

The Confessor's Tongue for February 27, A. D. 2022

Sunday of the Last Judgement; St. Raphael of Brooklyn

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 Sayings of St. Anthony the Great 8

Abba Anthony said, "Some have afflicted their bodies by asceticism, but they lack discernment, and so they are far from God."

Saying 8 in The Sayings of the Desert Fathers

Commentary: Man has a propensity for getting caught up in the form of something without attaining the substance. Indeed, St. Paul warns us about those who "have a form of godliness", who outwardly look pious in some ways, but who "deny the power thereof," who have not entered into the essence and experienced its power, who confess Christ with their lips, but have not come to know Him in the depths of their heart. It is possible to use the right forms, have the right externals, and the right dogma, and still have one's heart far from God and His transforming power.

For this reason St. Seraphim of Sarov instructs us that the goal of the spiritual life is acquisition of the Holy Spirit, a filling that overflows and guides our whole life. The external forms of spiritual life are not the end but the means to acquire this.

Discernment is a spiritual gift that enables the possessor to see to the heart of things, to know their true nature. Those lacking it, unless they have wise guidance from another person, can easily confuse form with substance. Consider the many who will say on the day of judgment "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name? and in Thy name cast out devils? and in Thy name done many wonderful works?", to whom Jesus will respond, "I never knew you, depart from Me ye that work iniquity." This is a tragic case. They thought they were serving God but, lacking discernment, they actually were serving themselves, doing their "own thing."

Monks and nuns are susceptible to this temptation along with the rest of us. "I eat once a week. I have no possessions but the rags on my back. I sleep but two hours in twenty-four. I do 3000 prostrations and read through the Psalter and Gospels each day while standing." Such confuse the strictness of their ascetic practice with true knowledge of God; they may, in fact, do these things because they take pleasure in their own strictness, or the reputation it wins them in the eyes of men. They take pleasure in comparing themselves to their neighbor and finding themselves stricter. They readily fall prey to judging their weaker brethren. All their self-directed ascetic activity, in fact, makes them worse.

Thus, in the Church, a moderate asceticism that curbs the body's passions so that the body may be subject to the spirit without doing harm to the body or giving ready grounds for pride is recommended. And our activity should always be guided by someone other than ourselves, for "He who chooses himself as his spiritual guide has chosen a fool."

A particular area where Christians must acquire discernment is in the area of their thoughts. All sin begins with a thought that flits into the mind. Often that thought appears innocent on the surface. It is discernment that penetrates the thought's seeming innocence to perceive the spiritual danger it will bring if accepted or acted upon. Discernment then works together with spiritual alertness and watchfulness. Watchfulness catches the thoughts as they enter the mind; discernment reveals them for what they are. Is this a good thought? Is it from God? Will it produce good fruit? Or is this a temptation? a deception from the demons? Without watchfulness and discernment in his thoughts, a person will be the plaything of the demons as they take pleasure in sowing tempting thoughts in his head and watching him fall into sin, and sin separates man from God—not that God is not there, but that man's awareness of God and ability to receive grace is diminished. Because of its vital role in the warfare with thoughts, the monks have prized the gift of discernment of thoughts above all others.

Our goal in Christian life is to come to know and love God with all our heart and to love one another as Christ has loved us. This is only possible through the grace of God filling us and transforming us. Proper ascetic practice with discernment brings us closer to this goal, while a deluded practice brings us only into deadly vainglory and pride.

27 February: St. Raphael of Brooklyn

Our holy Father Raphael was born in Syria in 1860 to pious Orthodox parents, Michael Hawaweeny and his second wife Mariam, the daughter of a priest of Damascus. The exact date of Raphael's birth is not known, but he estimated it to be on or near his Name Day, the Synaxis of the Holy Archangels Michael and Gabriel and all the Bodiless Powers of Heaven (November 8). Due to the violent persecution of Christians, at which time their parish priest, Saint Joseph of Damascus (July 10) and his companions were martyred, the Hawaweeny family was forced to flee to Beirut for their safety. It was here that the future saint first saw the light of day, and not in the city of his parents. Indeed, as the child's life unfolded, it was evident that he would have no continuing city in this world, but would seek the city which is to come (Heb 13:14).

