us away from Christ or cause our hearts to grow cold or indifferent to Him. This is a good time to abstain from secular entertainment and unplug ourselves from as much electronic media as we can so we may concentrate on face-to-face relations with friends and family—and with God.

Reading: Each person is strongly encouraged to choose a spiritual book for daily reading during the Fast in addition to our daily reading of Scripture, etc. It is wise to consult with your priest or confessor if you are not sure what to read. Put our Library and Bookstore to good use!

All Orthodox Christians should make the effort to prepare themselves to make Confession and receive Holy Communion during the Fast.

If you have any questions about how to keep the fast in your particular circumstances, please consult your Confessor or Priest.

Homily on the Call of All Christians to Become Saints

St. Nikolai of Zicha

To the saint which are at Ephesus...(Ephesians 1:1)

Note: In Greek, Slavonic, and Russian, the word ‘saints’ is the same word that is translated as ‘holy’: hagios, or svyatoi. Hence, the English word ‘saint’ means ‘holy one’—a person who is holy. Fr. Justin

The Apostle calls the Christians in Ephesus ‘saints’. He does not call one or two of them saints, nor one group of them, but all of them. Is this not a wondrous miracle of God for people, not in the wilderness but in a city—and an idolatrous and corrupt city—to become saints? That married men who sire children, who trade and work, become saints! Indeed, such were the first Christians. Their dedication, fidelity, and zeal in the Faith as well as their holiness and purity of life, completely justified their being called ‘saints.’ If in latter times saints have become the exception, in those earlier times the unholy were the exception. Saints were the rule. Therefore, we must not wonder that the Apostle calls all baptized souls in Ephesus ‘saints’ and that he has an even loftier name for all Christians, i.e., ‘sons,’ the

sons of God (Galatians 4:6). Christ the Lord Himself gave us the right to call ourselves such when he taught us to address God as *Our Father* (Matt 6:9).

O my brethren! Do we not say to God every day: "Holy God?" Do we not call the angels holy? Do we not call the Mother of God holy? And the prophets, apostles, martyrs, and the righteous? Do we not call heaven holy and the Kingdom of Heaven holy? Who then is able to enter into the holy Kingdom but the saints [holy ones]. Therefore, if we have hope for salvation, we also have hope for holiness.

O Holy God, who dwellest in the holy place and resteth among the saints and callest the holy to Thyself and showest mercy to them, help us also that we may become holy—in words, in thoughts, in deeds—to Thy glory and our salvation. To Thee be glory and praise forever. Amen.

Why God Allows Temptations

God allows man to fall into sin because of his pride, self-opinion, or self-trust. Thus, where there does not exist such self-opinion or self-trust, a corrective fall does not occur. Therefore, when you experience a fall, your thoughts should hasten towards humbled understanding and a disparaging self-opinion. Seek out God through prayer so that you do not fall anew. I must add that not only when one has fallen into some sort of sin, but also when one experience some misfortune, distress, or sorrow, especially physical illness—he must understand that he suffers thus so that he may come to self-knowledge; particularly the knowledge of his own helplessness and humility. For this purpose does God allow all manner of temptation from the devil. *St. Theophan the Recluse*

God allows temptations for the best and wisest of purposes, namely:

- a) for the testing of our will, to see which way it is more inclined—towards virtues or to sinful pleasures.
- b) to uncover hidden traits and inclinations which we ourselves are not aware of.
- c) to grow in virtues.

By hearing the Holy Gospels and holding them dear, and being in constant contemplation of them, many temptations and wiles of the devil will be dispersed. You will recognize his slanderous entrapments and arrogant flattery, and you will escape his grasp. *St. Hippolytus*

The Holy Fathers of Scetis (a desert region in Egypt where many monks lived) prophesied of the last generation. The brothers asked, "What have we accomplished?" In reply, one of them, of holy life, named Isychrion, said: "We have fulfilled God's commandments." They asked further: "And after us, will they accomplish anything?" He said: "They will achieve half of what we did." "And after them, what?" He said, "They of that generation will be completely without deeds, for temptations will come upon them. Those who prove themselves worthy in these

temptations will be regarded higher than we and than our fathers."

