

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

## Sunday of the New Martyrs of the Turkish Yoke

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 21**

*It happened one day that one of the brethren in the monastery of Abba Elias was tempted. Cast out of the monastery, he went over the mountain to Abba Anthony. The brother lived near him for a while and then Anthony sent him back to the monastery from which he had been expelled. When the brothers saw him, they cast him out yet again, and he went back to Abba Anthony saying, 'My Father, they will not receive me.' Then the old man sent them a message saying, 'A boat was shipwrecked at sea and lost its cargo; with great difficulty it reached the shore; but you want to throw into the sea that which has found safe harbor on the shore.' When the brothers understood that it was Abba Anthony who had sent them this monk, they received him at once.*

Anthony Saying 21 *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*

*Commentary:* "One rotten apple spoils the whole barrel." This saying, which is certainly true in the physical world and at least partially true in the spiritual world, would seem to be the thought of the monks moving them to cast out their fallen brother. St. Paul says something similar to the Corinthians in the case of the man who had taken his father's wife as his own (I Cor. 5). Paul expresses his displeasure over their toleration of this immorality and tells them to "deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." He warns his spiritual children that "a little leaven leavens the whole lump" and calls on them to cast out the old leaven and "put away from yourselves the evil person".

Thus, the brothers seem to have acted on a solid principle. That they did is confirmed by Anthony not reproving them for casting the brother out in the first place. The brother, leaving the monastery, settles near Anthony for a time. Anthony sees his repentance, and, when he deems the time ripe, he sends him back to his monastery healed. But the brothers refuse him entrance, and it is for this refusal to receive the penitent that Anthony reproves them with his parable of the wrecked ship.

The Church is a hospital for those wounded and disfigured by sin, but we must not abuse this image: the Church *is* a hospital, but only for the sick, wounded person who recognizes his ill health and desires to be made well. The whole Church is founded upon repentance. Without initial repentance, one may not enter Her, and without continued repentance until life's end, one may not remain in Her. The basic message of both St. John the Baptist and Christ was "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." The Church is a hospital for sinners, sick and wounded by sin, but one must acknowledge one's sin to be admitted for care. To reject the Church's diagnosis, stubbornly and pridefully to insist on acceptance in the Church as an unrepentant sinner is

to exclude oneself from the community of penitent sinners.

While this was initially the case with the man in Corinth, after being excluded from fellowship, he repented, and St. Paul in his second epistle to that church called on them to receive him back into fellowship. The same principle is at work here. The fallen brother repented and demonstrated that repentance in his way of life. Anthony sent him back in that repentant state, but the brothers would not receive him because of his prior sin. Anthony properly but gently chastises them through his parable, and they relent.

A baptized brother who chooses to live in sin without repentance is as pernicious to others in the Church as a rotten apple in a barrel is to the other sound apples. If the Church acts to exclude him from fellowship formally, it merely confirms what the man has already effected spiritually by his choice of sin. Very often, such people simply remove themselves from fellowship, sensing the incompatibility of their willful sin with the life of repentance leading to holiness in the Church. He who does not remove himself and who refuses to repent after private admonition must be removed to protect others from his bad example, to humble him, and to move him to repentance. The goal is always humility and renewed repentance for the sinner.

Because the Church is a hospital, any sinner who is willing to repent and believe may be admitted, and a fallen brother who demonstrates his repentance in deed as well as word must be re-admitted. Of course, the brother who falls and gets up again in repentance is not excluded at all. Depending on his sin, it is possible he will not be re-admitted immediately to the Chalice, but he will not be sent out the door. That measure is reserved for those who sin and will not repent, and so, by their bad example, would cause others to fall.

### **New Martyrs of the Turkish Yoke (Third Sunday After Pentecost)**

*Fr. Alexey Young*

On May 29, 1453, the troops of the Moslem leader, Mohammed II, took the great city of Constantinople. For more than 1000 years Orthodox Christians had assumed that the Byzantine Christian Empire would stand until the Second Coming of Christ. They had always called their city the "God-protected City," and indeed, until now it had been protected by Heaven. But when their Emperor, Constantine XI, fell in battle, the holy city of Byzantium became the capital of a new empire, the Ottoman Empire, ruled by a pagan people, enemies of Christ and Christianity, the Moslems. It was a dark, dark time for Orthodox Christians in that part of the world.

