

# The Confessor's Tongue for February 2, A. D. 2025

Zacchaeus Sunday; Meeting of the Lord in the Temple

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.

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## <sup>Le</sup> February 2: Meeting of Christ in the Temple

The Nativity cycle of feast days concludes with the Great Feast of the Meeting of Christ in the Temple on February 2<sup>nd</sup>, the fortieth day after the Nativity of our Lord. This feast is closely connected with the Nativity, for just as Christ's divinity was revealed at His Nativity and His Baptism, so it is also manifested at His meeting in the temple with Simeon and Anna.

According to the Law of Moses, all Hebrew parents were to bring their first-born son and a sacrifice in thanksgiving on the fortieth day after birth to the temple to be consecrated to God. The law was established in remembrance of the exodus of the Hebrews from Egypt—freedom from slavery, when the first-born Hebrews were spared from death.

In fulfillment of this law, the Theotokos with Joseph brought the infant Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem, and for their sacrifice brought two doves—the sacrifice of a poor family. At that time, the Elder Simeon by the Holy Spirit recognized the infant Jesus as the Christ, the anointed one of God, as did the Prophetess Anna. Thus these two joined the company of shepherds and magi as being among the first to recognize Him for who He was.

The spirit of the festal service is the same as that of the Nativity and Theophany: to glorify the manifestation of God on earth, to extol Christ's divinity, and to give honor to the most pure Virgin Mary as the Mother of God. St. Cyril of Alexandria speaks beautifully of the profound content and significance of this feast in his sermon for the day:

The Eternal, is both a small Child and the 'Ancient of Days' (i.e. God). A child at the breast and, at the same time, the Creator of ages. I behold a Child and recognize God. The Child is nourished, and, at the same time, he gives life and joy to the world. The Child is in swaddling clothes, and, at the same time, he delivers me from the bonds of sin... This Child—the angels glorify him, the archangels bow before him. The Principalities tremble in his presence, the Powers praise him, the Cherubim minister to him, the Seraphim bless him, fountains and seas yield to him... This Child conquered death, overcame the devil, abolished Adam's curse, ...washed away all sins, condemned all heresy, adorned all creation, saved Adam, renewed Eve, summoned all the nations, and sanctified the universe... Therefore, let us brighten this day with candles, as befits the children of light, and let us bring to Christ the Light of spiritual illumination.  
(Prologue 1)

The Feast of the Meeting of Our Lord has a post-feast until February 9<sup>th</sup>. During the festal time, the troparion and kontakion of the feast are said along with our daily prayers and at meals.

### Troparion, tone 1

Rejoice, O Virgin Theotokos full of grace, / for from thee hath shone forth the Sun of Righteousness, Christ our

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God, / who doth illumine those in darkness. / Be glad also, thou righteous elder, / for thou hast received in thine arms the Deliverer of our souls, // who bestoweth upon us Resurrection.

### Kontakion, tone 1

Thou who hast sanctified by Thy birth a virgin womb / and fittingly blessed the hands of Simeon, / Thou art come, O Christ our God, and on this day hast saved us. / Give peace to thy commonwealth in time of battle / and strengthen the Orthodox people whom Thou hast loved, // O Thou who alone lovest mankind.

### Introduction to the Sayings of St. Anthony

Fr. Thomas Hopko of blessed memory once said that the full teaching of Christian spiritual life is expressed in the thirty-eight sayings of St. Anthony the Great found in the classic work *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*. That comment inspired the forthcoming series of reflections on those sayings. It originally ran in the *Confessor's Tongue* 2006-7 shortly after the author heard Fr. Hopko's remark, but not every saying was covered then. It ran again beginning in January of 2010 in an expanded form, but the first saying was still not covered. We ran it a third time beginning in January of 2015, covering every saying and reworking some of them considerably, and a fourth time starting in November 2018, and a fifth time starting in January 2022. Given the growth of the parish and the foundational value of this material for all of us, we shall offer it again serially over the next thirty-eight weeks. The author hopes to continue to refine it that it may, perhaps, one day be published as a book. Your questions and comments are welcome as aids to achieving that end. Fr. Justin Frederick