When you set out to do God's work, prepare your heart for temptations and sorrows.

We cannot otherwise become heirs of the heavenly Kingdom than through many sorrows and temptations.

Those who love God experience diverse and most difficult temptations.

In the present times, do not seek virtues; seek only to withstand the temptations that beset you, and in the age to come this will be considered a great deed, equal to the struggles of even St. Anthony the Great. *Elder Dionysius the Athonite*

Whosoever is not inclined to discover how to avoid temptation and the snares of the enemy will be caught in them and never escape them. Even on the day of your repose you must be aware of the cunning of the unseen enemy.

He who suffers temptation good-naturedly is more pleasing to God than he who achieves great virtues.

The soul cannot free itself from temptation other than by calling on the Lord Jesus Christ and hurrying to his spiritual father. *St. Symeon the New Theologian*

It happens that when the enemy sees that someone with burning faith has undertaken a good beginning, he usually will meet him with many severe temptations in order to frighten him away and thereby cool his good intentions.

Benefits are derived from temptations by those who endure them without complaint, but with courage and gratitude.

By what means did the saints achieve glory and attain the Heavenly Kingdom? Sorrows, temptations, struggles. Some endured great suffering and torture, and for this received a martyr's crown; others dedicated themselves to struggles in seclusion, and through them acquired the Kingdom of Heaven. Why would God allow all the Saints to suffer so much temptation, danger, and sorrow if one could attain the Heavenly Kingdom without all of this? Therefore, we should not despair when we are visited by sadness and sorrows; on the contrary, we should be glad that God so cares for us, testing us through sorrows and misfortunes, like gold in the fire.

God allows His servants to fall into difficult temptations so that they would learn to resist evil and be strengthened in good. How do we increase in spiritual strength? By overcoming temptations.

In temptations of anger, pray for those with whom you are angry: "Save, O Lord, and have mercy on N., and by his holy prayers help me, the sinful and unrepentant one."

Question: Why are there temptations?

Answer: How can you ask why? When people buy material for clothes, they tear at it to see how durable it is. Flour, fruits, vegetables, wine, butter are sampled; are they fresh, or have they been mixed with

additives? One breaks a piece of wood to see whether it is rotten inside. In general, almost anything that is bought is tested in one way or another to make sure of the quality, for many things are of poor or deceptive quality. There are many merchants who will pass off poor goods in place of good ones, counterfeit money in place of real currency, fake silver for real silver. So it is with people, who are sometimes false, or pretentious, and they themselves are often not aware of it. And so, by means of temptations, it is necessary to test a person completely, thoroughly, to see how much true spiritual wealth is inside and how much is deceitful, how much in him is pure silver and gold, and how much is simply dirt and rust. For the Lord requires pure silver and gold, a pure image of God, a pure soul, a pure heart. *St. John of Kronstadt*

No matter what kind of temptation befalls a person, he must say, "This is by God's mercy." *St. Sisoies*

On The Noonday Demon: Acedia

Acedia (ακηδία) is such a close neighbour of sadness that the ascetical tradition inspired by St. Gregory the Great [of Rome] in the West reunites these two passions into a single one; the Eastern ascetical tradition, however, distinguishes them. The Greek word ακηδία appears in Latin as *acedia*, whence the French and English equivalents (*acédie*, *acedia*). It is difficult to translate this word simultaneously in a simple and all-encompassing manner; the words "sloth" or "boredom," often used to render it, express only a part of the complex reality signified by the term.

Indeed, *acedia* corresponds to a certain state of sloth and boredom, but also of disgust, aversion, lassitude, dejection, discouragement, languor, torpor, nonchalance, drowsiness, somnolence, and sluggishness (of the body as well as the soul). *Acedia* can even drive a man to sleep without his really being tired.

In *acedia*, there is a vague and general dissatisfaction. When he is under the sway of this passion, man no longer desires anything, finding everything bland and insipid and expecting nothing at all.