In their violent hatred of Christianity, the Moslem Turks embarked on a course of persecution designed to effectively muzzle the flock of Christ. Their strategy was no less cruel than that of atheist communists in the Soviet Union today; the parallels are striking. Most of the churches of Constantinople (whose name was changed to Istanbul, just as years later Petersburg was changed to Leningrad) were converted to mosques. Their movable icons were destroyed and whole walls of inspiring and radiantly beautiful mosaics were covered with paint or plaster. Crosses were torn off domes and broken off the roofs of churches. The Moslems guaranteed Christians a definite place in Turkish society; but it was a place of guaranteed inferiority. Orthodox Christians were required to pay an annual head tax, like cattle. To the Turks they were unbelievers, and they had absolutely no rights of citizenship. They even had to wear distinctive dress. They could not marry Moslems, nor could they engage in missionary work of any kind; in fact, it was a crime, usually punishable by death, to convert a Moslem to the Christian Faith.

As if these measures were not enough, the Moslems actively undertook to control the Church itself. The Sultan ironically considered himself the "protector" of Orthodoxy, supposedly guaranteeing the existence of the Church, but actually keeping it in the vise of a terrible stranglehold. Under this system each Patriarch had to pay a stiff fee to the Sultan before he could be enthroned. Unable to raise the funds himself, the Patriarch was forced to exact a fee from each new bishop before installing him in his diocese, and this burden was eventually placed on the flocks. Taking advantage of this financially lucrative situation, the Turks forced re-elections of the Patriarch with undue rapidity. The majority of the Sultans themselves were sick, demon-ridden men, whose irrational rule and unbridled power only heightened the already demoralizing effect of Turkish rule on the Church. It is not without reason that an Englishman living in Istanbul in the 17th century wrote these words: "Every good Christian ought with sadness to consider and with compassion to behold this once glorious Church tearing and rending out her bowels and giving them as food to vultures and ravens."

The aim of Orthodoxy in the Ottoman Empire became, simply, one of survival. Little could they know, in 1453, that the heavy sword of Islam would weigh upon them not for a generation or two, but for five hundred years, five long centuries of darkness and difficulty. But even under such ruinous circumstances, God did not allow the light of Christianity to be extinguished. It was kept alive through the courageous confession of the New Martyrs of the Turkish Yoke.

When speaking of New Martyrs today, one generally thinks of the recently glorified New Martyrs of Russia. But until just last year, the "New Martyrs" listed in the Orthodox calendar of saints referred to those men and women who suffered for the faith

under the Turkish Yoke. Their lives are not very well known, and yet they are a rich catalogue of the diversity and generosity of the Holy Spirit acting in the lives of Orthodox believers in time of oppression and persecution. The following examples illustrate the image often used in their Lives which describes them "laboring like diligent bees, gathering the honey of virtue" as they moved through life towards martyrdom. "Guard the deposit; keep safe what has been entrusted to you." (I Tim. 6:20)

St. Cyprian the New, for instance, was a pious monk from Mount Athos. After fortifying himself with Holy Communion, he went forth and found a Pasha (the ruler of a province). Straight way he witnessed to him that Mohammed was a false prophet and the enemy of God. The Pasha only laughed, thinking he was crazy; he ordered his guards to beat him and cast him out, which they did. St. Cyprian then went to Constantinople, to the Grand Vizier whose position was like that of a prime minister. There he attempted to witness to the Grand Vizier by sending him a written message about the Gospel of salvation. The Vizier thought the saint must be drunk, or mad. But when at last he realized that the saint was quite sober and quite sane, he ordered that he be beheaded and, as his Life says, as he was being led to the place of execution, "his face shone with joy; it was as though he hurried not to execution, but to a wedding banquet."

St. Timothy of Esphigmenou is an example of a Christian who betrayed Christ and then returned to suffer martyrdom for his Lord. He was married, but his beautiful wife was abducted by a Moslem who added her to his harem after forcibly converting her to Islam. In order to get his wife back through the process of Islamic law, St. Timothy himself converted to Islam. His wife was indeed returned and they both secretly repented of having converted to Islam and returned to Christianity. Finally his wife withdrew to a convent and he to Mount Athos, where he became a monk and prepared for the day when he could descend back into the Turkish world, there to witness for Christ and accept martyrdom, which in fact he eventually did.

Sometimes the family of a martyr begged him to embrace Islam rather than die. In the life of St. Zlata, a pious virgin-martyr of the 13th century, for example, the parents and sisters of the saint implored her to convert to Islam, saying, "O sweetest daughter, have pity on yourself and on us your parents and your sisters.... Deny Christ just for the sake of appearances." But she turned and said to them, "You who incite me to deny Christ, the true God, are no longer my parents and sisters.... But in your place I have my Lord Jesus Christ as a father, my Lady the Theotokos as a mother, and the saints as my brothers and sisters." She suffered a particularly horrible form of torture and martyrdom, including thrusting a red-hot skewer through one ear and out the other, so that smoke came forth from her nose and mouth. The writer of her Life tells us that her sufferings were so

terrible "that even the most stout-hearted of men would be humbled." This martyr, he says, "now dances and rejoices together with the prudent and prize-winning virgins in the heavenly bridal chambers, and stands at the right hand of her Bridegroom, Christ."