On the Feast of Theophany in 1861, he was baptized with the name Rafla, and later that spring the family was able to return to Damascus. The child attended elementary school, where he did very well, but in 1874 it appeared that Michael Hawaweeny would no longer be able to afford his son's tuition. Fortunately, help came from Deacon Athanasius Atallah (later Metropolitan of Homs), who recommended to Patriarch Hierotheus of Antioch

that Rafla be accepted as a student of the Patriarchate in preparation for the priesthood.

He was such a good student that he was selected to be a substitute teaching assistant in 1877. The following year he was appointed as a teacher of Arabic and Turkish. On March 28, 1879 he was tonsured as a monk by Patriarch Hierotheus, and served as His Beatitude's personal attendant.

Since the Balamand Seminary had been closed in 1840, Patriarch JOACHIM III of Constantinople invited the Patriarch of Antioch to send at least one deserving student to study on scholarship at the School of Theology at Halki, and Saint Raphael was the one who was selected to go.

On December 8, 1885, he was ordained to the diaconate at the school chapel. In July of 1886, the young deacon received his Certificate of Theology, and returned to his homeland in the hope of serving the Church there. Patriarch Gerasimus of Antioch was impressed with Deacon Raphael, and often took him along on his pastoral visitations of his parishes. When His Beatitude could not be present, Deacon Raphael was asked to preach the Word of God to the people.

Deacon Raphael was not satisfied with the extent of his knowledge, and thirsted to learn even more. This did not stem from personal pride or ambition, but came from his fervent desire to benefit others. Truly, the words of King Solomon could be applied to Saint Raphael: "Give an opportunity to a wise man, and he will be wiser; instruct a just man, and he will receive more instruction" (Proverbs 9:9). Therefore, he asked Patriarch Gerasimus to permit him to do graduate studies at a school in Russia, promising to return and serve as the Patriarch's Russian-language secretary. The Patriarch gave his blessing, and Deacon Raphael was accepted as a student at the Theological Academy of Kiev.

In 1889 Patriarch Gerasimus ordered the young deacon to take over as head of the Antiochian representation church in Moscow. He was ordained to the holy priesthood by Bishop SYLVESTER, the rector of the Academy, at the request of Patriarch Gerasimus. A month later, he was raised to the rank of archimandrite by Metropolitan IOANNIKII of Moscow, and was confirmed as head of the Antiochian representation church. After two years, Archimandrite Raphael was able to reduce the representation's 65,000 ruble debt by 15,000 rubles. He also arranged for twenty-four Syrian students to come to Russia to further their education, hoping that they would return to Syria and teach others.

When Patriarch Gerasimus resigned in order to accept the See of Jerusalem, Archimandrite Raphael regarded this as an opportunity to free the Church of Antioch from its domination by foreign hierarchs. Burning with love for the Church of Antioch, and wishing to restore the administration of the church to its own native clergy and people, Archimandrite Raphael began a campaign of writing letters to some Antiochian bishops and influential laymen. He also wrote articles in the Russian press, drawing attention to the plight of Antioch. His courageous efforts did not meet with success, however, and there was a price to pay for his outspoken criticism.

In November of 1891 Metropolitan SPYRIDON, a Greek Cypriot, was elected as Patriarch of Antioch. Many Arabs believed that he had purchased the election by distributing 10,000 lira to several notable people in Damascus. Archimandrite Raphael refused to commemorate the new Patriarch during services at the representation church. As a result, he was suspended from

his priestly functions by Patriarch SPYRIDON. Saint Raphael accepted his suspension, but continued to write articles in Russian newspapers in defense of the Antiochian cause. The Patriarchs of Antioch, Constantinople, Alexandria, and Jerusalem successfully petitioned the Tsar to forbid Russian newspapers from publishing his articles. With this door closed to him, Saint Raphael began to publish his writings in book form.

Eventually, Patriarch SPYRIDON wrote to the Assistant Overprocurator of Russia, a friend of Saint Raphael's, asking him to persuade Father Raphael to ask for the Patriarch's forgiveness. He did so, and the suspension was lifted. Saint Raphael was allowed to transfer from the jurisdiction of Antioch to the Church of Russia, and to remain there. He went to Kazan, taking a position as instructor in Arabic studies at the theological academy. He remained there until 1895 when he was invited by the Syrian Orthodox Benevolent Society of New York to come to that city to be the pastor of the Arab Orthodox community.

When the holy Apostle Paul had a vision of a man entreating him to come to Macedonia to help them (Acts 16:10), he set off on a great missionary journey. When Saint Raphael heard of the needs of his countrymen who were scattered in a strange land, he crossed the ocean to labor in yet another foreign country.