### The Sayings of St. Anthony the Great 1

When the holy Abba Anthony lived in the desert, he was beset by accidie, and attacked by many sinful thoughts. He said to God, "Lord, I want to be saved, but these thoughts do not leave me alone; what shall I do in my affliction? How can I be saved?" A short while afterwards, when he got up to go out, Anthony saw a man like himself sitting at his work, getting up from his work to pray, then sitting down and plaiting a rope, then getting up again to pray. It was an angel of the Lord sent to correct and reassure him. He heard the angel saying to him, "Do this, and you will be saved." At these words, Anthony was filled with joy and courage. He did this, and he was saved.

Saying 1 in *The Sayings of Desert Fathers*

Commentary: St. Antony the Great (251-353) is considered the father of eremitical monasticism (i.e., those who live as hermits largely alone), thanks to the influence his living example and his *Life* written by St. Athanasius had on countless others. His first saying in *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers* expresses the basic formula he practiced in his Christian life. It is not

esoteric or complicated, but simple: just “work and pray”.

*Acedia* (see the piece excerpted in this issue from Jean-Claude Larchet's excellent book for a detailed discussion of this passion) is one of the eight deadly thoughts, the “demon of noonday”, which deprives a man of the energy and desire to work on his salvation. Boredom, distraction, and sloth all are connected to *acedia*. Antony had committed himself to ascetical life in the desert, but he was tormented by thoughts of boredom, sloth, distraction, and discouragement, as, at some point, is everyone who seriously commits himself to the spiritual life. These thoughts would rob him of prayer, work, and Christian life if not countered.

Christian life is spiritual warfare, and that warfare persists until man's last breath. That warfare is not against one's fellow man politically, economically, or socially, but against the fallen spiritual powers who insinuate evil thoughts and lies into man's mind to lead him away from God and into sin. No sin is ever committed which is not conceived first in thought. To cut off sin in deed, the thoughts that come into one's mind must be watched, discerned, and dealt with. For this reason, the Savior commands His followers to “watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation”.

In response to Antony's cry for help with his thoughts, the Lord answers through an angel: work and pray, work and pray, “do this, and you will be saved.” The answer given to Antony is given to us too. All of us have to work, whether it is housework, chores, schoolwork, a profession, a job humble or exalted. That work, little though we may like it, if used properly, will help save us. If “idle hands are the devil's workshop” (and they are), work at the very least keeps man from idleness leading to temptation in thought and sin in deed. Having to work each day to make a living and diligently embracing the responsibilities given at home or school, keeps man out of more trouble than he might think. It enables him to love his neighbor by serving him and giving alms.

But work alone will not save. Work as we know it is part of the fallen order of things: “you will eat bread by the sweat of your brow.” Man's work must be redeemed by prayer, in which man offers himself, his work, his friends and family, and all his life to Christ and thereby wages war against thoughts. There is no spiritual life without prayer, and there will be no spiritual success without work. The desire to avoid work (“don't work too hard”!) and to have abundant leisure and pleasure undermines spiritual life. But work without prayer, without God, deadens the soul and leaves it vulnerable to idolatry, covetousness, envy, pride, and greed. But to work diligently that one may eat (and pray while one works) and then to rise from work to pray regularly (one's private prayer rule and one's participation in public worship) provides man with the balance he needs to gain victory over evil thoughts.

## On The Noonday Demon: Acedia Jean Claude Larchet

*Acedia* (ακηδία) is such a close neighbour of sadness that the ascetical tradition inspired by St. Gregory the Great [of Rome] in the West reunites these two passions into a single one; the Eastern ascetical tradition, however, distinguishes them. The Greek word ακηδία appears in Latin as *acedia*, whence the French and English equivalents (*acédie*, *acedia*). It is difficult to translate this word simultaneously in a simple and all-encompassing manner; the words “sloth” or “boredom,” often used to render it, express only a part of the complex reality signified by the term.