Another striking example of faithfulness to Christ and His Church is found in the Life of Martyred Monk James and his disciples. This Saint led a very pure life and was often vouchsafed to see angels during the Divine Liturgy. One day, while a guest in the home of a wealthy Turk, St. James declined the meat given at a banquet because it was the Apostles' Fast. This identified him immediately as a Christian. For such a holy one as this, the Moslems devised a particularly painful method of torture and death, which included wrapping bands of cloth around his head and twisting them gradually, crushing the skull.

There were many rewards given to those Christians who would convert to the Moslem religion. Sometimes these enticements worked and Orthodox believers gave up the struggle for the true Faith. St. John the Bulgarian was a young boy when he fell into the company of some Moslem youths and was led by peer pressure to renounce Christ and follow Mohammed. It was not long before he came to his senses and, overwhelmed with grief at having renounced Christ, he fled to Mt. Athos and gave himself up to a life of repentance. His conscience, however, would give him no rest until finally he set out for Constantinople in order to preach the Gospel. Dressing as a Turk - something forbidden to Christians - so as not to be detected, he entered a great mosque. There, in front of everyone, he made the sign of the cross and began to pray, witnessing to all that he had been a Christian and had fallen away, but that he had now been delivered from the error of Mohammed. Concluding with the ringing declaration, "Without Jesus Christ there is no salvation!", St. John was dragged out into the courtyard of the mosque and beheaded.

While many other Christians lived in daily fear and trembling, these noble warriors of Christ marched forth directly into the enemy's camp in order to boldly plant the cross of Christ like a battle banner. Penetrated by the very essence of Christianity, Christ Himself, they were able not only to endure the most frightful tortures - but also to be victorious. The victory of martyrs, however, is understood only from an otherworldly perspective, for they had deep in their hearts the words of Scripture: "What will it profit a man if he win the whole world and lose his soul? What can a man give in exchange for his soul?"

To paraphrase the closing paragraph from the life of yet another confessor of the Turkish Yoke: "Where are those Moslems who once saddened and despised the New Martyrs? Where are the mighty of the earth? Where is the Ottoman lord? Where the fearsome guards and Tartars who bound them and beat them and martyred them? Where are their

pampered bodies? O! They are dispelled as a morning mist. The tombstone of forgetfulness has covered them. And in Jerusalem on high, in the dwelling where are found the blessed souls of the saints who lived in privation in this world so that they might pass through the narrow and afflicted way that leadeth unto life, there rejoices also with them the spirits of these much-suffering martyrs whom we remember today. They reposed in the Lord and received the reward of the labors and toils and pains which they endured for Christ, Whom they loved more than all the fleeting things of this world. And now, wearing crowns in heaven, they rejoice with the choirs of the saints and behold in glory the Prize-bestower, our Lord Jesus Christ Himself. To Him be glory and dominion and worship unto the unending ages. Amen"

*This article is condensed from a lecture delivered at the St. Herman Summer Pilgrimage, August, 1982.*

### **The Commandments of Christ**

*"If ye love Me, keep my commandments." John 14:15*

Orthodox Christianity is not some abstract system of belief to which a man gives intellectual assent for salvation. Rather it is a whole way of life in Christ's Church. It is man's response to God's revelation of Himself in the God-man Jesus Christ. This response inseparably unites right belief with right action. Right belief is expressed in the dogmas and teachings of the Church, while right action is most fully expressed by Christ's commandments in the Gospel.

The way of life is initiated with faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God made man leading to repentance and Baptism. At Baptism, the new Christian decisively rejects Satan and joins himself to Christ. The priest asks him, "Have you united yourself to Christ?" He responds, "I have united myself to Christ." "Do you believe in Him?" "He answers, "I believe in Him as King and God," and then he recites the Creed. Following that, he bows down "before the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the Trinity one in essence and undivided." This public declaration marks a most profound moment of the transfer of allegiance to a new Master—a King whom the Christian invites to rule in his heart and all his life.

The idea of a king and his commands is not in favor with modern man. Worshipping himself and his own will, man wants little to do with commandments from any source (even though he readily resorts to legislation—the commands of the State—to address his perceived problems). The very word "command" is repugnant to him, for he considers himself free to do as he wishes. The prayers and hymns of the Church, which often mention the commandments of Christ, acknowledge the conflicted relationship man has with them. "I have made myself a stranger to every divine commandment..." (*Tone 8, Mon Vespers*) and "I have fled from Thy commandments, estranging myself from life, and draw nigh unto death..." (*Tone 8, Fri*

*Matins, canon, ode 6).*

Man's estrangement from Christ's commandments darkens his spiritual sight, blinding him. It renders him unfit to see the Light, hindering him from looking upon Christ. The man who is aware laments this: "With what eyes shall I look upon Thee, O Christ, not having kept even one of Thy commandments?" (*Tone 8, Mon Matins, canon, ode 3*) He cries out for a remedy: "Why hast Thou cast me away from Thy face, O never-setting Light? Why hath this dismal darkness covered me, the wretched one? But turn me and guide my path towards the light of Thy commandments I pray Thee" (*Irmos of 5<sup>th</sup> Ode for Sun. and Wed. Matins*).