Archimandrite Raphael arrived in New York on November 2, 1895, and was welcomed by a delegation of Arab Christians who were awaiting their leader from Russia. On November 5, his first Sunday in America, he assisted Bishop NICHOLAS in serving the Divine Liturgy at the Russian church in New York city. Less than two weeks after his arrival, Archimandrite Raphael found a suitable place in lower Manhattan to set up a chapel, and furnished it with ecclesiastical items that he had brought with him from Russia. Bishop NICHOLAS blessed the new chapel, which was dedicated to Saint Nicholas of Myra.

This zealous pastor remained in New York teaching, preaching, and celebrating the divine services for his parishioners. It was not long, however, before he heard of smaller communities of Arab Christians scattered throughout the length and breadth of North America. Since these Arab immigrants had no pastor to care for them, it was not surprising that some should turn to other Christian traditions, or completely neglect their religious duties. This was an ongoing concern for Saint Raphael throughout the course of his ministry. Although he was not opposed to dialogue with non-Orthodox Christians, nor to friendly relations based on shared beliefs, Saint Raphael never lost sight of the clear line of distinction that exists between the Orthodox and the heterodox. He always insisted that any church unity must be based on the teachings of the seven Ecumenical Councils.

The Orthodoxy of Saint Raphael's life and teaching was demonstrated over and over again by his words and his actions. He always upheld and defended the spotless Faith which was "delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). Although at first he did not understand the teachings of the heterodox, he later discovered how far removed they were from Orthodox doctrine. When he realized this, he took steps to protect his flock from harmful influences. He directed his people not to attend heterodox services lest they become confused by "divers and strange doctrines" (Heb 13:9). He believed it would be preferable for the head of the household to read the Hours at home from the Service

Book when it was not possible to attend an Orthodox church.

In the summer of 1896, Saint Raphael undertook the first of several pastoral journeys across the continent. He visited thirty cities between New York and San Francisco, seeking out the Master's lost sheep in cities, towns, and on isolated farms. He fed the spiritually hungry people with the Word of God in each place where he stopped. He performed marriages, baptisms, heard confessions, and celebrated the Divine Liturgy in the homes of the faithful where there was no church building. In other words, he zealously fulfilled his ministry as a preacher of the Gospel, enduring many hardships and afflictions, and he was watchful in all things concerning the care of his flock (2 Tim 4:5).

In 1898, with the blessing of Bishop Nicholas, Saint Raphael produced his first book in the New World -- an Arabic language Service Book called *The Book of True Consolation in the Divine Prayers*. This book of liturgical services and prayers was very useful to priests in celebrating the divine services, and also to the people in their personal prayer life. The English version published by Archimandrite Seraphim Nassar is still being used today.

Between May-November 1898, Saint Raphael set off on his second pastoral tour. During this trip he became convinced of the need for Arabic-speaking priests to serve in the new churches he had established. When he returned to New York, he made a report to Bishop NICHOLAS expressing these concerns. With Bishop NICHOLAS's blessing Saint Raphael was able to bring qualified priests from Syria. He also sought out educated laymen whom he could recommend for ordination. Both as an archimandrite and later as bishop, Saint Raphael would appoint pastors only after obtaining the blessing of the Russian hierarch who headed the American Mission.

This was the normal state of affairs in America at the time. Archimandrite Raphael welcomed Bishop Tikhon when the latter replaced Bishop NICHOLAS as the ruling bishop in America. On December 15, Saint Tikhon came to serve the Liturgy at the Syrian church of Saint Nicholas. Raphael told his people that their new Archpastor was one who "has been sent here to tend the flock of Christ -- Russians, Slavs, Syro-Arabs, and Greeks -- which is scattered across the entire North American continent." At that time, of course, there were no parallel jurisdictions based on nationality. The Church united those of diverse backgrounds under the omophorion of the Russian Archbishop. This was the norm until the Russian Revolution disrupted church life in Russia, and also in America.

In March of 1899, Saint Raphael received permission from Bishop Tikhon to start collecting funds for a cemetery, and for building a new church to replace the chapel which was located in an old building on a dirty street. In the spring he left on another pastoral tour of forty-three cities and towns. Traveling by land and sea, and undeterred by the obstacles and difficulties before him, he spent seven months in the northeastern, southern, and midwestern regions of the United States. Saint Raphael ministered to Greeks and Russians as well as Arabs, performing weddings and baptisms, and regularizing the weddings of Orthodox people who had been married by non-Orthodox clergy. He also chrismated some children who had been baptized by Catholic priests.

