

The Confessor's Tongue for August 14, A. D. 2022

9th Sunday After Pentecost; Forefeast of Dormition; Prophet Micah

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 Commandments of Christ

"If ye love Me, keep My commandments." (John 14:15)

Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly. . Matthew 6:1-4

Christ's words in these four verses boil down to two simple commands, a negative one and a positive one. Do not give charitable gifts to be seen and praised by others. Do give them as secretly as possible so that your giving is not generally known to others.

Why should Christians give secretly? The answer is simple. Christ would have His disciples give in faith for His sake, not for the sake of praise from men. Much human activity, much of it good in itself, is driven by vainglory—the desire to be noticed by others and praised by them. Vainglory says, "Look at my, look what I did, look how good I am. Praise me. Acknowledge me." While vainglory can help keep a man from committing serious sins, it is a weak foundation on which to build a virtuous life. It reduces the field of charity only to what others will notice and praise. If there is no praise from men in it, the man motivated by vainglory will not do it. Yet the praise of men who only see a small portion of another's life is vain and is often little more than flattery. Only the praise of God is true. By keeping the command, the Christian learns to seek praise and reward from God alone. He frees himself from vainglory and sets himself to serve Christ out of love.

How often these simple, explicit commands of our Savior and Lord are transgressed in our parishes! To motivate people to give for earthly recognition, donors are listed in bulletins and nameplates are attached to the furnishings and decorations of the temple. Thus we teach people to give in order to receive glory from men and deprive them of a public reward from our Heavenly Father. Moreover, we disobey the explicit commandment of Christ our Lord! It does not matter how 'successful' such tactics may appear to be, they are simply wrong. Such tactics are not ultimately successful: they stunt the spiritual lives of those who are taught to give for the wrong reasons and they replace an investment with a guaranteed eternal return for an uncertain, ephemeral return in personal pride and glory from men.

Jesus uses hyperbole in saying "let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth". As much as possible, a Christian should not be aware that he is

giving alms, and he certainly should not dwell upon it in his thoughts. It is also said that the left hand refers to vainglory and the right to almsgiving. Thus, when one gives, one is not to feed one's tendency to vainglory.

The focus of this passage is almsgiving, which is properly giving to others in need. Tithes are part of our worship. They represent the first part of what God gives us that we give back out of love and gratitude, seeking His blessing on what remains in our hands. Strictly "tithe" means ten percent. Our tithes support the local church in which we worship and receive the sacraments. Offerings are gifts we chose to give over and above our tithes. Almsgiving is a manifestation of Christian love. It is a means of providing those who come to us in need for what is essential to sustain their lives. Our almsgiving begins in the family, where we take care of our own in need, especially our aging parents and any relatives who cannot take care of themselves. It begins also in the Church, as we help take care of our own.

Traditionally, the church cared for Christian widows and orphans who had no other means of support. While children are the proper means of care and support for the aged, the Church undertakes to care for her own aged and sick who have no familial means of care and support. Having cared for her own, the Church also looks to the needs of those outside and applies the command of Christ "give to those who ask". This can take the form of shelters, of soup kitchens, of medical clinics and hospitals. Abiding in Christ, the Church has compassion on all, regardless of their personal worthiness or unworthiness.

Almsgiving is an essential part of Christian life. Many commands in the Old Covenant relate to the giving of alms and helping one's neighbor in need. Christ assumes the Christian will give alms in this passage, for He says "when thou doest alms" not "if". Thus the Christian must aim to live in such a way that he has means to give to those in need. This means cutting back on self-indulgent, frivolous expenditures and being content with necessities. It means not spending all one's income on oneself. Moreover, fasting makes almsgiving practically possible for everyone, regardless of means, for consuming less food on fast days provides each person with something to give to someone still less fortunate.

A Christian gives tithes, offerings, and alms out of obedience to his Savior and his love for Him. We can never repay Christ for what He has done for us, but we bring our gifts to Him in His House and give alms in His name out of deep gratitude. He knows our gifts and will reward us if we have not had reward from man; hence no one else need know. While Christ relates this explicitly to almsgiving, it seems that it is a wise policy to follow in all our giving.

The Sayings of St. Anthony the Great 27

Three Fathers used to go and visit blessed Anthony every year, and two of them used to discuss their thoughts and the salvation of their souls with him, but the third always remained silent and did not ask him anything. After a long time, Abba Anthony said to him, 'You often come here to see me, but you never ask me anything,' and the other replied, 'It is enough for me to see you, Father.'