Man in this state finds hope in the words of the Psalmist: "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (*118/119:105*). The word and the commandments bring us light to dispel the gloom of sin. Thus we pray, "...grant me to walk in the light of Thy commandments, O Word, that I may glorify Thee in the morning watches" (*Tone 8, Tue Matins, canon, ode 5 irmos*).

When the Church makes a man a catechumen, she prays, "Enable him to walk in all Thy commandments and to fulfill those things which are well-pleasing unto Thee; for if a man do those things, he shall find life in them." By confessing Christ as King and Lord, a man voluntarily submits himself to Christ's commandments; and the struggle to conform his life to them is at the heart of the process of purification, which is preeminently the purpose of the catechumenate. The keeping of the commandments and cleansing are connected as a hymn shows: "Make me to fulfill the commandments of God and cleanse the movements of my heart that I may praise Thee" (*Tone 8, Monday Vespers*).

Having baptized the catechumen, the Church requests in the closing litany "that he may be kept in the faith of a pure confession, in all godliness, and the fulfilling of the commandments of Christ, all the days of his life," for Christ did not simply command us to baptize, thereby making converts, but also to teach "them to do all things whatsoever I have commanded you" (*Matt. 28:20*). For, after all, the new Christian has acknowledged a new Master, the Lord Jesus Christ, who has won the kingship of the human race by conquering its deadly enemies of sin, death, and the devil. Hence he is "King of kings" and "Lord of lords." The King expresses His general will to his subjects through his commands; good subjects hear and delight to obey.

Thereafter, after every Communion in the Holy Mysteries, in giving thanks the faithful say, "Grant that they [these Mysteries] may become for me unto the observance of Thy commandments," and "grant that the communion of thy Holy Body and Blood of Thy Christ may be for us...unto the accomplishment of Thy commandments..." Christ's commandments remain the compass for the Christian's life, and he seeks through the Eucharist the grace to keep them. At Compline, the "after-supper" daily prayer of the

Church, the Church asks the Theotokos to "show me forth a proven doer of His commandments". And even at Marriage, the Church prays for the newly united couple, "Mercifully grant that they may life together in purity; and enable them to attain to a ripe old age, walking in Thy commandments with a pure heart."

Ultimately, the path of the commandments brings enlightenment, illumination, and holiness, and prepares us for *theosis* (divinization, union with God). The seventh prayer of light at Vespers, speaks of us being "enlightened by the exercise of Thy commandments." In the prayer at Vespers "Vouchsafe, O Lord, to keep us this evening without sin..." we pray, "Blessed are 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." A man must first learn God's statutes or commands if he is to do them. But he must also learn to understand them, why he needs them, what they imply for his life, and that they are not merely arbitrary 'do's' and 'don'ts', but that they express God's will for man and work to render him human and holy and fit for divine service and habitation with God. Knowing and understanding the commandments, a man will endeavor to do them rather than resist them, and the doing of them brings enlightenment and the deep experiential knowledge of God in which is abundance of life.

One of the twelve prayers prayed by the priest at Matins during the Six Psalms expresses similar ideas: "Teach us, O God, Thy righteousness, Thy commandments, and Thy statutes; enlighten the eyes of our intelligence that we may never fall asleep unto death in sin." One of the reasons we struggle so much with sin is that we have not had "the eyes of our intelligence" sufficiently enlightened to see God's light clearly, and it is that light which allows us to see sin for what it is and be properly repulsed by it. Having the commandments and a fear of them is a great help in the battle against sin. As the priest prays in the ninth prayer of Matins and before the Gospel reading at the Liturgy, "Instill in us also the fear of Thy blessed commandments that, trampling down all carnal desires, we may pursue a spiritual way of life, both considering and doing all things well-pleasing unto Thee."

Understanding the centrality of Christ's commandments to the Christian life, that it is by keeping them a Christian demonstrates his love for Christ and actually loves his neighbor should move the seeker of Truth to study the commandments, to treasure them as the path to his object, and to pray and sing fervently at every Vespers and Vigil, "Blessed art Thou, O Lord; teach me Thy statutes."

#### Upcoming Events 2022

4-29 July: Fr. Justin gone  
1-14 August: Dormition Fast

GLORY BE TO GOD FOR ALL THINGS!