

The Confessor's Tongue for October 29, 2023

21st Sunday after Pentecost: Martyr Anastasia, Martyr Timothy

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.

October 29: St. Timothy of Esphigmenou

Love Your Wife As Christ Loves the Church

St. Timothy of Esphigmenou gives us a nearly contemporary example of a husband loving his wife like Christ loves the Church, one we do well to contemplate and emulate.

From Thrace in Greece, the peasant Timothy was married and had two daughters. At this time, in the early 1800s, shortly before the Greek Revolution, Thrace was ruled by Muslim Turks. A Muslim neighbor conceived a lust for Timothy's wife, and, unable to contain his passion, he took her away by force. Somehow he persuaded her to become a Muslim and to be added to his harem.

Timothy, whose given name was Triantaphylos, was deeply grieved by his wife's double tragedy of losing both her marriage and her faith. As Christians under the Turkish yoke had no legal rights in such cases against Muslims, he had no hope of getting her back by legal means. But his love for her did not die, and he turned to God in fervent prayer for his wife's return to Christ. Continuing his prayers, he eventually began sending secret messages to her urging her to abandon Islam and come back to Christ.

In time, his prayers were answered. By God's grace, she came to her senses and her heart was kindled with desire to return to her former faith and way of life and husband, while her new faith and husband seemed to be repugnant to her. She wept bitterly in repentance over her sins. She knew her captor would not easily let her go, so she suggested to Timothy that he pretend to accept Islam, thereby gaining legal rights and a basis for getting her back. His wife's repentance delighted Timothy. Thinking of St. Paul's willingness to be "accursed from Christ" for the sake of his Jewish brethren (Romans 9:3), he accepted his wife's suggestion.

Timothy went to the Turkish magistrates, declared his intention to be Muslim, was accepted, and received circumcision according to the Muslim practice. He was then given his wife back. For a time they lived together secretly practicing their Christian faith, but had to flee to another region when the Muslims became suspicious. Timothy's wife entered a women's monastery while he went to the Great Lavra on Mt. Athos. There he took up the monastic life and cultivated repentance for his unavoidable sin committed out of love for his wife and the desire for her salvation.

After seven years, the monk Timothy heard of an Athonite monk named Agathangelos from the monastery of Esphigmenou who, like Timothy, had once denied his faith but had now confessed it and his renunciation of Islam publicly and had been martyred. Timothy began to long to make his confession of Christ in the same way. He moved to Esphigmenou

Monastery to receive guidance from the elder who had prepared Agathangelos. After a period of preparation, the abbot blessed Timothy to declare his Christian faith and renunciation of Islam before the Turkish authorities in Adrianopol. He set off joyously to receive martyrdom from the Turks on 29 October 1820. May God grant us all such love and care for one another as St. Timothy demonstrated for his wife. Holy Martyr Timothy of Esphigmenou, pray unto God for us!

The Parable of the Sower and the Soils

The parable Christ told of the sower and the soils provides fundamental insight into spiritual life that assists us from beginning to end. For those of us who converted to Orthodoxy, there are insights here to help sustain us in our new way of life.

Those who come to the Orthodox Church as adults very often enter with great enthusiasm and high hopes. They have seen the true Light and found the true Faith. All the problems they experienced wherever they were before are not behind them. To think so is meet and right—with a caveat: the initial enthusiasm will wear off, the challenge of the daily work of choosing to abide in Christ will manifest, and some will be tempted and slip away.

Why is this so? The parable explains. Of the four soils, three particularly represent adult converts who have joyfully received the Faith. The shallow, stony soil represents those who receive the Faith with gladness and enthusiasm but fall away when the going gets tough. Sometimes the resistance is external, such as persecution from and conflict with family or friends. It is usually internal, too, reflecting the resistance of the old man to the work of being crucified with Christ and dying to self-will. The old man could be said to persecute the new spiritual man. Over time, the internal and external tensions prove to be too much for the once-enthusiastic convert, and the person withers spiritually in the heat generated by the battle and seeks relief by abandoning the fight. The root of the problem in this case is stubborn self-will, a heart that has not softened in full submission to the Master and His will.

The weedy soil represents those who receive the word gladly but who fail to deal adequately with the weeds of sin which the devil constantly sows through thoughts. In time, if those weeds are not plucked up while small, they will grow and choke out the plant of the kingdom. The soul, drawn to the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life will be spiritually enervated, losing all taste for spiritual things, much as one who has overindulged in junk food has no taste for good food. Sin dulls the spiritual sensitivity of the soul, especially when it is willfully chosen. Unless the convert continues in active

warfare and quick repentance after falls, sin grows quickly in the soul to smother spiritual life.