Saying 27 *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*

Commentary: Certainly the third monk was edified by hearing the questions of the others and St. Anthony's answers. Very often our spiritual questions are those that others have but are afraid to ask, and our bringing up the topic ends up edifying others who are listening. It takes humility to ask a question, for asking a sincere question reveals our ignorance which pride shirks from revealing.

Yet this is not the primary sense of this saying. According to the words of the third monk, just to see Anthony was enough for him. How can this be? We all know the expression, "You are a sight for sore eyes!" We know the effect the mere sight of one we love but have not seen for a time has on us. Perhaps even more powerful is the effect seeing a truly holy person can have on us. If you doubt the power of holiness, recall how Moses, after all his conversations with God, wanted to see His face, but God only permitted him to see a part of His glory and his 'hind parts', not His face, as that would have been too much for Moses to bear. Even that limited sight of the glory of the holy God transfigured Moses so that his face shone so much that the Hebrews were frightened and he had to veil his face for their sake.

We have little experience with human holiness and its effects on others. Just encountering a holy person, looking upon him, and sitting quietly in his presence watching and listening can affect us powerfully. Indeed the saints (the word 'saint' is the same word in Greek as 'holy'—it could be translated as 'holy one') manifest in themselves the life of God who dwells in them, and God's powerful presence in them affects those around them, so much so that this monk was content merely to see and hear the holy Anthony without speaking.

The effect of holiness in others is why Christians have venerated relics, the sanctified remains of holy men of God, which, although separated temporarily from the soul, still participate in the sanctifying uncreated energies of God. The number of healings and miracles attributed to this encounter in incalculable. It is also why Christians have frequently made pilgrimages to see holy elders.

Furthermore, when we look at the world around us, our fellow parishioners, and our families and wonder why things are so bad, the power of holiness and God's command to "Be holy, for I am holy" makes us aware of the positive effect we can have on others by pursuing holiness. As we grow in true holiness, we make it easier for those around us likewise so to do. This can be said another way in St.

Seraphim's famous words: "Acquire the Holy Spirit, and thousands around you will be saved." One reason we don't see more people come to Christ, enter His Church, and remain, one reason we don't see the world becoming a better place, is our own want of holiness. You want the members of your family to become better, instead of lecturing them on virtue become more virtuous yourself. If you wish your fellow parishioners to be more Christ-like, instead of complaining about them and being offended, become more like Christ yourself. If we wish our city, our state, even our country to be better, instead of blaming our fellow citizens and the other party, let us blame rather ourselves and seek to improve ourselves by God's grace.

To become holy, we have to put ourselves in the presence of what is holy. We live such unholy lives because we spend so much time with what is base and impure. This means above all that we attend the Liturgy and regularly prepare ourselves for the Holy Mysteries. The holy things are for the Holy—and those on the road thereto!

Prophecies of St. Paisios of Athos (+1994)

1. God allows for these difficult years in His effort to awaken us. We will be tested greatly. Difficult times are coming. We have to take things seriously and start living spiritually. These difficult times will force us to struggle spiritually. We will be good if we struggle willingly and joyfully and not forcefully. Many Saints would have asked to live in our times because of the great struggle that is involved. We will not be fighting to defend our homeland or fighting off hordes of barbarians threatening to burn down our houses nor are we fighting for some ideology. Our opponent is very clear. We are either with Christ or with Satan, the opponent. We will witness frightening things. We will partake in spiritual battles. The holy will be holier still and the filthy will become filthier still. But I feel comforted internally. It is only a storm and the struggle is worthy because we battle not Ali Pasha the Turk, Hitler or Mussolini, but the devil himself. This is why we will have heavenly compensation.

2. This is the era when the sheep will separate from the goats; the faithful will separate from the unfaithful. Later in the future we will be tested greatly and give spiritual battles and become persecuted for our faith to shine even brighter. This will reveal and separate the gold from the copper.

3. In the past, people used to suffer in war. In our present times, we suffer because of civilization. In the past, people used to move away from the cities into the villages because of war conditions. In the villages they were able to survive and become self sufficient by cultivating a garden or a plot of land. In our times, people will move away from the civilized cities that have become uncivilized, barbarian because they will be unable to survive and live in them.

Upcoming Events 2022

15 August: Dormition
1 September: Church New Year
25 September: Annual Meeting

GLORY BE TO GOD FOR ALL THINGS!