In Johnstown, PA he reconciled those whose personal enmity threatened to divide the Arabic community. Although civil courts had been unable to make peace, Saint

Raphael restored calm and put an end to the bitter feud. While in Johnstown, he received a telegram informing him that Metropolitan Meletios (Doumani), had been elected Patriarch of Antioch. With great joy Saint Raphael told his people that for the first time in 168 years, a native Arab had been chosen as primate of the Antiochian Church.

After the new Patriarch had been installed, Archimandrite Raphael was proposed to succeed Meletios as Metropolitan of Latakia. The Patriarch, however, stated that the Holy Synod could not elect Father Raphael because of his important work in America. In 1901, Metropolitan GABRIEL of Beirut wrote to Archimandrite Raphael asking him to be his auxiliary bishop, but he declined, saying that he could not leave his American flock. First, he wanted to build a permanent church, and to acquire a parish cemetery. The latter goal was achieved in August of 1901 when Father Raphael purchased a section of Mt Olivet cemetery on Long Island.

In December of 1901 Archimandrite Raphael was elected as Bishop of Zahleh. Patriarch Meletios sent a telegram congratulating him and asking him to return. Father Raphael thanked the Patriarch, but again declined higher office. He said that he wished to complete the project of building a temple for the Syrian community in New York. The following year, he bought an existing church building on Pacific Street in Brooklyn, and had it remodeled for Orthodox worship. Bishop Tikhon consecrated the church to the great joy of the faithful in attendance. Thus, Saint Raphael's second major project was finished.

Since the number of parishes within the Diocese of North America was growing, Bishop Tikhon found it impossible to visit all of them. The diocese had to be reorganized in order to administer it more efficiently. Therefore, Bishop Tikhon submitted a plan to the Russian Holy Synod which would transfer the See from San Francisco to New York because most parishes and individuals were concentrated in the east. Since various ethnic groups required special attention and pastoral leadership, Bishop Tikhon proposed that Archimandrite Raphael be made his second vicar bishop (the Bishop of Alaska would be his first).

In 1903, the Holy Synod of Russia unanimously elected Archimandrite Raphael to be the Bishop of Brooklyn while retaining him as head of the Syro-Arab Orthodox Mission in North America. The Holy Synod announced the election to Patriarch Meletios, who was pleased by their decision. Bishop Tikhon wrote to Saint Raphael to inform him of his election, and Father Raphael sent him a letter of acceptance. Meanwhile, Father Innocent Pustynsky was consecrated as Tikhon's first auxiliary bishop at Saint Petersburg's cathedral of Our Lady of Kazan.

On the third Sunday of Lent in 1904, Saint Raphael became the first Orthodox bishop to be consecrated on American soil. Bishop Tikhon and Bishop Innocent performed the service at Saint Nicholas Cathedral in Brooklyn. The new bishop's vestments were a gift from Tsar Nicholas II. Following his consecration, Bishop Raphael continued his pastoral labors, ordaining priests and assigning them to parishes, and helping Bishop Tikhon in the administration of the diocese.

At the end of 1904, Bishop Raphael announced his intention to publish a magazine called *Al-Kalimat* (The Word) as the official publication of the Syro-Arab mission. This would help to link the people and parishes of his diocese more closely together. Bishop Raphael knew that he could not visit all Orthodox Christians across North

America in person, but through the ministry of the printed word, he could preach the word of salvation even to people he would never meet. The content was to be spiritual, moral, and churchly so that the magazine could reinforce people in their Faith. The Word would focus on five primary topics: dogmatic truths, ethical teaching, historical and contemporary ecclesiastical subjects, a chronicle of baptisms, weddings, etc., and official pronouncements. The first issue was printed in January 1905, and Saint Raphael considered this milestone as one equal in importance to the acquisition of Saint Nicholas Cathedral and the parish cemetery.

In July of 1905 Bishop Raphael consecrated the grounds for Saint Tikhon's Monastery and blessed the orphanage at South Canaan, PA. Three days later, he presided at a conference of diocesan clergy at Old Forge, PA, because Archbishop Tikhon was in San Francisco. Among the clergy in attendance were three who would also be numbered among the saints: Father ALEXIS Toth, Father Alexander Hotovitzky, and Father John Kochurov (the last two would die as martyrs in Russia).

