

# The Confessor's Tongue for April 3, A. D. 2022

4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent; St. John of the Ladder

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 12**

*Some brothers came to find Abba Anthony to tell him about the visions they were having, and to find out from him if they were true or if they came from the demons. They had a donkey which died on the way. When they reached the place where the old man was, he said to them before they could ask him anything, 'How was it that the little donkey died on the way here?' They said, 'How do you know about that, Father?' And he told them, 'The demons showed me what happened.' So they said, 'That was what we came to question you about, for fear we were being deceived, for we have visions which often turn out to be true.' Thus the old man convinced them, by the example of the donkey that their visions came from the demons. Saying 12 in The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*

*Commentary:* The devil is a "liar and the father of lies", but he and his demons will often mislead men, setting them up for greater deception by telling them the truth to get them to put initial trust in him and by appealing to their vanity. His program for man is nothing "but to kill, to steal, and destroy". That a vision turns out to be true is no guarantee that it is from God. Because of the danger of deception, we are instructed to disregard dreams and visions. We are to seek God, not visions. Sometimes the demons even foretell the future, which is generally a matter of curiosity to men. St. Anthony explains that they do not know the things that do not yet exist; rather, they see things beginning to happen and run on ahead to tell it to those who have not yet seen, thus appearing to tell the future. Sometimes even those 'predictions' fail as things turn out differently from what the initial indication suggests.

In his *Life of Anthony*, St. Athanasius reports much of St. Anthony's experience with the demons, of which he had much. In short, Anthony's life demonstrates that Christians need not fear the demons. Christ has conquered them, rendering them powerless against us. Oh, they may rage and scream and threaten, but they have no power over those who are Christ's. Their only device is to lie and get man to believe their lie, which then gives them a measure of power over man. When they appear to us or rage at us, they are attempting to get us to believe that they can harm us, and if they succeed in arousing such perverse faith in us, they may then afflict us. St. Anthony correctly understood this when a crowd of demons appeared to him. He said, "If you could hurt me, it would be enough for one of you to come. Nor would you all stand hear roaring and making noise, but would simply get on with harming me. That so many of you appear and make such noise proves your utter weakness."

In contending with the enemy, we put our faith in Christ, make the sign of the Cross, invoke the name of Jesus, and watchfully guard ourselves against lies.

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Here we are called to stand firm in the full armor of God. We are called to "resist the devil, and he will flee from you." We are to resist that lion who "prowls about seeking whom he may devour" and to stand firm in our faith. We do not dwell on the enemy, but we are aware of his devices. We fear God, not him, but we remain watchful and ready to resist his lies and suggestions, which he insinuates into our minds as thoughts, which is primary battlefield in the spiritual warfare that is the Christian life.

We should recognize that there are those in our time who do not believe that demons exist, considering them the attempt of primitive man to explain certain phenomena, such as mental illness, which they then did not understand. Now we supposedly know better and can dispense with such primitive explanations. According to those holding this view, we may best understand the references to demons and the devil in the Scriptures as a literary device personifying evil. Yet from Christ down to our time, we have a long record of personal encounters with personal but non-human rational powers of evil. One may choose whom to believe: the reasonings of the sceptics or the reports of Savior, the Scriptures, and the Saints. *Fr. Justin*

## **The All-Night Vigil: Litia**

At Vigils, the Evening Litany is followed by the "Litia," also written "Lity." Though the Litia is appointed for every Vigil, it is customarily omitted at Resurrectional Vigils on Saturday nights and served only at Great Feasts and for Vigil-class saints. The word comes from the Greek and means "prayer" or "entreaty". (If the Litia is not celebrated as part of the Vigil, the clergy remain in the altar, and the service continues with the stichera of the Aposticha.

The Litia begins with the choir singing special stichera (verses) in honor of the feast or saint. As they sing, the clergy and servers process out the North Door to the narthex of the temple (the Royal Doors remain shut). There is a special reason for the location of this part of the service. The nave of the temple represents the Church in the world, but the narthex represents those not yet united to the Church. A pre-revolutionary Russian liturgist writes, "In the Litia, the Church steps out of its blessed milieu and, with the goal of mission to the world, into the external world or into the narthex, the part of the church which abuts this world, the part which is open to all, including those not yet part of the Church or excluded from Her. From this stems the universal character of Litia prayers, embracing all people." In some times and places, the Litia is even celebrated outside the temple. Properly, all the faithful would process with the clergy to the narthex or outside, but due to the lack of space in most modern narthexes, this is rarely done—only the clergy leave the nave.

When the choir finishes the stichera for the Litia, the Deacon intones a special litany of five longer-than-usual petitions, beginning with the long prayer, "O God, Save Thy People." In this first petition, we ask that God would look upon His world with mercy and compassion, exalt the horn (a Scriptural symbol of power and strength) of Orthodox Christians, and send down upon them His rich mercies through the petitions of the Theotokos and a long list of saints. This reminds us that the Church consists of those of all times and places, not just those who happen to be alive now. Moreover, we call upon those who have successfully completed their earthly course to pray for us, the great cloud of witnesses of which Paul writes in the epistle to the Hebrews, who know better how to speak to God than we do.

