

The Confessor's Tongue for May 8, A. D. 2022

Sunday of the Myrrhbearers, St. John the Theologian, St. Arsenius

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.

300 Ascetical & Theological Chapters

St. Justin of Chelije

One day one of the disciples asked Fr. Justin why he would not write his confession, to which Fr. Justin replied, "All I have written is my confession." The hundred Words of Fr. Justin are not a complete work; they are made up of his individual notes in notebooks or on pieces of paper, but it is significant that they cover his entire ascetic life and are essential autobiographical material for a comprehensive understanding of the intellectual and spiritual image of the blissfully reposed Fr. Justin in all his Christ-likeness. For us, they are, according to the wise Solomon (see: Wisdom of Solomon 6:12-19), are living evidences of Divine life and Divine wisdom, or, as Fr. Justin himself would say about it, God-human life and God-human wisdom. It is based on God, and God is one in heaven and on earth, in the lily and in man. By God we are equal through love. – (August 21, 1916)

First Century

1.1 All—all other religions—prescribed to be above man in order to avoid human sins; to be above the world without the world; without the earth in order not to be defiled and not to do evil. Only Christ demands man to be in the world of evil but without evil, to be among sly people but without slyness; in filth but without being defiled. To be in an evil world but not to be evil—here is the strength which Christ gives. And therefore Christ is the bearer of the struggle, of the sword which separates and cuts off evil from the world. 4 January 1915, *Vladychin Khan*

1.2. Love is the new thing in Christ, the only new thing. By love, Christ is new and God. "Whoever is in Christ is a new creature." whoever does not have love is still in the Old Testament. The sign of Christ is love. 21 August 1916, *London*

1.3. Love—this is the only equality possible on earth: the equality of man with man, of man with the lily, of the sparrow with man, the equality of everything with everything; of everything on earth with everything in heaven; in the lily and in man. We are equal with God through love. 21 August 1916

1.4. Suffering—this is the wine by which Christ communes man from the chalice of love. 21 August 1916 (Translated from Russian by Fr. Justin Frederick)

From Fr. John (Krestiankin, +2006)

Fr. John was an elder at the Pskov Caves Monastery (Pechory) during Communism. You can read more about him in the book Everyday Saints. He will soon be canonized.

Dear in the Lord N.!

The Lord is in Pskov and in Karelia, and He hears those who call out to Him fervently.

Live where you are and go to church in your town, take communion often, not less than once a month, every two weeks would be better. No one can free us

from bearing our life's cross, and that's not even necessary. Without the cross, we won't see Christ. Receive Unction once a year without fail. Unction is one of the seven Sacraments of the Church, while exorcism is only a right.

May God give you wisdom.

Dear L.N.!

I read your alarming letter and have to disappoint you. While living, according to your opinion, with God in your soul, you remain practically without God.

You have no living faith that the Lord rules life in the world and provides for each person. When there is no faith in God's omnipotence, in His boundless mercy, then the enemy of God and man finds an inroad to us. He tries to scare us, and deprive us of calm and peace of soul. This exhausting fear makes a person sick.

This is very obviously expressed in you. "I am afraid of everything, afraid for everyone, afraid of people." You yourself are unable to overcome this state of soul—you must seek help from the all-powerful God. To begin with, you and O. should go to Confession, receive Unction and Communion. This is spiritual healing. Then take your will under your control and start receiving Communion every other week, for now. When your condition has gotten better, you can receive Communion once a month, but no less.

When you leave the house, say without fail the prayer to the Cross of the Lord, and when you have a meeting with people whom you fear, also read this prayer [at end of evening prayers—"Let God arise..."]. The Lord and your guardian angel will protect you from all evil.

Yes, there are people nowadays who consciously choose evil, but they cannot do anything to those who are with God. After all, the enemy is powerful, but only the Lord is all-powerful.

I promise to pray for you and your daughter.

