

# The Confessor's Tongue for January 30, A. D. 2022

32<sup>nd</sup> Sunday After Pentecost; Three Holy Hierarchs

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.

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## **The Sayings of St. Anthony the Great 4**

*Abba Anthony said to Abba Poemen, "This is the great work of a man: always to take the blame for his own sins before God and to expect temptation to his last breath."*

Saying 4 in *The Sayings of Desert Fathers*

*Commentary:* Why is taking the blame for one's own sins a "great work"? The work is great, for the obstacles to doing the work are great.

First, man often does not see his sins. He cannot take the blame for what he cannot see. And it is no small thing for man to see his sins. To see his sins, man needs light, he needs Christ, the Light of the world. Only in the light of Christ can a man realize what he was made to be (according to the image and likeness of God) and wherein he falls short of the glory of the divine image. Without the light of Christ, man will never see his wretchedness and nakedness, nor will he see what he destined to be. Remaining blinded in the dark, he will strive to make himself after some image and likeness that he creates for himself rather than after the image and likeness of God.

In the light of Christ, man's deceitful heart is exposed. Despite the testimony of his God-given conscience, man lies to himself about his actions and intentions, justifying himself while condemning others. To overcome this self-deception is one reason the Holy Spirit is given—to convict men of their sins. Most men see themselves as 'basically good and decent', especially when they compare themselves selectively to others—but that is a delusion the Holy Spirit works to overcome. Man deludes himself into thinking he is basically good, healthy, and 'normal'. The Holy Spirit shows him just how desperately ill he is—not to plunge him into despair, but to enable him to see his malady so that he may seek healing from the Great Physician who became man to heal man.

Having overcome his blindness to see himself and sick and sinful, man must then admit his sin and fault. This requires humility. Either a man must humble himself, or God will humble him through the vicissitudes of life to put him in a state where he may begin to see and admit his fault before God. Only by humility may he overcome the powerful temptation to blame others for his sins or to make excuses for his faults. Parents, circumstances, spouse, friends, children, and others, may provoke us and make it easier for us to sin, but in the end we have to own our sins without blaming others. No matter how unjustly someone else acts first, a man is always accountable before God for how he responds. This confronts our penchant for self-justification, which goes back to Adam blaming the woman, and Eve blaming the serpent. Indeed, Abba Dorotheos of Gaza teaches that the first half of humility is blaming ourselves for our sins, i.e., taking responsibility for them before

God. (The second half of humility is giving God, the Giver of all good, the glory for all that is good in our life rather than taking the credit for ourselves.)

To see his own sins and to acknowledge them as his own without making excuses, blaming others, or comparing himself to others rather than to Christ is a great work to accomplish, one which requires much grace. That a man has this awareness in some measure is a sign of God's grace at work in him for which he should be thankful, for his salvation cannot be accomplished without it.

If taking the blame for his own sins is a great work, so is expecting temptation to one's last breath.

Man often comes to Christ expecting blessing, comfort, and ease, even health and wealth. In exchange for serving God, He wants payment here and now in terms of a comfortable, happy life—according to his own definition and expectation. God makes everything better, right? Indeed, the Gospel is often presented in this way with Christ as the essential ingredient to a better life on earth. Just have Christ, and you will have a better marriage, better children, better finances, more fun.

But St. James in his epistle speaks of "*when ye fall into divers temptations*" not "*if*." Thus, we must expect temptation, trials, tribulations, and persecution as part of being a Christian rather than being deluded by our desire for peace and pleasure. That delusion is dangerous, for many possessed by it have suffered the shipwreck of their faith when trials have come upon them contrary to their expectations. These are those represented in Christ's parable by the stony soil in which the young shoot wilts in the heat of temptation and persecution.

Moreover, not only will the Christian have diverse trials and temptations, he must rejoice in them! St. James writes, "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. . . . Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him (James 1:2-4, 12)." Likewise, St. Paul instructs us: "And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us (Romans 5:3-5)."

Surely this is a great work: a Christian not only accepts without complaining but also rejoices in and gives thanks for temptations and trials as an essential part of the Christian life which God uses to perfect his faith! St. Isaac the Syrian says, "When you find unchanging peace on your way, then fear; because you

are far from the right path by which the righteous go with suffering feet.” Again, he says, “Temptation is good for everyone.... An undisciplined son will not enter into possession of the riches of his father’s house because he will not be able to use his wealth profitably. For this reason God first gives troubles and trials, and then gives grace. Glory to the Lord who by irksome treatment gives the pleasure of health! There is no one who does not suffer during his training, and there is no one who does not find the time difficult when he is given to drink the poison of temptations.” May God grant us all success in this great work of man! *Fr. Justin*

### **The All-Night Vigil: The Great Litany**

After the singing of the opening Psalm, the Royal Doors are closed and the lights dimmed, reflecting man’s fall into sin and the closing of Paradise to man.