In the remaining four petitions, we pray for hierarchs, the whole Church and the local Church, the departed, and civil authorities. We pray to be preserved from "wrath, famine pestilence, earthquake, flood, fire, the sword, foreign invasion, and from civil war, and from sudden death..." and we pray that God will hear us sinners and have mercy on us.

"Lord, have mercy" is sung many times after each of these petitions (originally 40, 50, and 30 times for the first three petitions, now customarily reduced to 12 times). After the priest's exclamation, he then offers a prayer to Christ through the intercessions of the Theotokos and a long list of saints (sometimes omitted): "...make our prayer acceptable, grant us forgiveness of our trespasses, shelter us under the shelter of thy wings, drive away from us every enemy and adversary, give peace to our life, O Lord. Have mercy on us and on Thy world and save our souls, for Thou art good and lovest man."

After this prayer, the people and clergy process back into the nave while the choir sings the stichera of the Aposticha commemorating the resurrection, feast, or saint, alternating with psalm verses chanted by the reader. The clergy stand before a table on which five loaves (evoking the five loaves Christ used to feed the 5000), wheat, wine, and oil are placed. They remain there until after the "Our Father" has been read and the dismissal troparia have been sung, and then the priest blesses the loaves, wheat, wine, and oil. The ancient custom was then to distribute the wine and bread to strengthen the faithful to keep the long all-night Vigil yet ahead. Now, the bread dipped in the wine is distributed during Matins when the faithful come to venerate the Gospel or Festal icon and be anointed with the blessed oil. *Fr. Justin*

### From St. John of the Ladder

Let us who are weak and passionate have the courage to offer our infirmity and natural weakness to Christ with unhesitating faith, and confess it to Him; and we shall be certain to obtain His help, even beyond our worth, if only we continually plunge to the depth of humility. *Step 1.8*

In hastening to solitude and exile, do not wait for world-loving souls, because the thief comes unexpectedly. In trying to save the careless and indolent along with

themselves, many perish with them, because in course of time the soul's fire goes out. As soon as the flame is burning within you, run; for you do not know when it will go out and leave you in darkness. Not all of us are required to save others. The divine Apostle says: 'Everyone of us shall give account of himself to God.' And again he says: 'Thou therefore that teachest another, dost thou not teach thyself?' This is like saying: I do not know whether we must all teach others; but we must most certainly teach ourselves. *Step 3.4*

Run from places of sin as from the plague. For when fruit is not present, we have no frequent desire to eat it. *Step 3.9*

He whose will and desire in conversation is to establish his own opinion, even though what he says is true, should recognize that he is sick with the devil's disease [pride]. And if he behaves like this only in conversation with his equals, then perhaps the re-buke of his superiors may heal him. But if he acts this way even with those who are greater and wiser than he, then his malady is humanly incurable. *Step 4.48*

Greater than baptism itself is the fountain of tears after baptism, even though it is somewhat audacious to say so. For baptism is the washing away of evils that were in us before, but sins committed after baptism are washed away by tears. As baptism is received in infancy, we have all defiled it, but we cleanse it anew with tears. And if God in His love for mankind had not given us tears, those being saved would be few indeed and hard to find. *Step 7.6*

The beginning of freedom from anger is silence of the lips when the heart is agitated; the middle is silence of thoughts when there is a mere disturbance of soul; and the end is an imperturbable calm under the breath of unclean winds. *Step 8.4*

Do not regard the feelings of a person who speaks to you about his neighbor disparagingly, but rather say to him: 'Stop, brother! I fall into graver sins every day, so how can I criticize him?' In this way you will achieve two things: you will heal yourself and your neighbor with one plaster. This is one of the shortest ways to forgiveness of sins; I mean, not to judge. 'Judge not, and ye shall not be judged.' *Step 10.7*

Do not condemn, even if you see with your eyes, for they are often deceived. *Step 10.17*

He who has become aware of his sins has controlled his tongue, but a talkative person has not yet come to know himself as he should. *Step 11.4*

With beginners, falls [from chastity] usually occur by reason of luxury; with intermediates, because of haughtiness as well as from the same cause which leads to the fall of the beginners; and with those approaching perfection, solely from judging their neighbors. *Step 15.20*

Fear is a rehearsing of danger beforehand; or again, fear is a trembling sensation of the heart, alarmed and troubled by unknown misfortunes. Fear is a loss of assurance. *Step 21.3*

God often hides from our eyes even those perfections that we have obtained. But he who praises us or, rather, misleads us, opens our eyes by his praise, and as soon as our eyes are opened, our treasure vanishes. *Step 22.10*

Talkativeness is born sometimes of gluttony, and sometimes of vainglory. *Step 26.43*

Sickness is sometimes for the cleansing of sins, and sometimes to humble our soul. *Step 26.54*

If you feel sweetness or compunction at some word of your prayer, dwell on it; for then our guardian angel is praying with us. *Step 28.11*

### Upcoming Events 2022

18-23 April Great & Holy Week  
24 April Holy Pascha, the Feast of Feasts

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!