

The Confessor's Tongue for September 11, A. D. 2022

13th Sunday After Pentecost; Ven. Theodora of Alexandria; SS Sergius & Herman of Valaam
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.

September 14: Exaltation of the Cross

On the 14th of September, the Church celebrates the Great Feast of the Exaltation (Elevation) of the Precious Cross. The Feast is the only one of the Great Feasts that does not commemorate some occasion in the life of either Christ or His mother. The day is a strict fast day.

The Feast commemorates two events: the finding of the Cross by St. Helen, mother of the Emperor Constantine, and the return of the Cross and its elevation before the faithful in 629, fifteen years after it was taken from Jerusalem by Persian invaders.

But more than this, the Feast calls us to celebrate Christ's glory and victory won on the Cross. Christ's agonizing death on the Cross was victory over Satan and sin, and the death of death. Thus we find the Cross indeed to be "precious" and "life-creating" for us. Christ's life-giving death on the Cross transformed it from a feared symbol of Roman public execution of criminals to the symbol of Christ's great love for mankind and of His victory over evil and the evil one. Hence we glory in the Cross of Christ, as St. Paul writes: "But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world."

At Vigil, there is a special ceremony of venerating the Cross. During the Praises of Matins, the priest vests fully. During the Great Doxology, he censes around the altar table three times. When the "Holy God" at the end of the Doxology is sung, he bears the Cross out of the altar to before the Royal Doors, and then deposits it on an analogion in the midst of the nave. Everyone sings "Before Thy Cross we bow down in veneration, O Master, and Thy holy Resurrection, we glorify" three times, doing a full prostration each time. Then as special hymns to the cross are sung, each person comes to venerate the cross, prostrating twice, kissing the cross, and prostrating again. Having venerated the Cross, each person comes to be anointed with the blessed festal oil and to receive blessed Litia bread dipped in blessed wine.

The Church also honors Christ's Cross on August 1st, the Third Sunday of Great Lent, and every Friday (and Wednesday).

We celebrate the Feast through its Leave-taking, September 21. We may replace our usual prayers at meals with the Troparion (before) and the Kontakion (after), and use them in our daily prayers as well. All the faithful should participate in the services celebrating this Great Feast of the Church.

Troparion tone 1

O Lord, save Thy people / and bless Thine inheritance. / Grant victory to Orthodox Christians / over the enemy; / and by Thy Cross / preserve Thine estate.

Kontakion, tone 4

As Thou wast voluntarily crucified for our sake, O Christ God, / so grant mercy to those who are called by Thy name; / make all Orthodox Christians glad by Thy power, / granting them victories over the enemy, / by bestowing on them the invincible trophy, Thy weapon of peace.

The Sayings of St. Anthony the Great 31

One day Abba Anthony received a letter from the Emperor Constantius, asking him to come to Constantinople, and he wondered whether he ought to go. So he said to Abba Paul, his disciple, "Ought I to go?" He replied, "If you go, you will be called Anthony; but if you stay here, you will be called Abba Anthony." Saying 31 Sayings of the Desert Fathers

Commentary: Firstly, notice that even in his greatness, Anthony consults a brother and does not rely solely upon his own discernment or wisdom. And he asks not any brother, but his own disciple! Humility is required to ask counsel of others, still greater humility is required to ask one who less in age, experience, and wisdom. How many pitfalls we would avoid if we would take counsel with others! How many tears of repentance would need never be shed if only we had asked counsel and listened! We ought not to ask counsel of just anyone, of course. We can ask those who will tell us what we want to hear, but that will not help us. We must ask those who have a measure of wisdom and discernment from God.

Secondly, notice the reversal of the world's values. Most of us would leap and the opportunity if the President summoned us by name to visit him. We would think of how it would be good publicity for our cause or how we might influence him for good. Yet Abba Paul indicates that to go the Emperor will hinder Anthony in his true vocation of being a monk. He will be known simply as 'Anthony' if he goes to the Emperor, but if he stays in his cell in the desert, he will be known as 'Abba Anthony.' Very often the thing the world judges as great honor and opportunity is a spiritual hindrance for the true lover and seeker of God. Public exposure, honor, and publicity may well hold one back from one's full potential in Christ.

