

The Confessor's Tongue for November 5, 2023

22nd Sunday after Pentecost: Synaxis of the Holy Unmercenaries

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.

Sermon for the Synaxis of Unmercenaries

On this Sunday we celebrate the Synaxis of the Holy Unmercenary Healers, or, as they are also called, the "physicians without silver." They are those saints who, out of pure love of God and neighbor, healed the sick and mended the souls of others while asking nothing in return. It was a pure self-sacrifice born out of love. Today we remember the great saints Cyrus and John, Tryphon, Artemius, and the others, as well as Cosmas and Damian, who lived and were martyred in Roman times. And of course, we also remember and honor our great patron, the martyr and healer Panteleimon.

We are all icons of Christ in that we are made in the image and likeness of God. Yet it is in the saints, whose souls have been scoured and scrubbed clean of the black taint and deformity of sin, that this image of Christ is made clear, and it shines through in the lives of the saint – each in their own particular way. In the Unmercenary Healers, we see the image of Christ the True Physician; their whole lives and their very being pointed to Christ. The holy brothers, Sts. Cosmas and Damien, told the sick: "It is not by our own power that we treat you, but by the power of Christ, the true God. Believe in him and be healed."

The Unmercenary Healers were not self-serving. They had no ulterior motives. Rather, they showed a Christ-like love for all, and they gave themselves for all. Sts. Cosmas and Damien, on trial before the Roman emperor, said in their own defense: "We have done evil to no one, we are not involved with the magic or sorcery of which you accuse us. We treat the infirm by the power of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and we take no payment for rendering aid to the sick, because the Lord commanded His disciples. 'Freely have you received, freely give.' (Matt. 10:8)"

It is interesting to note that in the stories of the lives of both Sts. Cosmas and Damian and St. Panteleimon, the saints were martyred – yet they were given over to death by that ancient enemy: *envy*. In the life of Sts. Cosmas and Damian, we see that envy was able to accomplish what the hatred of the pagans and the ferocity of the Roman authorities failed to do. An older physician, who was an instructor of Sts. Cosmas and Damien and who taught them the art of medicine, became envious of their fame as great and godly healers. Driven to madness by his envy, and overcome with malice towards them, he summoned the two brothers, his once beloved students, and proposed that they go together to gather medicinal herbs. Going into the mountains alone, he cruelly murdered them and threw their bodies into a river.

St. Panteleimon, likewise, was delivered to the Emperors' tribunal by envy. As St. Panteleimon began to be well known as a loving and unmercenary healer, healing both body and soul through his medical

practice and his righteous prayer to Almighty God, his former teachers and peers – the pagan physicians – became envious at the young man. Out of spite, they turned Panteleimon over to the Emperor, denouncing him as a Christian, which was punishable by death. And so, St. Panteleimon met his martyric death in this way.

Envy is not simply a desire to have what someone else has, for this would be mere covetousness. Rather, envy wants the other to suffer loss and simply be deprived.

Envy. It is a silent and very hidden sin. Yet it is a sin set deep in the soul and very ancient. In envy, we can hear the ancient hiss of the serpent – the enemy of mankind – sliding slyly and almost imperceptively – hidden as in tall grass. It was envy that led Satan to first deceive Eve, bringing about the Fall, and it is envy to this day that bids all the fallen spirits to war against God and man. It was envy that led to the first murder – the first fratricide – when Cain slew his brother, Abel. Indeed, it was even envy that delivered Christ up to the Cross for Mark 15:10 says that *Pilate knew that the chief priests had delivered [Christ] for envy*.

In speaking of envy, Fr. Stephen Freeman once noted that in all his years as a priest, he strangely had never heard (or even preached) a sermon on the topic, and he did not find that the issue of envy generally arises in Confession. Yet this doesn't mean that it isn't there. Envy is often hidden by a related sin – that of *pride*.

Envy is often disguised in our lives. Envy is not simply a desire to have what someone else has, for this would be mere covetousness. Rather, envy wants the other to suffer loss and simply be deprived. This is certainly what we see in the lives of our Unmercenary Healers today, Sts. Cosmas and Damien and St. Panteleimon. They are brought to death by the very people who raised them, molded them, and helped to make them who they were – simply out of envy.

The Scriptures, as well as many traditional Orthodox cultures, describe envy as the "evil eye." It has a destructive capacity almost beyond calculation. The passions of various modern revolutions – and certainly the Russian Revolution – have often been grounded in envy. Unable to achieve a reasonable and prosperous society, revolutions turn with envy towards destruction. The end is mere destruction – not fairness or equality, but just simply destruction.