The Sayings of St. Anthony the Great 14

Abba Anthony heard of a very young monk who had performed a miracle on the road. Seeing the old men walking with difficulty along the road, he ordered the wild asses to come and carry them until they reached Abba Anthony. Those whom they had carried told Abba Anthony about it. He said to them, 'This monk seems to me to be a ship loaded with goods, but I do not know if he will reach harbor.' After a while, Anthony suddenly began to weep, to tear his hair, and lament. His disciples said to him, 'Why are you weeping, Father?' The old man replied, 'A great pillar of the Church has just fallen (he meant the young monk) but go to him and see what has happened.' So the disciples went and found the monk sitting on a mat and weeping for the sin he had committed. Seeing the disciples of the old man he said, 'Tell the old man to pray that God will give me just ten days, and

I hope I will have made satisfaction.' But in the space of five days he died. Saying 14 in The Sayings of the Desert Fathers

Commentary: The true Christian does not envy the gifts, miracles, or accomplishments of others, nor does he take pleasure in their sins. When the young wonderworker falls, Anthony takes no joy, but weeps, lamenting his fall. We must guard ourselves lest we, feeling threatened by others or envying their gifts, take a malicious pleasure in their shortcomings or failures. Solomon even warns us in his Proverbs not to take pleasure in the downfall of a wicked man lest the Lord cease to chasten him!

Anthony here likens the Christian life to a merchant ship. In the course of life, we gain a valuable cargo of virtues and good works to offer to God, but we must make it safely to port. The monk had a great treasure of virtues and accomplishments, but his ship foundered before reaching a safe haven. Thus we, too, must be vigilant and cautious until the end and not trust in what we have accomplished until now. The miracle the young monk worked was impressive, and St. Anthony sees in it evidence of significant accomplishment (“a ship loaded with goods”). But he has doubts, nonetheless, whether the monk will “reach harbor”, perhaps based on the perception that the monk’s miracle was mixed with a measure of pride and self-display that rendered him vulnerable.

Having fallen, the monk is found weeping over his sin. He asks Anthony’s envoys to ask their elder to pray that God will give him ten days to make his repentance complete, but he is given only five days. Is his repentance complete and is he reconciled with God in that time? We are not told. Certainly, five minutes, let alone five days, is enough for repentance, but was it enough for this monk? Was he excessive in setting himself a need for ten days to repent? Was he deluded to think he needed any time beyond the present to gain God’s forgiveness?

A saying from Abba Poemen casts light on this matter.

A brother questioned Abba Poemen saying, ‘I have committed a great sin and I want to do penance for three years.’ The old man said to him, ‘That is a lot.’ The brother said, ‘For one year?’ The old man said again, ‘That is a lot.’ Those who were present said, ‘For forty days?’ He said again, ‘That is a lot.’ He added, ‘I myself say that if a man repents with his whole heart and does not intend to commit the sin any more, God will accept him after only three days’ (Poemen 12 in *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*).

Some who think of forgiveness of sins as something God automatically grants upon His receiving a request for it in words may be scandalized by the concept of ‘making satisfaction’ and needing time to repent. Others who know the canonical penalties for serious sins may be scandalized by Poemen’s leniency.

So what do we make of this? Notice that the sin is serious, one which, presumably, would deprive the monk of Holy Communion. Notice, too, Poemen’s qualifying words: “if a man repents with his whole heart and does not intend to commit the sin any more”. Does a quick, “Lord I have sinned, please forgive me” constitute repentance with one’s whole heart? It might, but it might not—most likely not. Most usually it takes time for a sinner to come to repent with his whole heart and seriously intend not to commit the sin again. The monk in Anthony’s saying wants ten days. He is given only five. Only God knows whether it was enough for him.

God is quick to forgive. He forgives in a moment, without reluctance. Man’s part is to ask in repentance with the intention not to repeat the offense. When a Christian betrays his faith and his Savior by committing a serious sin, he will need time to complete his repentance so that it is wholehearted and sincere. How much time? Only God knows. But we must not presume on God’s mercy and assume that we can choose to sin and still have time for repentance. That time may not be given, or we may fail to repent with all our heart. *Fr. Justin Frederick*

All-Night Vigil: The Six Psalms

After the Vespertal portion of the All-night Vigil (about 40 minutes in parish practice), the second part begins: Matins. Matins is the Church’s daily service of morning prayer. It combines two themes: the end of night, and the beginning of day. Night is the image of death. Night is when early Christians especially prayed in their eschatological anticipation of Christ’s return and Eternal Kingdom. Night has been conquered and death overthrown. Night is the reality of the world without Christ; it gives man the feeling of chaos, fear, insecurity.