The hard-packed soil of the path on which the seed falls but is snatched up by birds perhaps does not apply so much to adult converts as it does to those baptized as infants who hear the word as they grow up in the Church but never choose to act on it. Yet even and adult can get to the place: having once received the word, he lets his heart grow hard and cold to the point that further sowing of the word does not penetrate the surface of his heart but is snatched away by the demons.

No one should despair over this. However the condition of the soil of one's heart may be described at this moment, that is not one's fixed identity. Just as bad soils in the physical world can be amended and become productive, so the condition of the soil of the heart is not static, but changes. It can change both for the better and for the worse. If as Christians we hear the word of the Gospel and don't act on it, don't work to receive it into our lives and apply it, our hearts are like the hard path—what we've heard will get taken from us. If we receive the word and act on it but retain conditions for doing so in our minds (I'll pray if you give me what I want...) or our stubborn self-will is not softened and humbled, then when the going gets tough, we'll get going—right out of the Church. If we receive the word but don't work to uproot the sin the constantly sprouts in our lives, or souls will be overgrown with sins and will have no desire for life in Christ.

In all cases, our desire is that the soil of our hearts become good so that the word of the Gospel sown therein may be free to grow and bear abundant fruit. God speaks through the prophet Hosea (10:12), "Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the Lord, till he come and rain righteousness upon you" and through the prophet Jeremiah, "For thus saith the Lord to the men of Judah and Jerusalem, Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns." We who are baptized into Christ are spiritually Judah and Jerusalem. All of us have fallow, untilled and unused soil in our hearts. All of us have thorns and rocks to remove. If we work to prepare the soil of our hearts to seek the Lord, He will come visit us bringing rain to make the seeds of His righteous kingdom grow. *Fr. Justin Frederick*

Fifty-Five Beatitudes, Part I *St. Ephrem the Syrian*

St. Ephrem, whose feast we celebrated January 28, is known as "the apostle of repentance".

1. Blessed the one who has become wholly free in the Lord from all the earthly things of this vain life and loved God alone, the good and compassionate.
2. Blessed the one who has become a good ploughman of the virtues and raised a harvest of fruits of life in the Lord, like a ploughed field bearing wheat.

3. Blessed the one who has become a good husbandman of the virtues and planted a spiritual vine, plucked the grapes and filled his presses with fruits of life in the Lord.

4. Blessed the one who has made his fellow servants glad with spiritual gladness from the fruit of the virtues, which he planted by toiling to give back the fruit of life in the Lord.

5. Blessed the one who stands in the assembly and prays like an Angel from heaven, keeping his thoughts pure day by day, and has given no entrance to the Evil One to make his soul a prisoner, far from God his Saviour.

6. Blessed the one who with understanding has loved weeping and with compunction rained tears upon the ground, like fair pearls before the Lord.

7. Blessed the one who loves holiness like the light and has not defiled his body with dark deeds of the Evil One in the sight of the Lord.

8. Blessed the one who keeps his body for holiness for the Saviour and has not shamed his soul by unnatural deeds, but remained well-pleasing to the Lord.

9. Blessed the one who has hated evil-doing that is full of shame and presented himself as a living sacrifice, well-pleasing to the Lord.

10. Blessed the one who always keeps the memory of God in himself, he will be wholly like an Angel from heaven upon earth, ministering to the Lord with fear and love.

11. Blessed the one who loves repentance that saves sinners and has not thought of doing ill, like someone ungrateful before God our Saviour.

12. Blessed the one who seated in his cell, like a noble warrior, guards the treasure of the kingdom, that is his body with his soul, blameless in the Lord.

13. Blessed the one who seated in his cell like Angels in heaven keeps his thoughts pure and with his mouth sings praise to the One who has authority over everything that breath.

14. Blessed the one who has become like the Seraphim and the Cherubim and never wearied in his spiritual ministry, unceasingly giving glory to the Lord.

15. Blessed the one who is always full of spiritual joy and has not grown slack in bearing the Lord's good yoke, for he will be crowned with glory.

16. Blessed the one who has cleansed himself of every stain of sins, so that with boldness he may receive into his own house the King of glory, our Lord Jesus Christ. *to be continued*

Upcoming Events 2023

- 31 October: 6:00 p.m. All Saints Party
11 November 10:00 a.m. Adult Baptisms
12 November: 4:00 p.m. Parish Thanksgiving Meal

GLORY BE TO GOD FOR ALL THINGS!