

The Confessor's Tongue for May 22, A. D. 2022

Sunday of the Samaritan Woman, Martyr Basiliscus

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 16

A brother said to Abba Anthony, 'Pray for me.' The old man said to him, 'I will have no mercy upon you, nor will God have any, if you yourself do not make an effort and if you do not pray to God.'

Saying 16 in *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*

Commentary: To be a Christian requires that we desire God, that we actively seek Him, that we pray, we give, we keep Christ's commandments, we serve others. Indeed, the great commands to love God and love neighbor call us to action rather than to a passive feeling of warmth towards to the objects of our love.

Some people, however, for whatever reason, will ask others to do for them what they will not do for themselves, as in this case. The monk seeks the prayers of the recognized holy man, thinking that having Anthony's prayers will be more effective than his own and save him. Yet Anthony discerns that the monk is seeking an easy way out and exhorts him to make the needed effort on his own behalf.

Some Christians might seek the same: sending their names to be commemorated at monasteries, asking for special prayer services for their living and dead, and going to see holy elders. But no number of requests for prayer by holy elders will ultimately benefit us if we do not make our own effort to pray and keep Christ's commandments.

Prayer is something every Christian must practice. It is a particular demonic delusion that leads us to think we can leave the prayer for our souls to others. A monk named Nikita in the Kiev Caves Monastery long ago found this out the hard way. Young and willful, he sought to live as a recluse against the advice of his abbot who warned him of his inexperience and the dangers of being deluded by demons. In his pride, Nikita insisted he would not be deceived, and he got the blessing of the monastery's elders to live as a recluse. Soon after he started living alone, his cave was filled with a sweet fragrance and he heard a voice joining him in prayer. He assumed it was an angel, and he prayed that God would reveal Himself to him, face to face. The voice told him an angel would be sent to him to whom he must be obedient in everything. Soon a demon appeared in the guise of an angel. The demon told the young monk that he would pray for him, freeing the monk to study the Old Testament. In his inexperience, he obeyed. He soon knew the Old Testament by heart (but could not even open the New Testament) and began prophesying inspired by the demon. Laymen came to hear him. The elders realized he was in a state of delusion and delivered him. Once the demon was driven off, Nikita forgot the Old Testament, couldn't remember ever having read, and, indeed, had forgotten how to read. Later, after his repentance, he

became bishop of Novgorod, was later canonized, and is known today as St. Nikita the Recluse (as he had no beard, he is depicted as beardless in his icon).

The prayers of others help strengthen our feeble efforts, and at some dark times of life, we may even be carried by the prayers of others, as the four friends bore the paralytic man on his bed to Christ. But the prayers of others, no matter how holy and powerful they may be, can never be a substitute for our own prayer. If the four friends carrying the paralytic symbolize the power of intercessory prayer to bear the spiritually paralyzed to Christ and to do for them what they cannot do for themselves, once healed, those formerly paralyzed by sin are then responsible to come to Christ on their own.

Our desire for God, expressed in our feeble efforts to pray and do His will, attracts God's grace to enable us to do and be what we cannot do and be by our own strength. If we have insufficient desire even to make a weak, inadequate effort, neither God nor a holy man can help us, for such help would mean God was compelling us against our will. Christ has accomplished man's salvation through the economy of His becoming man. Our participation in that salvation made available through Him depends on our desire and our will. As St. Maximus puts it, "The mystery of salvation belongs to those who choose it, not to those who are compelled by force." God's love for us means He allows us to choose our eternal destiny, even though our wrong choices grieve Him. Such is the mystery of God's love for us. *Fr. Justin Frederick*

All-Night Vigil: Polyeleon to Magnification

The Polyeleon (meaning 'many mercies'), comprising Psalms 134 and 135, is the most festive part of Matins. It glorifies God for the greatness of His mercy shown to His people of old when He brought Israel out of Egypt and into the Promised Land. Every member of the new Israel, every Christian, identifies with Israel's Exodus from slavery in Egypt and the passage through the Red Sea as a sign of his own deliverance from bondage to sin through Baptism and Chrismation.

"Praise the name of the Lord: praise Him O ye servants of the Lord. Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia! Praise be to God in Zion, He that dwelleth at Jerusalem. Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia! O confess unto the Lord, for He is good, for His mercy endureth forever. Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia! O confess unto the God of heaven, for His mercy endureth forever. Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!"

Typically, only a selection of verses from the two Psalms is sung: probably most commonly (and minimally) four (first and last of each psalm), but each verse is followed by the joyful refrain of the thrice-

fold "alleluia." Locally, we sing a longer version for feasts and a complete version when we do a literal All-night Vigil.

As these verses are sung, all the lamps and candles in the church are lit, the Royal Doors are opened, and if it be a Great Feast, the festal icon is brought out to the center of the church which the Priest deposits on an analogion and then censes. If it is not a Great Feast, the priest remains censing at the front of the altar. This censing is done with both Priest and Deacon bearing candles as at the beginning of the Vigil.