Only the Word of God takes us out of the night. Light comes only from God. Light always is from God, for there is no darkness in God. The light of the day is a resurrection every morning. Matins celebrates this victory over night—the resurrection of light—and God’s goodness in not leaving us in perpetual darkness.

At the All-night Vigil, Matins begins with the Six Psalms, or “Hexapsalms,” as they are sometimes called: the lights are extinguished, the bells rung, and the reader stands in the midst of the temple with a lighted candle to read them. As the candles (except for the lampadas before the icons; in most places, however, only the electric lights are dimmed or turned out) are gradually extinguished, we experience in the descending darkness the dark night Christ entered at His coming.

The rubrics direct that the Six Psalms be read slowly, without haste. Both reader and faithful are to read and hear the words as though they were praying them directly to God as a prayer. This is a time for stillness and concentration, and everyone, if at all possible, should stand attentively throughout the reading of the psalms. The rubrics even note that

bows are not to be made after the first three psalms during the Glory... Alleluia...Glory. All is quiet, dark, and as motionless as possible to facilitate concentration as we strive to enter into the psalms and make the prayer of the Psalmist our own.

The Six Psalms begin with thrice-fold repetition of the hymn of the angelic choir at Christ's Nativity: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace, good will toward men," followed by a repeated verse from Psalm 50: "O Lord, open Thou my lips, and my mouth shall declare Thy praise." Christ was born into our dark, fallen world to show us the way by which we might return to God on high and find peace with ourselves and with others

The Six Psalms (3, 37(38), 62 (63), 87 (88), 102 (103), 142 (143)) represent the history of the opposition of night to day. They express the whole range of experience and prayer in the Christian life. They alternate between confidence in and gratitude towards God for His salvation and deliverance, and desperate outcry to God from those in distress, darkness, bondage, and affliction. The themes thus alternate between actualized salvation and potential salvation, and the overarching mood is penitential.

The first psalm of the Six (3) expresses confidence in God as man cries out to the Lord for help against a multiplying number of enemies who say that God cannot save him. These enemies are first of all the sinful passions of our souls and the demons that work to stir them up (only secondarily are they humans that may oppose us). "God can't save you from us," they mock. But this is a lie, for man has cried out to the Lord, who heard him, and protected him so that he could sleep and wake again. With God on his side, he need not fear ten thousand foes. The man speaking in the Psalm is Christ first of all, the God-man, but it is also us in our own spiritual warfare. Praying this Psalm enables us to call on the Lord against seeming great odds without despair, knowing He will save us.

At the end of each psalm a verse or two from the psalm is repeated to conclude the psalm and to summarize its contents. For Psalm 3, the repeated verse is "I fell asleep and slept; I rose again, for the Lord succoreth me." The verb "to succor" literally means "to run to" or "to run to support" and hence has the fuller meaning "to help or relieve when in difficulty, want or distress." Sleep itself is an image of death; when we sink into the sleep of spiritual death through sin, when our spiritual enemies have prevailed against us and are multiplying so that they are too many to defeat, it is the Lord who raises us up again to life and consciousness that we may continue the fight.

The second Psalm of the Six (37) is a cry of repentance to God in the face of the distress, weariness, and suffering which our sins have brought upon us, even to the point of losing our usual sources of human aid from neighbors and friends. The repeated verse sums up our posture towards God: "Forsake me not, O Lord my God; turn not away from me. Attend to my help, O Lord of my salvation."

The third Psalm (62) returns to the theme of realized salvation and man's gratitude for it. Man rises early in the morning (for Matins) to seek the Lord in his great thirst for Him. What God has to offer him is far better than even life itself. The repeated verse declares: "In the mornings I have meditated upon Thee, for Thou hast become my Helper, and under the shelter of Thy wings will I rejoice. My soul hath cleaved unto Thee; Thy right hand hath upholden me."

