

The Confessor's Tongue for March 13, A. D. 2022

Sunday of Orthodoxy; St. Nicephorus; Martyr Christian of Persia

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.

13 March: Martyr Christina of Persia

The Holy Martyr Christina of Persia was scourged to death for confessing her faith in Christ, during the fourth century.

The Sayings of St. Anthony the Great 10

Abba Anthony said, "Just as fish die if they stay too long out of water, so the monks who loiter outside their cells or pass their time with men of the world lose the intensity of inner peace. So like a fish going towards the sea, we must hurry to reach our cell, for fear that if we delay outside we will lose our interior watchfulness."

Saying 10 in *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*

Commentary: The monk has a special vocation, to leave the world and all ties thereto and to live separated from the affairs of the world so he can devote himself to prayer. In the desert, the advice to monks was always to "stay in your cell" for "your cell will teach you everything." Even in the desert, the monk was tempted to "make the rounds", to "hang out" with other monks, to fall into idle chatter. Even worse was the monk who was frequently absent for business in town. The canons of the Church affirm the special vocation of the monk; he is to remain in his monastery, subject to his bishop, engaged in prayer and whatever work he is given. To be outside for long is to be in the wrong environment and to run a serious spiritual risk.

Likewise, the first (but not only) place of a Christian in the world is the Church. The natural expectation she has of all Christians is that they gather every Lord's Day in the Lord's house. So strong is that expectation and she has decreed in a holy canon that to be voluntarily absent for three or more weeks in a row is to excommunicate oneself from the Church. If we are absent for long, we begin to die spiritually. Just as the employee goes to work every day appointed for him by his employer, so the Christian sets aside the time asked of him by his Lord.

In the *Apostolic Constitutions*, a third-century document containing material still more ancient, Christians are urged to "assemble yourselves together every day, morning and evening, singing psalms and praying in the Lord's house.... And on the day of our Lord's resurrection, which is the Lord's Day, meet more diligently, sending praise to God who made the universe by Jesus, and sent him to us, and condescended to let him suffer, and raised Him from the dead" (Bk 2.59). This was written for laity in the world who had to work six days a week, not for monks! Of course, it was written long before the coming of our many addicting, time-wasting technologies which serve well to kill time but have little eternal value.

Most parishes do not even bother to try to serve daily services, fearing that no one would come. But certainly it is not too much for our Lord, who made us and died for us, to ask that we be present at the Vigil for two hours Saturday evening (especially if we plan to partake of Holy Communion), the Hours and Divine Liturgy for two hours Sunday morning, and perhaps an hour at a midweek service? Altogether, that would represent five hours a week in church of the 168 given to us each week, or 2.9% of our time. Take another five hours for prayer and reading at home, including time preparing for Communion, and you have ten hours, just under 6% of our time each week. Even if we exclude from our calculations eight hours per night for sleep, that ten hours still represents only 8.9% of our waking time, not even a 'tithe' of time offered to God. Even if you attended all the services here during a typical week (Vigil, two or three Liturgies, three Vespers, three Matins—about 12 hours) and spent four more at home, that 16 hours would still be but 9.5% of your total time each week and 14% of your waking time (if sleeping 8 hours)—not a lot to ask when eternity is at stake.

Sometimes we wonder why our spiritual lives are weak and why we make little progress. The answer may well be how little time we devote to preparing for eternity. If nearly all our time is spent in the world engaged in worldly activities, attending to the cares of life (or simply amusing ourselves), how can we expect to become fit for heaven? Many of us would be ashamed to see how much time we spend each week watching television or movies, listening to music, playing sports or video games, reading novels or newspapers or surfing the web compared to how much time we spend on the One we call our Lord.

Since this life is preparation for the life to come, let us, for a moment, compare our Christian practice with college, which is popularly thought to prepare us for adult life 'in the real world'. How likely would you be to graduate if, while signed up for a full load (15 credits), you attended ten of your scheduled fifteen hours of class each week and studied just five more hours (instead of the 2-3 hours of study outside of class are required for each hour spent in class, which means 30 to 45 hours of study outside class each week) for a total of fifteen spent each week on college of the needed 45 to 60? Good luck. As Christians, how can we expect progress and success in spiritual life and entrance into the Kingdom if we (grudgingly) give God but two or three hours a week? Sunday Liturgy alone with minimal preparation and a hurried "our Father" as we fall into bed each night won't cut the bonds of sin and distraction tying us down to this world.

Moreover, we notice that it is not just time out of the cell that is a threat to the monk but time spent with 'men of the world,' or worldly people. "Bad

company corrupts good morals," as St. Paul says. Our choice of friends plays a decisive role in the quality of our spiritual life, as we become like those with whom we spend time and open ourselves to. If most or much of our time is spent with people who drink too much, do drugs, doubt God, scoff, and otherwise live sinful lives, it should not surprise us if we find ourselves doing such things too and that our love for God and His people and Church is growing cold.

