

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

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent; St. Mary of Egypt; Martyr Terence

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 13**

*A hunter in the desert came to find Abba Anthony enjoying himself with the brethren and he was shocked. Wanting to show him that it was necessary sometimes to meet the needs of the brethren, the old man said to him, 'Put an arrow in your bow and shoot it.' So he did. The old man then said, 'Shoot another,' and he did so. Then the old man said, 'Shoot yet again,' and the hunter replied, 'If I bend my bow so much, I will break it.' Then the old man said to him, 'It is the same with the work of God. If we stretch the brethren beyond measure, they will soon break. Sometimes it is necessary to come down to meet their needs.' When he heard these words, the hunter was pierced by compunction and, greatly edified by the old man, he went away. As for the brethren, they went home strengthened.*

Saying 13 in *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*

*Commentary:* This same wisdom is found in the cycles of fasting and feasting in the Church. We are called to make a considerable ascetic effort in prayer, fasting, and almsgiving during the four fasts of the year, especially during Great Lent. But at the end of each season of fast comes a festive season and a relaxation of ascetical effort. Few of us could bear it if we had to try to live life at the level of effort demanded by Great Lent. Like the overstressed bow, we would break.

Though the feasts bring us a relaxation of ascetical effort and a time to rejoice and be glad, we must not conceive of this 'relaxation' as though it were a sort of 'spiritual vacation', during which we are freed from prayer, temptation, and struggle. There is no such thing as a spiritual vacation, for our adversary the devil relentlessly prowls about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. To take a spiritual vacation will always spiritually disarm us and harm us. It is for this reason that St. Anthony the Great was always urging others to hold on to their ascetic labors and not relax them, and why he himself throughout his life increased his own.

King Solomon writes in Ecclesiastes, "To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven.... A time to weep, and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance.... A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away.... A time to keep silence, and a time to speak..." (Ecc 3:1-8). Though this life generally is a time for us to lose our life that we may find it, to give that we may receive, to weep and cultivate repentance so that we may rejoice in the age to come, yet even this life in this fallen world and evil generation has its joys, its rewards, its times of laughter, rest, getting, and dancing. The Optina Elders often referred to these little relaxations and joys along the way as "consolations" sent by God. Such times help us who

are weak from breaking under the strain of constant effort.

Yet every such consolation and joy in this life is only relative compared to the joy to come, a foretaste, a glimpse. We cannot live here in rest, relaxation, and meeting the needs of the body, for these pleasures are only a pale reflection of much greater goods to come; the joys here are not the ultimate end. In this life, we get only a foretaste of the Kingdom, not the fullness of it. God grants us consolations along our difficult way so we do not lose heart, but we cannot long tarry in them. Even though we cannot linger long in them, we should not disdain them, or be ashamed of our need for them, or judge others over them as the hunter did. *Fr. Justin*

## **The All-Night Vigil: St. Symeon's Prayer**

Following the Litia and Aposticha is St. Symeon's Prayer, "Now dost Thou dismiss Thy servant, O Master, according to Thy word, in peace..." which expresses the last theme of Vespers: that of the end. At daily Vespers, the prayer is read by the reader, but at Great Vespers it is sung. The words of this prayer come from the lips of St. Symeon the God-Bearer (Luke 2:22-35). St. Symeon had spent his entire life in constant expectation of the coming of the Messiah, for he had been told in a vision that he would not die before he had seen the Promised One of Israel. When Mary and Joseph brought the Child Jesus to be presented to God in the Temple, he was there and received the Christ-child into his arms, and spoke the words we now sing at Vespers:

Now dost Thou dismiss Thy servant, O Master, according to Thy word in peace. For mine eyes have seen Thy salvation, which Thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to enlighten the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel.

St. Symeon had been waiting all his life, and then, at last, the Christ-child was given to him: he held the Life of the world in his arms. He stood for the whole world in its expectation and longing, and the words he used to express his thanksgiving have become our own. He could recognize the Lord because he had expected Him; he took Him into his arms because it is natural to take someone you love into your arms; and then his life of waiting was fulfilled. He had beheld the One for whom he had longed. He had completed his purpose in life and was ready to die.

But death to St. Symeon was no catastrophe. It was only a natural expression of the fulfillment of his waiting. He was not closing his eyes to the Light he had at last seen; his death was only the beginning of the more inward vision of the Light. In the same way, Vespers is the recognition that the evening of this world has come, which announces that day that has no evening. In this world, every day faces night; the world itself is facing night. It cannot last forever. Yet

the Church is affirming that an evening is not only an end, but also a beginning, just as any evening is also the beginning of another day. In Christ and through Christ, it may become the beginning of a new life, of the day that has no evening. For our eyes have seen salvation and light which will never fail. And because of this, the time of this world is now pregnant with new life. We come into the presence of Christ to offer Him our time, we extend our arms to receive Him, and He fills this time with Himself. He heals it and makes it—again and again—the time of salvation.

Following St. Symeon's Prayer, the reader chants the Trisagion Prayers through the "Our Father." At the exclamation (in some practices), the lights are turned up and the Royal Doors are opened. The hymn "O Theotokos, Virgin, Rejoice..." is sung three times. (At Great Vespers served alone, this hymn is not taken, but rather the appropriate dismissal troparia and theotokion.) If a Litia was served, the Deacon now censes the loaves, wheat, wine, and oil and the Priest reads the prayer of blessing. He then gives the dismissal and returns to the altar. The Royal Doors are closed, the Church is darkened, and the bell rings to announce the beginning of Matins. *Fr. Justin*

**Upcoming Events 2022**

18-23 April Great & Holy Week  
24 April Holy Pascha, the Feast of Feasts  
24 April Agape Vespers and Paschal Picnic 3:00 p.m.

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!