For the next ten years Bishop Raphael tended his growing flock. With the growth of his New York community came an increase in the number of children, and he was concerned about their future. He wanted to establish an evening school to educate them in a Christian atmosphere, because the future of the Church in this country depended upon the instruction of the youth. Children who did not speak Arabic were already going to non-Orthodox churches where Sunday school classes were conducted in English. Bishop Raphael saw the absolute necessity for using English in worship and in education for the future progress of the Syro-Arab Mission.

Taking heed of Saint Paul's words to pray in a language that people understood (1 Cor.14:15-19), Saint Raphael recommended the use of the Service Book of the Holy Orthodox Catholic Apostolic Church (translated by Isabel Hapgood) in all of his parishes.

In March of 1907 Saint Tikhon returned to Russia and was replaced by Archbishop PLATON. Once again Saint Raphael was considered for episcopal office in Syria, being nominated to succeed Patriarch GREGORY as Metropolitan of Tripoli in 1908. The Holy Synod of Antioch removed Bishop Raphael's name from the list of candidates, citing various canons which forbid a bishop being transferred from one city to another.

On the Sunday of Orthodoxy in 1911, Bishop Raphael was honored for his fifteen years of pastoral ministry in America. Archbishop PLATON presented him with a silver-covered icon of Christ and praised him for his work. In his humility, Bishop Raphael could not understand why he should be honored merely for doing his duty (Luke 17:10). He considered himself an "unworthy servant," yet he did perfectly the work that fell to him (Saint Ignatius of Antioch, Letter to the Ephesians).

Toward the end of 1912, Bishop Raphael became ill while working in his office. Doctors diagnosed him with a heart ailment that eventually caused his death. After two weeks he felt strong enough to celebrate the Liturgy in his cathedral.

In 1913-1914 this missionary bishop continued to make pastoral visitations to various cities. In 1915 he fell ill again and spent two months at home, bearing his illness with patience. At 12:40 AM on February 14/27 he rested from his labors. They called him, but he did not answer. They shook him, but he was gone.

From his youth, Saint Raphael's greatest joy was to serve the Church. When he came to America, he found his people scattered abroad, and he called them to unity. He never neglected his flock, but traveled throughout America, Canada, and Mexico in search of them so that he might care for them. He kept them from straying into strange pastures, and he protected them from spiritual harm. During twenty years of faithful ministry he nurtured them and helped them to grow. At the time of his death, the Syro-Arab Mission had thirty parishes with 25,000 faithful.

He was also a scholar, and the author of several books. He wrote many, if not most, of the articles that appeared in The Word. He served his own Arabic community, and also reached out to Greeks and Russians, speaking to them in their own language. He became fluent in English, and encouraged its use in church services and educational programs.

Saint Raphael came into contact with all sorts of people, and was a gentle father to them. He gained their love and respect by first loving them, and also through his charming personality and excellent character. He was always kind and merciful to others, but was strict with himself. He accomplished many good things during his earthly life, and now he joins the holy angels in offering ceaseless prayer and praise to God.

Through the prayers of the holy Bishop Raphael, may we also be made worthy of the heavenly Kingdom. Amen.

The All-Night Vigil: OT Readings

The "Paroemia" are the Scripture readings or lessons appointed for Vespers. They have largely disappeared except for Great Feasts and Saints for whom a Vigil or Polyeleion Matins are served. The readings are related to the feast or saint in some way, and at Vespers, the readings are primarily from the Old Testament. Usually there are three readings to symbolize the three parts of the Old Testament (Law, Prophets, Writings), and if they are from the Old Testament, the Royal Doors are closed and the church is darkened. If the readings should be from the New Testament, as they are at a feast of the Apostles, for example, the lights remain on and the doors open. This difference, of course, shows that what was darkly seen in signs, types, and shadows in the Old Testament is now clearly revealed in Christ. This is one reason the Old Testament is not read at the Divine Liturgy: the Liturgy represents the Kingdom, the New Covenant, the Church, and the fulfillment of the Old Testament, and reading from the Old Testament (apart from the Psalms) is not in keeping with the nature of the Divine Liturgy. But on the eve of a feast in the time and service of preparation, the reading of the Old Testament is appointed in accordance with its preparatory nature.

To Be Continued

Upcoming Events 2021

6 March Forgiveness Vespers, 5:00 p.m.
7 March: Great Fast Begins
7-12 March Clean Week
18-23 April Great & Holy Week
24 April: Great & Holy Pascha

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!