Envy is the secret sin we don't like to discuss, and which we don't want to admit, mostly out of pride. Yet this sin is just as pernicious, just as destructive, as any other – and I would say, even more so. Certainly without love of God and love of neighbor, as St. Paul says, we are nothing, and our so-called good deeds profit us nothing. Yet when we have envy towards our

brother, we may not physically kill him, but we murder him in our heart. It is nothing but mutual destruction. With the poison of such secrets sins still lying in our hearts, and with the sin of envy remaining unnamed and unhealed, we can expect to make little spiritual progress or growth.

So today, let us look to the Holy Unmercenary Physicians for our example, and let us implore them to intercede to God for us to heal us of our hidden sins. Christ is the True Physician, but we can only be healed if we allow the light of Christ into our darkest, most hidden places. As St. Macarius of Egypt said: "The heart is but a small vessel; and yet dragons and lions are there, and there likewise are poisonous creatures and all the treasures of wickedness... [Yet] there also is God, there are the angels, there life and the Kingdom, there light and the apostles, the heavenly cities and the treasures of grace: all things are there." (Homilies 43:7)

Let not shame or fear keep you away from Christ. Our true path to salvation is towards the light of Christ, and away from the darkness of the shame of Adam and Eve and the envy of the devil. May the Lord grant us the courage to come out of our darkness and into the light and with fear of God, with faith and love, draw nearer to Him. Let us emulate the Holy Unmercenary Healers, who for themselves wanted nothing, but out of love of God and their brother, gave everything. May the Lord grant this to us. Amen *Holy Cross Monastery, WV*

Fifty-Five Beatitudes, Part II

St. Ephrem the Syrian

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

17. Blessed the one who draws near with fear and trembling and dread to the spotless Mysteries of the Savior and has realized that he has received in himself eternal life.

18. Blessed the one who meditates on death each day and destroys the base passions lurking in the hearts of the vines, for he will be consoled in the moment of separation.

19. Blessed the one who continually remembers the fear of Gehenna and hastens with tears and groans to repent sincerely in the Lord, for he will be delivered from the great tribulation.

20. Blessed the one who continually humbles himself willingly; he will be crowned by the One who willingly humbled himself for our sake.

21. Blessed the one who sits in his cell with all devotion, as Mary sat at the Lord's feet, and hastens, like Martha, to receive him, the Lord and Savior.

22. Blessed the one who is fired by the fear of God, ever having in himself the fervor of the Holy Spirit, and who has burned up the thorns and thistles of the thoughts.

23. Blessed the one who has not defiled his hands with unseemly deeds like one accursed, for about this

there will be a judgement in the dread day in the presence of the Lord.

24. Blessed the one who farms fair and good thoughts each day and by hope conquers the wicked passion of despondency, by which the Lord's ascetics are warred upon.

25. Blessed the one who has become like a noble warrior in the Lord's work, rousing the idle, encouraging the faint-hearted in the way of the Lord.

26. Blessed the one who has become fruitful in the Lord, that he may have the holy Angels as guardians, as a fruitful tree has its own husbandman as guardian.

27. Blessed the one who loves gentleness with spiritual understanding and is not tripped up by the wicked Serpent, for he has as his hope the good and compassionate Lord.

28. Blessed the one who honors the Saints and loves his neighbor and has banished envy from his own soul; envy through which Cain became his brother's murderer.

29. Blessed the one who has rebuked the tyrant and not quailed at the flame of the pleasures, for his soul will be refreshed with dew by the dew of the Holy Spirit.

30. Blessed the one whose mind the dark diabolical cloud has not been able to invade and deprive of the sweet light and joy of the just.

31. Blessed the one the eyes of whose heart have been enlightened as he ever mirrors the Lord, for such a one has been unburdened of the passions and evil thoughts.

32. Blessed the one who loves good and fair words and hates base and destructive speech, because he will not become a prisoner of the Evil One.

33. Blessed the one who rebukes his neighbor with fear of God and has not deceived his soul, fearing each day the iron rod of the great Shepherd.

34. Blessed the one who in accordance with God's will obeys his neighbor and while enduring afflictions gives thanks. Such a one will be crowned, for he will become a confessor for the Lord.

35. Blessed the one who has not been worsted by the passion of despondency like a coward, but has found perfect endurance, by which all the Saints received their crowns.

36. Blessed the one who in accordance with God's will loves self-mastery and has not been condemned, thanks to his stomach, as a pleasure seeker and defiled, for such a one will be magnified by the Lord.

37. Blessed the one who has not been made drunk by wine like a prodigal, but has been made glad each day by the memory of the Lord, in whom all the Saints rejoice continually. *to be continued*

Upcoming Events 2023

11 November 10:00 a.m. Adult Baptisms

12 November: 4:00 p.m. Parish Thanksgiving Meal

GLORY BE TO GOD FOR ALL THINGS!