So thirdly, we see that our choices in life are not always between good and bad, but sometimes between good, better, and best. Good and better can be the enemy of best, and here that is the case. Better it is for Anthony to have his full development as monk and become known as 'Abba' than to partake of the honor of seeing the Emperor with all the attendant good opportunities but fall short of his spiritual potential. For this reason, St. Paul tells us that "all things are lawful, but not all are profitable." It was lawful for Anthony to respond to the Emperor's invitation and visit him, it was a 'good' thing, not inherently wrong, but it was not profitable for him nor the best thing for him, as he discerned

through the counsel of his disciple Paul. May God grant us all the wisdom to take counsel with others and the desire to pursue His best and what is truly profitable for us, and not to be content with merely the good and lawful. *Fr. Justin Frederick*

The Commandments of Christ

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

Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth. Luke 12:15

Christ warned His disciples and us of a number of dangers: false prophets, men, hypocrisy, and the deceit of false teachers who claim to come in Christ's name, but this may be the only sin Christ addresses with words of warning: “You keep looking out and keep yourselves from covetousness”, as it may be more literally expressed. This covetousness is greed, a “thirst for having more.” In place of the blessed state of directing his desire to hunger and thirst for righteousness, greed directs man to hunger and thirst for material things.

Covetousness is not the insignificant sin many consider it to be. In St. Paul's epistle to the Ephesians, he puts it with fornication and uncleanness as things that should “not be once named among you” who are called to be holy (Eph 5:3). He goes on to say that no fornicator, unclean person, or covetous man will inherit the kingdom of heaven (5:5) and connects covetousness to idolatry—the worship of false gods. So it is no light thing to be covetous or greedy, nor is covetousness the province only of the rich. A beggar can be a slave of covetousness as well as a rich man.

Jesus gives this command command in response to a man who came to Him asking Him to make his brother share the inheritance with him. Jesus responds by saying, “Who made me a judge or divider over you?” and then issues the command to beware of covetousness. He then follows with the parable of the rich fool, who laid up ever-increasing treasure for himself but was not rich towards God. To cinch the point, He asks the disciples to consider the birds and the lilies to see how God cares for them. God will care for those made in His image, too, so they may seek His kingdom first and safely trust God to provide the material things they need. All this, Christ directs against the sin of covetousness, which readily assails man to harm him.

How may we escape this deadly sin? Christ expresses the attitude of mind necessary to us in relation to things: “A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.” Understanding that more stuff does not make our lives better is the first step, and, as St. Paul said, the Christian may be fully content in this life if he has but food and clothing. The second is to choose to seek first the kingdom of God, to put the search for the heavenly food of immortality before that for earthly food. The third, to keep covetousness and the love of

money growing in our hearts, is to give God the first part of our income (our tithe) and to give alms above and beyond that. This teaches us to entrust our lives to God and helps make us aware of how frivolously we are wont to use what God gives us. Our faith in God overcomes our fear that we shan't have enough, and our awareness makes us more ready to put the needs of others over our own frivolous desires. By such steps, we may walk free from covetousness. *Fr. Justin Frederick*

Book Review: Elder Zenobius:

A life in Spiritual Continuity with Pre-Rev. Russia Zinoviy Chesnokov, Jordanville, 2013.

Many more than we suppose are God's holy ones on this earth. Sometimes we see them easily. Often they dwell in far places, so our paths do not cross and their report does not reach us. Sometimes we see them and do not recognize their sanctity.

Elder Zenobius was one of God's holy ones whose sanctity was seen by those who knew him, but whose report did not reach far due to the conditions under which he lived.

Zenobius was born September 14, 1896 in Glukhov, Chernigov Province, in what is now north-central Ukraine. He lost his father at age three, his mother at eleven. After living with relatives for five years, he went to live at the House of Work at the Glinsk Hermitage, Chernigov Province, (just west of the border with Russia and the city of Kursk) where monks took needy and orphan boys in to learn trades. In 1914 at age 18, he became a novice. He was tonsured a monk in 1921, just a year before the victorious Bolsheviks closed the monastery. Zenobius, with the blessing of the elders there, took an antimimension (so he could serve Liturgy wherever he went) and departed for Abkhazia, on the eastern shore of the Black Sea, part of the Soviet Republic of Georgia. There he entered a monastery that was still open, was ordained deacon and then priest, and served in a parish church in Sukhumi until 1930, when he was arrested and imprisoned. He worked as a prisoner in labor camps building the White Sea-Baltic Canal and a chemical plant. After early release in 1934, he lived as a hermit in the Caucasus mountains from 1936 until 1942 and in secret monastic communities there.

In 1942, being ill, he travelled to Tbilisi, Georgia for treatment. There he became well-acquainted with the Patriarch of Georgia Callistratus,

In 1950, after the death of the rector, the Patriarch immediately appointed Fr. Zenobius rector of St. Alexander Nevsky Cathedral in Tbilisi, saying: “This man . . . has great obedience, which is worth more than literacy and pride, and puts anyone in the first place.” Fr. Zenobius was consecrated a bishop in 1956 to oversee Russian parishes in Georgia. He served faithfully and effectively in his cathedral of St. Alexander Nevsky, with good relations with each Georgian patriarch, until his repose March 8, 1985.

He was canonized as a saint in 2010 at Glinsk Monastery by Metropolitan Vladimir of Kiev.