Indeed, *acedia* corresponds to a certain state of sloth and boredom, but also of disgust, aversion, lassitude, dejection, discouragement, languor, torpor, nonchalance, drowsiness, somnolence, and sluggishness (of the body as well as the soul). *Acedia* can even drive a man to sleep without his really being tired.

In *acedia*, there is a vague and general dissatisfaction. When he is under the sway of this passion, man no longer desires anything, finding everything bland and insipid and expecting nothing at all.

*Acedia* makes man instable in both soul and body. His faculties become fickle; his mind flits from one object to another, unable to stay focused. Especially when he is alone, he can no longer bear to remain where he is—the passion urges him to leave, to move, to go to one or several other places. Sometimes he begins to wander and roam and generally he seeks contact with others at any price. These contacts are not objectively necessary; but driven by his passion, man feels that he needs them and finds himself ‘good’ pretexts so as to justify them. He thus establishes and maintains often-futile relationships nourished with idle chatter in which he generally manifest an idle curiosity.

It can happen that *acedia* fills the person subject to it with an intense and permanent aversion for his place of residence, giving him grounds for being dissatisfied with his abode and bringing him to believe that he would be better off elsewhere. This passion “drives him along to desire other sites where he can more easily procure life's necessities.” *Acedia* can also bring a man to shun his activities, in particular his work, and makes him dissatisfied with it. The passion leads him then to look for other kinds of work while making him believe that these will be more interesting and will make him happier. . . All states linked to *acedia* are accompanied by worry or anxiety, which in addition to disgust are a fundamental trait of this passion.

The demon of *acedia* especially attacks those who have dedicated themselves to the spiritual life. He seeks to turn them away from the paths of the Spirit, to prevent in manifold ways the activities that such a life entails, and in particular to harm the regularity and constancy of the ascetical discipline it requires and to break the silence and stillness favouring this

life. St. John Climacus thus presents acedia as “a paralysis of soul, and enervation of the mind, [and] neglect of asceticism.” It renders the spiritual man “desultory and lazy at any task to be done within the walls of his cell. It does not let him sit in his cell and apply himself to his duty of reading.” Under this passion’s influence, man’s mind becomes “idle and empty of any spiritual work”; he becomes indifferent to God’s whole work, ceases to desire future goods and even going so far as to belittle spiritual goods. All the Fathers see in acedia one of the primary obstacles to prayer. St. John Climacus defines it as “being languid in psalms, weak in prayer.” St. Symeon the New Theologian notes: “Above all, the demon of acedia usually attacks those who are advanced in prayer or who are assiduous in it.” Many remark that it engenders torpor in the soul and body especially at the hour of prayer, urging man to slumber: “When there is not psalmody, the despondency [i.e. acedia] does not make its appearance. And as soon as the appointed service is finished, the eyes open,” St. John Climacus points out. He notes further: “But [when] the hour of prayer has come, again the body is weighed down. He begins to pray, but he grows sleepy and the psalm verse are snatched from his mouth with untimely yawns.”

If it is true that acedia most especially affects those who strive to submit themselves to a regular spiritual discipline, reducing for this reason their exterior activities and movements to what is strictly necessary and seeking the greatest silence and solitude; if it is true that the more man orders himself spiritually and isolates himself in order to dedicate himself in silence to the prayer that unites him to God, the more he is attacked by this passion particularly feared by hermits—nonetheless this passion does not leave in peace those living outside any discipline or even any spiritual activity. It challenges them under other guises, as St. Isaac the Syrian comments: to “those who lead their lives in the works of the body,” “another acedia comes, which is visible in the eyes of all.” This acedia takes the form of an oft-times vague and muddled feeling of dissatisfaction, disgust, boredom, lassitude—and this vis-à-vis themselves, existence, those around them, the place where they live, their work, or even any activity whatsoever. Such individuals are further affected by groundless restlessness, a generalized anxiety, or a continual or episodic anguish. Generally speaking, they are correlatively seized by a state of torpor, mental and physical numbness, general and constant fatigue experience without any reason and permanent or periodic drowsiness of soul and body. Often at the same time—and in order somehow to ward off these dreadful states—acedia drives such people to various unnecessary activities and movements, to useless visits, and to everything through which they think they can escape anguish and boredom; it impels them to flee solitude and to compensate for the dissatisfaction they feel. Although they wish and often believe that thus they will be