Now, midway through the Six Psalms, the reader says, "Glory to the Father...now and ever... Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia, glory to Thee, O God [3], Lord have mercy [3],

Glory...now and ever..." and the last three psalms. In the Russian tradition, one does not do full bows during this interlude; one only crosses oneself and inclines the head slightly. In the Greek tradition, one does not bow or cross at all.

During this interlude, the Priest exits from the south door and stands bareheaded before the Royal Doors, wearing only his riassa and epitachelion, to recite the 12 Matins prayers silently for those present, representing again fallen man standing outside of Paradise in the darkness of the fallen world, crying out to the only One who can deliver him.

The fourth psalm of the Six (87) is perhaps the darkest, showing man in his greatest desperation and need. Man cries out "for my soul is filled with evil and my life hath come nigh to hell." Man feels the weight of God's displeasure rejection for his sins, what Christ experienced when He cried out on the Cross, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" Yet in our greatest despair and weakness, even when it seems God has closed His ears to us and forsaken us, we still cry out to the Lord, as the repeated verse expresses: "O Lord God of my salvation, I have cried in the day and in the night before Thee. Let my prayer come in before Thee; bow down Thine ear to my supplication."

Once man has been in the depths of the pit, when salvation finally comes, his response is joyous, and this joy is expressed in the fifth Psalm (102). If the fourth Psalm is the darkest of the Six, then fifth is the most joyful; indeed, it is the first Psalm sung during most Divine Liturgies (the first antiphon). "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless His holy name." How can man not be joyful when the Lord has healed him, given him good things, and removed his transgressions from him "as far as the east is from the west." The repeated verse at the end of the Psalm declares what our response to God's goodness always should be: "In every place of His dominion, bless the Lord, O my soul!"

The last Psalm (142) returns to man's cry for help to God, but it is tinged with faith and hope. The enemy has persecuted me, brought me low, and made me sit in darkness. I am dejected. Don't judge me, for no one can stand worthily before the righteous Judge. "Hearken to me in Thy righteousness, O Lord, and enter not into judgment with Thy servant. Thy good Spirit shall guide me to the land of uprightness." As Jesus told His disciples, "In the world, ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). The Christian life alternates between times of trouble, tribulation, and distress, and times of joy, peace, and wellbeing. Each time we pass through the valley, it should be with a deeper faith in Christ than we had the previous time, and though we suffer, our suffering is eased by our previous experience of God's goodness and deliverance, for we know that suffering and tribulation is inevitable in this life, but God redeems it to work His good in our lives through it, that Christ may be formed in us. Thus the Six Psalms contain the full range of experience and prayer for the Christian, which is why we are called to attend carefully to them and enter into them at Matins.

One of God's Judgements Long Ago

In January, A.D. 614, in the wilderness of Palestine, there was a most-pious ascetic who also had twelve disciples. One morning after the Divine Liturgy, he gathered them together and told them the following:

"My children, last night I saw a frightening vision. I observed that I was in the Holy Altar of the immaculate divine Church of the Resurrection of our Lord in Jerusalem. Surrounding the Holy Altar Table were several bishops, many priests, both celibate and married, and a good number of deacons, all most-ready for the start of the Divine Liturgy. The main church was full of monastics and Christians.

"Suddenly, with a very loud crash, a filthy torrent full of impurities and excrement started to flow from the central entrance of the church. It filled the entire floor, soiling everything and everyone in sight. And since this impure and stench-filled contamination covered the entire church, it started to overflow into the sanctuary through the Royal Gate, circling the lower level of the Holy Altar Table. All the Christians and monastics present in the main church, and even all the liturgists, hierarchs, priests, and deacons, were soiled not only to the feet but even onto their vestments, since the impurities had reached as high as their knees.