Elder Zenobius possessed great humility and simplicity. One, a man came to see Metropolitan Zenobius for the first time. Upon reaching the church, he saw an elderly monk wearing a worn skufia on his head, a shabby old cassock and bast shoes [a poor man's shoe made from linden or birch tree fibers, basket-woven and fitted to the foot], talking with some old ladies. Realizing he should not interrupt, the man waited until the conversation was over before he addressed himself to the monk to ask where he might find the Metropolitan. He was utterly amazed when the monk answered softly, "I am Metropolitan Zenobius."

Having received great grace from his elders at the Glinsk Monastery before it was closed, Zenobius throughout the difficult years of communism helped keep alive the Faith in the hearts of many, counseling them, imparting to them spiritual nourishment, and praying for them. As he became known, people came to see him from all over the Soviet Union. He instructed them to say the Jesus Prayer, not seeking "to reach some high level and particular concentration of thought, but with simplicity of heart [to] pray to the Living God, who is as close to us as our soul." He advised people to use the prayer in moments of solitude and to drive away thoughts. He considered this more important than reading spiritual books.

On fasting, he instructed people: "If you are a guest, never try to explain fasting rules to your hosts. Eat what they have cooked and then go to confession [for breaking the fast]. People should not have to fuss around you and ask, 'Are you allowed to eat this or not?'"

This great elder, who was spiritual father to Patriarch Illia II, now intercedes for us on earth in heaven. Pray to God for us, O holy father Zenobius!

Fr. Justin Frederick

Homily on the Living Stone

St. Nicholas of Zicha (+1956)

"To whom coming, as unto a living stone...ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood. I Peter 2:4-5

What does a stone mean, my brethren, but stability? What can it teach us, my brethren, but stability? The living stone means immortality. The Apostle refers to Christ the Lord as the living Stone, because He is immortal and the giver of immortality. The Apostle also refers to Christians as living stones, as partakers of the immortality of Christ.

My brethren, what do unbelievers think will be the last end of man? They think that his last end will be like that of a stone; a man will die, he will become insensate and turn to dust. A stone is already dead and without feeling, and can easily be turned to dust. Thus both unbelievers and believers compare men with stone, unbelievers because of its deadness and lack of feeling, and believers because of its endurance

and stability. For the first, stone is a symbol of death, but for the second, it is a symbol of immortality.

In truth, without Christ, men are and always will be like dead stones. But Christ is like living stone. Ally yourself with Him alone, and you will be like living stones. In building a house, a builder chooses only those stones that are hewn and dressed to fit together with the other stones in the wall. Those that are unhewn, undressed, rough, and dilapidated, he throws away. Building the house, or the Temple, of His immortal Kingdom, Christ chooses men as a builder selects stones, with one characteristic: life, spiritual life. The Lord casts aside the spiritually dead as useless material, and only takes those that are alive with His life, and who fit well with the other living stones—the angels and the prophets, apostles and saints. Let us strive, my brethren, to be holy material for the holy house of Christ's Kingdom, which He is building day and night, and which He will complete in the fullness of time.

O Lord Jesus, Thou builder of the heavenly Kingdom, enliven us by Thy Holy Spirit and build us as living stones into the house of Thine eternal glory. To Thee be glory and praise forever. Amen.

The Importance of the Old Testament

Metropolitan Anthimos of Alexandroupolis

Your priest met Metropolitan Anthimos on his trip to Serbia and Mt. Athos in 2014. His spiritual father is Elder Macarios, the Abbot at the Marouda Kellia where I stayed, and he was there for a visit and for Confession. We left the Holy Mountain the same way; he paid for our boat ticket and provided refreshment for us in Ouranopolis. He made a good impression on me and my travelling companions.

Many people nowadays question the relevance of the Old Testament and the contribution it can make – if any – to society as a whole. Some attack it and disapprove of it. They are making a grave mistake. The Old Testament is God's second gift to us after that of reason and self-determination. While other peoples were still fighting shadows in the dark, the Israelites were conversing with God. While other nations were speculating about God and attempting to locate Him in multi-faceted idols, Israel was coming to terms with Him. While other nations were sacrificing their children to appease God, Israel was singing psalms and hymns to God and was concerned about how to reduce the distance that separated them from Him.

In days gone by, the texts of the Old Testament guided the people away from times of barbarity through to a relatively enlightened society. In the realm in which the people of God functioned, with such "building materials" as they found, they laid the foundations of the enduring religious sense of the world.

The books of the Old Testament are read multifariously and exude an air of confidence in God and indicate how this trust can be restored when it

has been shaken. In our relations with God, each of us is Jewish inside, to this day.

The Christian Church should never forget what it owes to the Old Testament and to the people of Israel, our “custodian until Christ came”. There have been extreme times when it has forgotten, and has then acted in ways that were both unchristian and inhumane.