Acedia makes man instable in both soul and body. His faculties become fickle; his mind flits from one object to another, unable to stay focused. Especially when he is alone, he can no longer bear to remain where he is—the passion urges him to leave, to move, to go to one or several other places. Sometimes he begins to wander and roam and generally he seeks contact with others at any price. These contacts are not objectively necessary; but driven by his passion, man feels that he needs them and finds himself 'good' pretexts so as to justify them. He thus establishes and maintains often-futile relationships nourished with idle chatter in which he generally manifest an idle curiosity.

It can happen that *acedia* fills the person subject to it with an intense and permanent aversion for his place of residence, giving him grounds for being

dissatisfied with his abode and bringing him to believe that he would be better off elsewhere. This passion "drives him along to desire other sites where he can more easily procure life's necessities." *Acedia* can also bring a man to shun his activities, in particular his work, and makes him dissatisfied with it. The passion leads him then to look for other kinds of work while making him believe that these will be more interesting and will make him happier. . . All states linked to *acedia* are accompanied by worry or anxiety, which in addition to disgust are a fundamental trait of this passion.

The demon of *acedia* especially attacks those who have dedicated themselves to the spiritual life, He seeks to turn them away from the paths of the Spirit, to prevent in manifold ways the activities that such a life entails, and in particular to harm the regularity and constancy of the ascetical discipline it requires and to break the silence and stillness favouring this life. St. John Climacus thus presents *acedia* as "a paralysis of soul, and enervation of the mind, [and] neglect of asceticism." It renders the spiritual man "desultory and lazy at any task to be done within the walls of his cell. It does not let him sit in his cell and apply himself to his duty of reading." Under this passion's influence, man's mind becomes "idle and empty of any spiritual work"; he becomes indifferent to God's whole work, ceases to desire future goods and even going so far as to belittle spiritual goods. All the Fathers see in *acedia* one of the primary obstacles to prayer. St. John Climacus defines it as "being languid in psalms, weak in prayer." St. Symeon the New Theologian notes: "Above all, the demon of *acedia* usually attacks those who are advanced in prayer or who are assiduous in it." Many remark that it engenders torpor in the soul and body especially at the hour of prayer, urging man to slumber: "When there is not psalmody, the despondency [i.e. *acedia*] does not make its appearance. And as soon as the appointed service is finished, the eyes open," St. John Climacus points out. He notes further: "But [when] the hour of prayer has come, again the body is weighed down. He begins to pray, but he grows sleepy and the psalm verse are snatched from his mouth with untimely yawns."

If it is true that *acedia* most especially affects those who strive to submit themselves to a regular spiritual discipline, reducing for this reason their exterior activities and movements to what is strictly necessary and seeking the greatest silence and solitude; if it is true that the more man orders himself spiritually and isolates himself in order to dedicate himself in silence to the prayer that unites him to God, the more he is attacked by this passion particularly feared by hermits—nonetheless this passion does not leave in peace those living outside any discipline or even any spiritual activity. It challenges them under other guises, as St. Isaac the Syrian comments: to "those who lead their lives in the works of the body," "another *acedia* comes, which is visible in the eyes of all." This *acedia* takes the form

of an oft-times vague and muddled feeling of dissatisfaction, disgust, boredom, lassitude—and this vis-à-vis themselves, existence, those around them, the place where they live, their work, or even any activity whatsoever. Such individuals are further affected by groundless restlessness, a generalized anxiety, or a continual or episodic anguish. Generally speaking, they are correlatively seized by a state of torpor, mental and physical numbness, general and constant fatigue experience without any reason and permanent or periodic drowsiness of soul and body. Often at the same time—and in order somehow to ward off these dreadful states—acedia drives such people to various unnecessary activities and movements, to useless visits, and to everything through which they think they can escape anguish and boredom; it impels them to flee solitude and to compensate for the dissatisfaction they feel. Although they wish and often believe that thus they will be satisfied and come to themselves, in reality, they do nothing but turn away from themselves and their spiritual 'ought' or duty, from their true nature and destiny, and by this from any full and complete satisfaction.

With those who lead an ascetical life, the attacks of this demon—the manifestations of this passion—attain their greatest intensity around noon. St. John Cassian writes:

It particularly troubles [solitaries] at the sixth hour like a malaria which recurs at regular intervals, as the infection brings burning fevers on the suffering soul at predictable set times. Many elders consider this to be the 'noonday devil' which is mentioned in the ninetyeth psalm.