The Deacon (or Priest) comes before the closed Royal Doors to intone the Great Litany. He faces east, representing fallen Adam who cries out to God in his distress after being expelled from Paradise. All litanies are said facing east with the Deacon (or Priest) leading the people (but still as one of the people) in offering prayer to God. The Church gathered in worship is not a closed circle contemplating itself, but looks beyond herself to God. From earliest times, the Church has prayed to the east for at least three reasons: 1. that is the direction of the rising sun, and Christ is the Sun of righteousness who brings light to a dark world; 2. Paradise, or Eden, was situated in the east, and man looks to regain what he lost; 3. Christ’s return in glory will be “as lightening flashes from the east to the west” and so to look east in prayer is to look for Christ’s return.

The Great Litany is the beginning of the official prayer of the Church and begins all Her services. In this litany, the Church offers prayer on behalf of the whole world in a descending hierarchy of values, beginning with what is most important. When the Great Litany is taken in a service, the Augmented Litany must also be taken (with the thricefold “Lord, have mercy”). In the former, the Church prays universally for the world, but in the latter, She prays for the particular place in which She gathers and for the particular people of that place.

The following analysis of the petitions is primarily (but not exclusively) that of Fr. Alexander Schmemmann.

“In peace let us pray to the Lord.” The prayer of the Church is a new prayer, made possible by the peace of Christ which passes all understanding. He is our peace (Ephesians 2:14) with God, with others, and with ourselves, and we pray therefore in Him, in the wonderful certitude that our prayer is being accepted by God because of Him.

“For the peace from above and for the salvation of our souls...” The world cannot give that peace; it is a gift from above (John 14:27). To receive it is our first and most important goal together with the salvation

of our souls. Before we pray for anything else, we must pray for the ‘number one object’ of every Christian: eternal salvation.

“For the peace of the whole world, for the good estate of the holy Churches of God, and for the union of all men...” We pray that the peace of Christ might be granted everywhere, that the Church might fulfill Her mission of preaching Christ and making Him present throughout the world, and that all men might be united in Christ to His Body, the Church. Christ provides the only basis for human unity; He is the only power capable of overcoming the barriers that separate man from his fellow man.

“For this holy house, and for those who with faith, reverence and fear of God enter herein...” We pray for our particular parish, which must manifest Christ and His Kingdom to the surrounding community, that we may worship in the proper spirit of faith, reverence, and fear of God.

“For our [bishop], the honorable presbytery [priests], the diaconate in Christ, and for all the clergy and the people...” We pray for those to whom God has entrusted the care of His Church, to guide and edify Her, especially the diocesan bishop. They bear a heavy responsibility and need our frequent prayers. We also pray for all the people who are part of the Body and also bear responsibility for its welfare.

“For this God-protected land, its president, all civil authorities, and for those who serve in the armed forces...” Christians are both citizens of Heaven and responsible members of civil society on earth. We are loyal to the State and established authorities, but only so far as this loyalty is compatible with our ultimate loyalty to Christ. We must bear witness to Christ within our society and pray that it may receive guidance from the Lord. Whether we like or agree with those in power, they need our prayers simply because they do have power and must use it wisely.

“For this city, for every city and country, and for those who in faith dwell therein...” Christ teaches us that we “are the salt of the earth.” We have a spiritual responsibility for the place we live, and we also join with all Christians everywhere in praying for their civil communities and for the faithful living in them.

“For favorable weather, for an abundance of the fruits of the earth, and for peaceful times...” The prayer of the Church embraces the whole natural world. We ask God to provide for us what we require for life, and that we may live in peace rather than anarchy or unrest. We recognize our dependence on God for these good things, though modern man tends to take them for granted.

“For travellers by land, by sea, and by air, for the sick and the suffering; for captives, and for their salvation...” The Church remembers all who are in danger and difficulties, praying for their salvation and protection. We reach out in love to those suffering everywhere to fulfill Christ’s commandment of love. “Captives” in former times referred especially to Christians who had been seized by Muslim raiders and sold into slavery.