It is time to start discussing the Old Testament and to respect its contribution to society as a whole. To have an understanding of this requirement, try removing from world legislation, from morality, from art, from human decency, what the Old Testament has contributed and then you will realize how appallingly impoverished and pointless the world would be. If you tried to read the New Testament with no previous knowledge of the Old, you would not understand more than a few fragments.

Like it or nor, “they are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is Christ (*Rom. 9, 4-5*). We need to remember that always. And to recognize it.

On the Icon of the Theotokos & Prayer

Elder Cleopa of Romanina (+1998)

When you see the icon of the Mother of God with the Christ Child in her arms, do you know what you are seeing? Heaven and earth! Heaven is Christ, He who is higher than the heavens, the Maker of heaven and earth. And the Mother of God represents the earth, because she is of our descent. She is from the royal and priestly lineage.

Prayer is the nourishment and life of the soul. Just as the body dies without food and drink, so also the soul dies without prayer.

On Passions

St. Barsanuphius of Optina

Even perfect people have passions—there are no totally passionless people. Passionlessness exists in full measure only beyond the grave. But with the perfect, the passions have come to a standstill, since they are not given a chance. Each man, no matter how exalted a life he has led, no matter how many grace-filled gifts he has been vouchsafed, must remember and never forget that he, too, is a passionate man.

Christian Labor to Fulfill Christ's Commandments

St. Barsanuphius of Optina

It is impossible to learn to fulfill the God's commandments without labor, and this labor is threefold: **prayer, fasting, and sobriety**. The Savior responded to the question of His disciples, why they could not cast out a demon: *Because of your unbelief... This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting* (*Matt. 17:20-21*). These three podvigs make us into conquerors of the enemies of our salvation.

The most difficult one is **prayer**. Every virtue, from practice, becomes a habit, but one must force oneself in prayer to one's very death. It is opposed by our “old man,” and the enemy especially rises up against the one who prays. Prayer is the insinuation of death to the devil; it defeats him. Even the saints, such as St. Seraphim, had to force themselves in prayer, not to mention us sinners.

Our poet Lermontov, whose life ended so sadly [in a duel at age 27]—even he experienced the sweetness of prayer and described it in his poem:

*When life becomes too sorrowful
And weighs upon my heart,
I then recite a wonderful
Short prayer I know by heart.*

*Therein dwells grace so powerful,
Imbued with living words,
And breathes through inexplicable,
God-touching, sacred chords.*

*And when my burden disappears
And doubts no longer stay,
My soul is freed by holy tears,
And lifts my heart away.*

Unfortunately, prayer did not save him, because he expected only ecstasies and did not want to bear the labor of prayer.

The enemy attacks powerfully, instilling despair, despondency, and fear: *There have they feared with fear where no fear is* (*Psalm 52:6*). Sometimes a man loses heart, but such sorrow is unlawful—you must oppose the enemy with prayer and with the sign of the Cross, in which there is hidden incomprehensible power.

The second means is **fasting**. Fasting is twofold: outward—abstinence from forbidden foods, and inward—abstinence in all the senses, especially sight, from everything impure and foul. Some people understand only outward fasting. So, for instance, one person joins a group of people and in conversations the judging of his neighbors begins. He takes an active part in it, and steals much from the honor of his neighbor. Dinnertime comes. The guest is offered cutlets, suckling pig, and so on. He resolutely declares that he will not eat non-fast foods. “Go ahead, eat,” his hosts persuade him. “After all, *not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of his mouth*” (*Matt 15:11*). “No, I’m strict about that,” he declares.

Such a man doesn't even understand that he has already broken the inward fast, in judging his neighbor.

And this is why **sobriety** is so important. Laboring for his salvation, a man little-by-little purifies his heart from envy, hatred, and slander, and love is instilled in it....

When the Lord sent the Apostles out to preach, He commanded them not to think about what they would reply to the torturers, because the Holy Spirit would speak for them. This same Holy Spirit acts now as well in the Holy Scriptures and the sacred books, and in particular in the Lives of Saints. That is why this reading acts in such a way upon the soul—because it is given life by the Holy Spirit; in it is the word of life, while in the works of unbelievers is the word of death. This is why simple fishermen subdued the whole world, in such a way that learned un-believers could not oppose the spirit of grace....

And so, my spiritual children, read the Holy Scriptures and the works of the Holy Fathers, because through them the Holy Spirit Himself is speaking; and let us not read the works of the kind of teachers that try to tear us away from Christ. May the Lord save us all from that. Let us follow the teaching of Christ alone, and we shall be saved.... Yes, the true teaching of Christ is capable of kindling even a cold heart. *I am come to send fire on the earth* (*Luke 12:49*), said the Savior. The grace of God covers and saves all who follow after Christ.

Upcoming Events 2022

25 September: Annual Meeting
16 October: Octoberfest

GLORY BE TO GOD FOR ALL THINGS!