Among those Elders one must cite Evagrius who affirms: "The demon of acedia—also called the noonday demon— . . . presses his attack upon the monk about the fourth hour and besieges the soul until the eighth hour.

What fundamentally distinguishes acedia from sadness is that the former has no precise motivation and that there is 'an unreasonable mental turmoil,' as St. John Cassian says. But having no motivation does not mean that it has no cause. The diabolical etiology is dominant, as the preceding remarks show. However, the passion presupposes favourable soil in order to be able to act. The fact of being attached to pleasure and being in the grip of sadness constitutes one of acedia's forms, the importance of which St. Thalassius underscores. "Acedia is negligence of soul; a negligent soul is one that is sick with the love of pleasure," he notes further. St. Macarius, on his part, blames a lack of faith, while St. Isaac remarks that "acedia comes form the distraction of the intellect" in the spiritual man.

The preceding description of the turmoil characterizing acedia allows us to understand why the Fathers consider it an illness of the soul; its numerous pathological effects only confirm this way of viewing the passion. Standing first among these effects is a generalized darkening of the soul—acedia makes the mind (*nous*) dark, blinding it and covering the entire soul with gloom. As a result, the soul becomes incapable of apprehending essential truths. "For truly the soul sleeps, unaware of any contemplation of virtue or spiritual insight, once it is

damaged by the onset of this disease," observes St. John Cassian. The most serious consequence is that through this passion, man is turned away and kept distant from the knowledge of God.

The Fathers not further that acedia—which constitutes a paralysis of soul and carelessness of the mind—engenders an emptiness within the soul, leads man to a generalized negligence, and makes him cowardly. When united to sadness, it increases it and thus can easily lead to despair. Furthermore, thoughts of blasphemy as well as mad thoughts against the Creator can come forth from acedia; some of its other well-known consequences include the destruction of compunction and the onset of irritability. Additionally, says St. Isaac, "the spirit of distraction comes [from it], which is the source of a thousand temptations.

Contrary to the other main passions, acedia does not give birth to any particular passion on account of its producing almost all of them. "No other demon follows close upon the heels of this one," affirms Evagrius, who explains elsewhere: "The thought of acedia is not followed by any other thought, first because it lingers, and then because it contains within itself almost all thoughts." St. Maximus likewise says that acedia "excites practically all the passions together." In a more general way, St. Barsanuphius teaches that "the spirit of acedia engenders every evil." St. John Climacus consequently notes that "for the monk, despondency is a general death," and St Symeon the New Theologian as well concludes that it "is the death of the soul and the mind." He adds: "If God were to allow [this demon] to use all his might against us, undoubtedly no ascetics would be saved." In the face of the extent of these effects, the Fathers also affirm that acedia is the most burdensome and most overwhelming of all the passions, "the gravest of the eight principal passions," and that "there is no passion worse than it." St. Isaac says that it "causes [the soul] to taste hell."

The pathology of acedia cannot be considered as constituted by the perverted use of a particular faculty, as is the case in the previously studied passions. St. Maximus observes that this passion entails all of them: "The remaining passions lay hold of either the irascible part of the soul or the desiderative only, or also of the rational. . . . But acedia seizes all the powers of the soul." Yet it is not constituted by their contranatural use, since it has no positive foundation in its nature. Evagrius notes that it is in conformity with nature not to have it at all. In a sense, acedia is on the one hand the numbing and deactivation of all the faculties contributing to man's spiritual life, and on the other hand their distraction. St. Thalassius expresses this dual aspect well when he defines this passion as "the negligence of the soul." To a certain degree, one can consider it to be constituted by the absence of spiritual "zeal" given by the Spirit both to the first man as well as to the man renewed in Christ in order to accomplish with fervor their spiritual task. *Jean-Claude Larchet, Therapy of Spiritual Illnesses, vol. 1, pp. 195-201.*

Upcoming Events 2021

- 14 November: Parish Thanksgiving Meal
- 15 November: Nativity Fast Begins.
- 21 November: Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple.
- 25 November: Thanksgiving Day Liturgy

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!