"For our deliverance from all tribulation, wrath, danger, and necessity..." These things have the potential to overwhelm our faith and life, so we intercede that we be delivered from the harm they threaten. 'Necessity' is an extreme situation where the lack of basic necessities of life may lead us into sin in order to get them.

"Help us, save us, have mercy on us, and keep us, O God, by Thy grace." The final supplication hearkens to Christ's words, "Without Me, ye can do nothing." Faith reveals to us our total dependence on God's grace, mercy, and help in all things.

"Remembering our all-holy, immaculate, most blessed and glorious Lady Theotokos and ever-virgin Mary with all the Saints, let us commend ourselves, and each other, and all our life unto Christ our God." By remembering the Theotokos and all the Saints, we affirm our unity with the Church in Heaven as we entrust ourselves, each other, and all our life to God's loving care and providence rather than depending on our own wisdom and efforts.

In the Great Litany, we unite in offering the prayer of Christ's Church for the world. The priest or deacon bids us to pray for these things, and as each matter is set before us, we ask God to "have mercy". Our attentive participation is needed; we must unite our heart to these petitions and bring them to God that we may be truly praying and not merely mouthing words.

### On Lukewarmness

*Archimandrite Athanasios Mitilinaios*

*I know your works. I know your works that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of my mouth. Revelation 3:15-16*

Truly, my friends, these are great and heavy words, but let us look at the passage. According to St. Andrew of Caesarea, "cold" is the one who faith and love is frozen, or he who is devoid of the energy of the Holy Spirit. Who is "hot"? Saint Paul says that it is *he who is fervent in spirit* (Romans 12:11), he who has burning love, whose spirit is at a boiling point. However, the bishop of Laodicea was neither cold nor hot, but lukewarm. Is it really possible for the spirituality of a faithful person to regress from hot, to become lukewarm? Or after having tasted Christ, to turn his or her back on Him and to romance with the world and the things of this world?

It seems that it is quite possible and quite tragic. The great majority of Christians today (May 1981), at least the contemporary Christians, belong to the class and state. As contemporary Christs, we are not cold and certainly not hot. Most of us are lukewarm. So here, we have this great class of Christians, who according to the prophet Elijah *limp with both legs*, living the psychology of Israel, the same Israel which easily came forward to worship the true God but also displayed the same ease in running off and offering equal worship to the false gods. According to Saint

Paul, in this class of the lukewarm faithful, God and the world, Christ and Baal, truth and lie, have the ability to intertwine and coexist. Worse, yet, people who are able to live in both of these worlds—of God and of Satan, of the truth and of the lie—at the same time boast about their high level of spirituality and greatness. They fell extremely important and very pleased with their high position.

Unfortunately, this very large group of Christians makes it very difficult for the Church to reach them. If you suggest to them that they study the Scriptures, they will tell you that they already know the Scriptures. If you tell them to go do church, they will tell you that they are better than all the people who go to church. If you tell them to live a spiritual life, they will answer that this is the only way of life they know, that they already have accomplished this, and that they do not see anything in their life that needs to be changed. What pitiful people!

My friends, the egoism of these people rises before them lie the Great Wall of China. This egoism does not allow for a single ray of God's grace to penetrate and work a change within them. Lukewarm people are unable and incapable of increasing their spiritual thermometer even by one degree, and yet they are under the impression that they are the best specimen humanity has to offer and the best of Christians. However, the paradoxical announcement of the Lord tells them *You are not warm of cold. You are not hot or cold. You are lukewarm. You would be better off cold.* This is a paradox.

The Lord poses a seemingly strange declaration to the bishop of Laodicea because cold seems to be farther away from hot than lukewarm. At least chemically, lukewarm water is closer to hot, degree-wise, than cold water. Now why does the Lord prefer someone cold to someone lukewarm? The psychology and the experience based on this clearly prove that the man who is cold spiritually is able to repent; his hart has the possibility to change, and he can become a very hot spiritual person. At some crossroad in his life, at some moment, a certain incident occurs and the grace of God touches him—the Right Hand of the Most High God touches him—and he turns around. He changes his life.

We see many of these conversions. Yesterday, he was immoral an unethical; today he is pure. Yesterday he mocked and ridiculed the faith; today he is full of piety. Yesterday he lived like the swine; today he is clean and washed from sin. What happened? He repented. How many of these incidents do we have? How many? The thief on the cross was cold at first. Both thieves mocked Christ. It is not mistake that once of the Evangelists says that both thieves crucified with Him had mocked Him; whereas Luke says that one of the thieves called out; "*Lord, remember me when You come into Your Kingdom* (Luke 23:42). This is not a mistake, because both of them had mocked the Lord in the beginning.