satisfied and come to themselves, in reality, they do nothing but turn away from themselves and their spiritual ‘ought’ or duty, from their true nature and destiny, and by this from any full and complete satisfaction.

With those who lead an ascetical life, the attacks of this demon—the manifestations of this passion—attain their greatest intensity around noon. St. John Cassian writes:

It particularly troubles [solitaries] at the sixth hour like a malaria which recurs at regular intervals, as the infection brings burning fevers on the suffering soul at predictable set times. Many elders consider this to be the ‘noonday devil’ which is mentioned in the ninetieth psalm.

Among those Elders one must cite Evagrius who affirms: “The demon of acedia—also called the noonday demon—. . . presses his attack upon the monk about the fourth hour and besieges the soul until the eighth hour.

What fundamentally distinguishes acedia from sadness is that the former has no precise motivation and that there is ‘an unreasonable mental turmoil,’ as St. John Cassian says. But having no motivation does not mean that it has no cause. The diabolical etiology is dominant, as the preceding remarks show. However, the passion presupposes favourable soil in order to be able to act. The fact of being attached to pleasure and being in the grip of sadness constitutes one of acedia’s forms, the importance of which St. Thalassius underscores. “Acedia is negligence of soul; a negligent soul is one that is sick with the love of pleasure,” he notes further. St. Macarius, on his part, blames a lack of faith, while St. Isaac remarks that “acedia comes from the distraction of the intellect” in the spiritual man.

The preceding description of the turmoil characterizing acedia allows us to understand why the Fathers consider it an illness of the soul; its numerous pathological effects only confirm this way of viewing the passion. Standing first among these effects is a generalized darkening of the soul—acedia makes the mind (*nous*) dark, blinding it and covering the entire soul with gloom. As a result, the soul becomes incapable of apprehending essential truths. “For truly the soul sleeps, unaware of any contemplation of virtue or spiritual insight, once it is damaged by the onset of this disease,” observes St. John Cassian. The most serious consequence is that through this passion, man is turned away and kept distant from the knowledge of God.

The Fathers note further that acedia—which constitutes a paralysis of soul and carelessness of the mind—engenders an emptiness within the soul, leads man to a generalized negligence, and makes him cowardly. When united to sadness, it increases it and thus can easily lead to despair. Furthermore, thoughts of blasphemy as well as mad thoughts against the Creator can come forth from acedia; some of its other well-known consequences include the destruction of compunction and the onset of irritability. Additionally,

says St. Isaac, "the spirit of distraction comes [from it], which is the source of a thousand temptations.

Contrary to the other main passions, acedia does not give birth to any particular passion on account of its producing almost all of them. "No other demon follows close upon the heels of this one," affirms Evagrius, who explains elsewhere: "The thought of acedia is not followed by any other thought, first because it lingers, and then because it contains within itself almost all thoughts." St. Maximus likewise says that acedia "excites practically all the passions together." In a more general way, St. Barsanuphius teaches that "the spirit of acedia engenders every evil." St. John Climacus consequently notes that "for the monk, despondency is a general death," and St Symeon the New Theologian as well concludes that it "is the death of the soul and the mind." He adds: "If God were to allow [this demon] to use all his might against us, undoubtedly no ascetics would be saved." In the face of the extent of these effects, the Fathers also affirm that acedia is the most burdensome and most overwhelming of all the passions, "the gravest of the eight principal passions," and that "there is no passion worse than it." St. Isaac says that it "causes [the soul] to taste hell."