"On the other hand," continued this most pious and holy ascetic, "full of fear and trembling so as not to be contaminated by this pollution, I climbed onto the *synthronon* of the Holy Altar, which is situated behind the Holy Altar Table, and from there I started to cry out and remonstrate with anger toward the hierarchs, priests, deacons, and monastics, because I saw them standing there idle and indifferent. Some of them were even joking, while others laughed at what was happening around them! They laughed at their sad, wretched condition. I responded with divine exasperation:

"Don't you see what's happening around you? Don't you see that the entire church has been polluted and that your Christian faithful are full of excrement? Don't you recognize your sad state? Don't you see how despicable you have become with such impurity that you bear? Why are you not ensuring that the church is cleaned? Why aren't you washing your Christians or cleaning yourselves? Why aren't you doing this? Why do you wait idle with such indifference, insensibility, cold-heartedness, while some of you are even laughing at this?"

"Unfortunately, though, despite my remarks, all of them remained indifferent and insensible. Suddenly, I saw two immaculate, bright young men who stood next to me. They were Angels of the Lord, I turned to them and asked them with boldness: 'What is the cause of this filthy state of affairs? Why did it come about?'

"And they responded by saying that all of this unsanitary and foul uncleanness can be attributed to first, the bad behavior of the majority of clergymen of every rank, and, second, to the sinful and unethical life of lay Christians. And the Angels added: 'All of this uncleanness of excrement, which has utterly contaminated the entire church, the sanctuary, the clergy, the monastics, and Christians, all of this filth will be wiped away immediately, but . . . by fire and brimstone!'"

And—lo, what wonder!—the next day a great war broke out against the Persians, who besieged Jerusalem and the Holy Land on January 22, 614. They slaughtered thousands of Christians, among whom were many hermits and ascetics. Among them was this blessed abbot, who saw this terrible vision, which was preserved by several of his disciples, who were able to escape this horrible massacre. There were thousands of bodies in the streets and their blood flowed as a river. There were thousands of captives. This is when the Persians took the Precious Cross as a

spoil of war, on January 22, 614. About two or three days before, the holy ascetic had seen this vision.

Fourteen years later, the emperor of Byzantium Heraclius conquered the Persians (628) and returned the Precious Cross triumphantly to Jerusalem, where he raised it up on September 14, an event that we commemorate gloriously each year as the day of the Elevation of the Precious and Life-giving Holy Cross.

God allowed the events related in this story to occur due to the lack of prayer and spiritual struggle at all ranks of the clergy; the lukewarm stance of the monastics-ascetics; and, even worse, the filthy lifestyles of the Christians of that day. Alas, if this blessed ascetic lived in our time, what sort of dark vision would have been revealed to him? For this reason, if we cannot endure long fasts, vigils, standing for hours, and the rest of the sum of Orthodox ascetical struggles, we can at the very least call upon the all-holy Name of Jesus orally, "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me." *From The Jesus Prayer for Those Living in the World, Fr. Stephanos Anagnostopoulos, 2021.*

From Fr. St. Arsenius the Great

From the Sayings of the Desert Fathers.

1. While still living in the palace, Abba Arsenius prayed to God in these words, "Lord, lead me in the way of salvation." And a voice came, saying to him: "Arsenius, flee from men, and you will be saved. *p.*

2. Having withdrawn to the solitary life, he made the same prayer again, and he heard a voice saying to him, "Arsenius, flee, be silent, pray always, for these are the source of sinlessness."

3. It happened that when Abba Arsenius was sitting in his cell that he was harassed by demons. His servants, on their return, stood outside his cell and heard him praying to God in these words: "O God, do not leave me. I have done nothing good in Thy sight, but according to Thy goodness, let me now make a beginning of good."

9. A brother questioned Abba Arsenius to hear a word of him, and the old man said to him, "Strive with all your might to bring your interior activity into accord with God, and you will overcome exterior passions."

10. He also said, "If we seek God, He will show himself to us, and if we keep Him, He will remain close to us."

15. Abba Arsenius used to say that one hour's sleep is enough for a monk if he is a good fighter.

30. It was also said of him that on Saturday evenings, preparing for the glory of Sunday, he would turn his back on the sun and stretch out his hands in prayer towards the heavens, till once again the sun shone on his face. Then he would sit down.

Upcoming Events 2022

8 May: 7:00 p.m. Choir Concert Fundraiser at St. Sava, Allen.

30 May: Noon, Memorial Day Picnic

GLORY BE TO GOD FOR ALL THINGS!