At some point, a revolution took place in the soul of the one thief, but not the other. When he witnessed

that the Lord was forgiving those who were crucifying Him; when he saw that the Lord was not cursing; when he saw His softness and leniency on the cross; he was transformed. He changed instantaneously; his soul lit up. He said to his other companion, "Whom are you cursing? Whom are you mocking? Are we in His class? We deserve death, but not Him." He turned to the Lord and said, *Lord, remember me when you come into Your Kingdom.*

From being cold as ice, he suddenly blazed like the sun and was the first to enter Paradise. This is what the experience and the psychology of the cold soul shows. On the contrary, the lukewarm stays always lukewarm. As I explained to you previously, this one does not budge from his position because he rests on his laurels, since he thinks very highly of himself. What causes this? Saint Andrew of Caesarea provides us with a wonderful explanation of this psychology. To paraphrase, eh says, "The cold man has never tasted the fruit of faith. At some point, he tastes something. He tastes the faith and immediately he says, this is exactly what I was looking for, and he becomes warm."

However, the one who was warm—at some point in the past, by the Holy Spirit during baptism—later froze because of laziness and spiritual indifference, which is something of laziness and spiritual indifference, which is something that we are *all* very guilty of. He cut himself off from the hope of salvation by scorning and criticizing the faith. This might mean that since he had observed something negative in the church—some scandal, some gossip, the same things that we always hear about; he came to think, "How can this happen in the church?" He then cuts himself off. He is cut off from the hope of salvation. He says, "Why bother? I grew up with priests and I saw how they lived. This priest used to do such-and-such; that priest does not believe, why bother? There is no faith, nothing matters." He keeps a form of external piety and uses the church as a coffee shop and a meeting place. This person has excommunicated himself from the Body of Christ. He really has no hope of salvation with this mentality. It is truly dreadful. Let's be very careful about this.

The first causes of being lukewarm are spiritual laziness, sloth, and spiritual indifference. After this, the lukewarm person does not have the desire to restart his spiritual life, to become hot again. He begins to look for negative things in the life of the Church. He gets stuck on some scandals, possible the weaknesses of the clergy, why our church does not have this or that program, why our church ignores this or that area. Then he slowly poisons himself with all the adverse happenings. He destroys his hope and he withers. We think, "If we could only have the Lord next to us," and yet we do. We have Him. If we read Scripture and listen to His words, they tell us whatever is necessary to pull us away from our disillusion. We all become disillusioned. We think we are something; but we are not what we are supposed to be, even though we think we are.

The Lord now brings the bishop of Laodicea back to reality. *Because you say, 'I am rich and have become wealthy and have need of nothing.'* The lifestyle of the city put its seal on the life of the bishop and the faithful. As you can see, we are not immune to the state of society around us, to our environment. All these things certainly influence our lives and similarly influence our faith. So, you say that you have need of nothing. You do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked.

This is who you are: poor, miserable, blind, and naked. How am I going to deal with all this when He reveals so many more other flaws in my case? How am I going to stand before all of you? But to think, how will I stand in front of you and you in front of me and even more important, how will we stand before the Lord? This is what matters to us, my friends. Well, even though one may think that he is something, God reveals our true self to us. For this reason, let's hurry to discover ourselves before the Lord reveals it to us—and worse yet, especially before it is revealed to *all* people and all the angels on the Day of Judgment.

The words of the bishop, *because I have become wealthy and I do not need anything*, are an unwise statement. It is quite unwise to say this in a spiritual sense, but it is not any wiser to say it in a material sense. I made my money and I don't need anyone. How many rich people actually say this? I don't need anybody! This is the psychology of the foolish, the selfish, and the truly antisocial person who does not have the faintest idea how much his life is interdependent with his fellow man. Your pitiful person! (When that piece of steak gets wedged in your throat while entertaining yourself at the restaurant of the year, you will see what another human being means, any human being rich or poor.; and you have the audacity to say that you don't need any one?) You are an antisocial, audacious, egoist, and incurable egoist if you say that you have become wealthy so you do not need anyone. *To be continued...*

#### Upcoming Events 2021

2 February: Great Feast: Entrance of Lord into the Temple  
26-27 February: Archbishop Alexander visits  
6 March Forgiveness Sunday  
7-12 March Clean Week  
17 April Palm Sunday  
17-23 April Great & Holy Week  
24 April Pascha  
24-30 April Bright Week

**GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!**