Our life is found in Christ and His Body, the Church. As Christians, that is our natural environment (through baptism) just as a fish lives in the water. May we all be found more commonly in our natural element for the salvation of our souls! *Fr. Justin*

The Word "Anathema" and Its Meaning *Saint John of San Francisco*

The Greek word "anathema" consists of two words: "ana", which is a preposition indicating movement upwards and "thema", which means a separate part of something. In military terminology, "thema" meant a detachment; in civil government "thema" meant a province. We currently use the word "theme", derived from "thema", to mean a specific topic of a written and intellectual work.

"Anathema" literally means the lifting up of something separate. In the Old Testament this expression was used both in relation to that which was alienated due to sinfulness and likewise to that which was dedicated to God.

In the New Testament, in the writing of the Apostle Paul it is used once in conjunction with "maranatha", meaning the coming of the Lord. The combination of these words means separation until the coming of the Lord; in other words - being handed over to Him (1 Cor 16:22).

The Apostle Paul uses "anathema" in another place without the addition of "maranatha" (Gal 1:8-9). Here "anathema" is proclaimed against the distortion of the Gospel of Christ as it was preached by the Apostle, no matter by whom this might be committed, whether by the Apostle himself or an angel from the heavens. In this same expression there is also implied: "let the Lord Himself pass judgment", for who else can pass judgment on the angels?

St John the Theologian in Revelation (22:3) says that in the New Jerusalem there will not be any anathema; this can be understood in two ways, giving the word anathema both meanings: 1) there will not be any lifting up to the judgment of God, for this judgment has already been accomplished; 2) there will not be any special dedication to God, for all things will be the Holy things of God, just as the light of God enlightens all (Rev 21:23).

In the acts of the Councils and the further course of the New Testament Church of Christ, the word "anathema" came to mean complete separation from the Church. "The Catholic and Apostolic Church anathematizes", "let him be anathema", "let it be anathema", means a complete tearing away from the church. While in cases of "separation from the communion of the Church" and other epitemia or penances laid on a person, the person remained a member of the Church, even though his participation in her grace filled life was limited, those given over to anathema were thus completely torn away from her until their repentance. Realizing that she is unable to do anything for their salvation, in view of their stubbornness and hardness of heart, the earthly church lifts them up to the judgment of God. That judgment is

merciful unto repentant sinners, but fearsome for the stubborn enemies of God. "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God ... for our God is a consuming fire" (Heb 10:31 ; 12:29).

Anathema is not final damnation: until death repentance is possible. "Anathema" is fearsome not because the Church wishes anyone evil or God seeks their damnation. They desire that all be saved. But it is fearsome to stand before the presence of God in the state of hardened evil: nothing is hidden from Him. *from Orthodox Life, vol 27, Mar-April 1977, pp 18,19*

The All-Night Vigil: "Vouchsafe"

After the Augmented Litany, the Deacon steps aside from before the Royal Doors while the priest intones the exclamation. Then the reader chants the prayer, "Vouchsafe, O Lord, to keep us this evening without sin...", a short prayer derived from the longer Great Doxology. It is always prescribed to be read by the reader except during Bright Week, when it is sung—though in many places, it is always sung at Vigil. Depending what time of the day this prayer is read, we'll ask God to keep us "this day" (in the morning), "this evening" (at Vespers), and "this night" (at Compline).

In this prayer, we recognize our dependence on God's grace to stand against sin—"vouchsafe to keep us this evening without sin". Often we fall, because we lack the humility to see our weakness and do not ask for His help. ("Vouchsafe" means "condescend to grant" or "graciously grant".)

The prayer instructs us in the importance of Christ commandments, or statutes. "Blessed art Thou, O Lord, teach me Thy statutes. Blessed art Thou, O Master, make me to understand Thy statutes. Blessed art Thou, O Holy One, enlighten me with Thy statutes." Though the prayer to some may seem repetitive, it is actually progressive. We ask God to teach us what His commands are; then, knowing them, we ask Him for understanding of what they mean and how they apply to our lives; then we ask that God would bring us enlightenment through keeping his commandments. Indeed, Christ's commandments purify us from sin and the passions, and it is a purified soul that is able to receive enlightenment, illumination, and, ultimately, deification.

The prayer concludes by asserting that God's mercy is not temporary, like human mercy, but is forever. It cannot be exhausted. Based on His mercy, goodness, and love, we ask that he not despise us, the work of His hands, and then we affirm that He is due praise, a hymn, and glory *Fr. Justin*

Upcoming Events 2021

24 March: Vigil for Annunciation, 7:00 p.m.
25 March: Vespers Divine Liturgy for Annunciation 6 p.m.
18-23 April Great & Holy Week
24 April Holy Pascha, the Feast of Feasts

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!