If the Vigil is a Resurrectional Vigil taking place in the three weeks preparatory to Great Lent (Prodigal Son through Cheesefare), Psalm 136 ("By the Waters of Babylon") is added.

The Polyeleos is not prescribed at every Vigil, though commonly it is always done. If it is not prescribed, Psalm 118—the longest psalm—is taken in its place. This Psalm, which extols the law of God, represents Christ Himself in total surrender to the will of His Father, even unto death. Chanting Psalm 118 constitutes the real life of man in God, that of obedience to His statutes which are life-giving. Christ's death in history is the greatest act of life. Life is, in fact, to say, "I love Thy statutes."

It is unfortunate that this Psalm extolling the glories and blessing of God's law is so often abbreviated or even omitted from our services, for it imparts to us an accurate assessment of God's law which serves as an antidote to negative attitudes towards God's law that afflict some of us. Moreover, there is life and blessing in keeping God's law, and the way of God's statutes leads us to our participation in the Resurrection. To ignore God's will expressed in His law is to court death.

This Psalm forms an important part of the funeral service, too, though it is usually abbreviated. It is used at the funeral because it is a hymn of Resurrection, which is the chief theme of a Christian funeral.

One verse from Psalm 118, "Blessed art Thou, O Lord, teach me Thy statutes," comprises the familiar refrain in the next part of Matins: the Evlogitaria or 'Troparia of the Undeiled.' They take their name from the first verse of Psalm 118: "Blessed are the undeiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord." A number of troparia on the theme of the Resurrection are sung, each preceded by the refrain, "Blessed art Thou..." For example, the third:

Very early in the morning the myrrhbearers ran with sorrow to Thy tomb. But an angel came to them and said: "The time for sorrow hath come to an end; do not weep but announce the resurrection to the apostles. Blessed art Thou, O Lord, teach me Thy statutes.

As the Troparia of the Undeiled are sung, the Priest, accompanied by the Deacon, censes the whole temple and the people.

If the Vigil is being served for a Great Feast, the Troparia of the Undeiled, which glorify the Resurrection, are not taken. Instead, a hymn glorifying the saint or feast known as the *Magnification* is taken, which begins with the

words, "We magnify, we magnify Thee..." This practice is not found in the Greek usage, but only in the Slavic. The Priest chants this in front of the appropriate icon. He then carries out the great censing of the temple as above while the choir repeats the Magnification with its psalm verses several times. If the all the Psalm verses prescribed for it were used, the Magnification could take nearly half an hour in itself! This part of the Matins is followed by a Little Litany with its exclamation.

300 Ascetical & Theological Chapters St. Justin of Chelije

First Century

10. Dostoyevsky and St. Paul: "Our warfare is against the spirits of wickedness in heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:12). In Dostoyevsky, you constantly feel yourself as if between two Testaments, between the Old and the New. Isaiah always cried out for the Messiah, for the Lord, not for man, not for faith in man. Let no one believe in man—this is Dostoyevsky. All Western literature believes in man and cringes before him. Dostoyevsky always raises his hands to Christ from his Sodom and Gomorrah. *Oxford, 1917 (Translated from Russian by Fr. Justin Frederick)*

St. John of Kronstadt on Candles in Church

Do not grudge burning a wax taper before the image of the Lord during prayer; remember that you burn it before the Light inaccessible, before Him who enlightens you with His light. Your candle is as though a burnt offering to the Lord. Let it be a gift to God from your whole heart. Let it remind you that you yourself should also be a burning and shining light. *He was*, says our Lord of John the Forerunner, *a burning and a shining light.*

I offer light to the Lord in order that He may bestow the light of grace, spiritual light, upon me, that He may lead me from the darkness of sin into the light of the knowledge of God and of virtue; I offer fire that the fire of the grace of the Holy Spirit may be kindled in my heart, and that I may quench the fire of the vices of that miserable heart. I bring a light that I myself may become a light, burning and shining to all that are in the church.

It is well to place candles before the icons. But it is still better if you bring as a sacrifice to God the fire of your love for him and your neighbor. It is well that the one should accompany the other. But if you place candles before the icons and have no love for God and your neighbor in your heart, if you are grasping, if you do not live in peace with others—then, your offering to God is useless.

I am an infirm, carnal, sinful man. I am not always able to bring to my Lord a heart burning with faith and love—but at least I bring, as a carnal, material man, a material gift as a gift to heaven, a lighted candle. May the Lord look down from heaven upon this little gift of my zeal, and may He give me more in return. He alone is rich, and enriches all, whilst I am poor and needy. He dwells amid light inaccessible, whilst I am in darkness. I am of little faith; may He grant me the gift of faith. I am poor in love; may He enrich my heart with this priceless heavenly treasure. I am powerless to do good; may He give me that power. From *Spiritual Counsels: Select Passages from My Life in Christ*, SVS Press

Upcoming Events 2022

30 May: Noon, Memorial Day Picnic

GLORY BE TO GOD FOR ALL THINGS!