The pathology of acedia cannot be considered as constituted by the perverted use of a particular faculty, as is the case in the previously studied passions. St. Maximus observes that this passion entails all of them: "The remaining passions lay hold of either the irascible part of the soul or the desiderative only, or also of the rational. . . But acedia seizes all the powers of the soul." Yet it is not constituted by their contranatural use, since it has no positive foundation in its nature. Evagrius notes that it is in conformity with nature not to have it at all. In a sense, acedia is on the one hand the numbing and deactivation of all the faculties contributing to man's spiritual life, and on the other hand their distraction. St. Thalassius expresses this dual aspect well when he defines this passion as "the negligence of the soul." To a certain degree, one can consider it to be constituted by the absence of spiritual "zeal" given by the Spirit both to the first man as well as to the man renewed in Christ in order to accomplish with fervor their spiritual task. *Jean-Claude Larchet, Therapy of Spiritual Illnesses, vol. 1, pp. 195-201.*

### **Don't Worry Brother: God Is Closer** *St. Nikolai of Zicha*

You have done well for repenting right away. God has left repentance for salvation. If that was not the case, not even the Apostles would have been saved, far less other people. You have sinned with the tongue, repented with the heart. You said an evil word against your neighbor. As if you threw a spark into dry straw. The whole village heard it and made a mockery of it. The neighbor was bitter and sued you. You paid a lot, and became more miserable. You are bitter with yourself. It is not so hard for you that the court has punished you, but it is hard that your offended neighbor keeps punishing you. He does not wish to speak with you anymore. He keeps quiet and turns away from you. What should you do?

Leave it to God and time. Pray to the all-seeing Creator that He would give some goodwill to your neighbor. Use every opportunity to say a good word about your neighbor, and wait. God, a good word and

time will do their job. And one day, you will again go to church together with your pacified neighbor.

And as the lesson for the future, remember the words of the Savior, I say to you that in the day of the tenable judgment, people will give account for every empty word they uttered. Does this say to you that each vicious and false word strikes against the order of the universe and offends the Creator? A good or bad word that we say about a person, even if said in the greatest secrecy, is felt by the whole universe and by the Creator of feelings. Or how could we keep our words unknown from Him to whom even our thoughts are all known! Ancient Greeks said that the spear of their hero Achilles could wound with one side and heal with the other. We do not know about Achilles' spear, but we do know for sure that this is true for the human tongue. Wounds are caused by the tongue and are also healed by the tongue. With it we bless God and curse men. (Jas. 3: 9)

In one of our villages, this terrible event took place. A mother had an only son, a student in school. The mother was mad at the son and in her anger she said these senseless words, "If I were to never see you again, I'd be happy!" The child was so distraught by these words that he took a gun and shot himself. Beside himself, he left a student's writing board on which he wrote, "Here mother, I remove myself forever from before your face, just to make you happy!" O, the miserable happiness of the mother! After that happened, the mother sat by the fireplace every night, putting out the fire with her tears until she was eventually found dead one morning, wasted, by the cold fireplace.

Do you see what a senseless word does? But I will not leave you without an example of what a sensible word can do. During the war, a soldier who was easily frightened was sent into patrol. Everyone knew how easily scared he was. Everyone laughed when they heard that the commander was sending him out. Only one soldier did not laugh. He came up to his friend to encourage him. But the scared soldier said, "I will surely die. The enemy is very close." The friend answered, "Don't worry brother, God is closer!" These words rang out in the scared soldier's soul like a big bell. And they kept ringing until the end of the war. And that frightened soldier came back from the war decorated with medals for courage. That good word transformed and strengthened him so much - "don't worry, God is closer."

Peace and health to you from God!

#### **Upcoming Events 2025**

7-10 February: Fr. Justin in Alpine  
14 February: Parish Fundraising Gala  
1 March: Forgiveness Vespers, 5:00 p.m.  
3-8 March: Clean Week  
14-19 April: Holy Week  
20 April: Great and Holy Pascha

**GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!**