

The Confessor's Tongue for May 9, 2010

Sixth Sunday of Pascha: Blind Man

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.

Orthodox Jurisdictional Unity in North America

At the invitation of His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, delegates from the fourteen Autocephalous Churches participated in the historic Fourth Pre-Conciliar Pan-Orthodox Conference, meeting at the Center of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Chambésy-Geneva, Switzerland on June 6-12, 2009. The Conference was a direct result of the Synaxis of the Heads of all the Orthodox Churches, convened by His All Holiness at the Ecumenical Patriarchate October 10-12, 2008. At that time, all the Heads, They expressed their "desire for the swift healing of every canonical anomaly that has arisen from historical circumstances and pastoral requirements, such as in the so-called Orthodox Diaspora, with a view to overcoming every possible influence that is foreign to Orthodox ecclesiology."

At the October meeting of the Heads of the Autocephalous Churches, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew called upon them to "activate the 1993 agreement of the Inter-Orthodox Consultation of the Holy and Great Council in order to resolve the pending matter of the Orthodox Diaspora." This agreement provided a plan to establish an 'Episcopal Assembly' with appropriate authority for the bishops to guide the entire Church in each of the regions of the so-called Orthodox Diaspora.

Acting as formal representatives of the Autocephalous Churches, the members of the Fourth Pre-Conciliar Conference in Chambésy affirmed "that is the common will of all of the most holy Orthodox Churches that the problem of the Orthodox Diaspora be resolved as quickly as possible, and that it be organized in accordance with Orthodox ecclesiology, and the canonical tradition and practice of the Orthodox Church." The Conference decided to establish an "Episcopal Assembly" in specific regions which are beyond the boundaries of the Autocephalous Churches. The Conference initially identified twelve regions throughout the world. The Episcopal Assembly will include all the canonical Orthodox bishops in a given region such as North America. The representative of the Ecumenical Patriarch (in this case, Archbishop Demetrios of America) will chair the Episcopal Assembly in each region. The Assembly will meet yearly and will have an Executive Committee which will meet every three months. Other committees, composed of clergy and laity, will be established to address particular concerns. [http://www.scoba.us/resources/chambesy_documents.html *Comprehensive and informative background information on events and deliberations leading to the convocation of the Assembly may be found on this web site of the Standing Conference of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas.*]

This initiative is now being acted upon. Our first North American Episcopal Assembly is scheduled to

convene later this month in New York City May 25-27, 2010. His Beatitude, Metropolitan Jonah has asked that special petitions be included in the Litany of Fervent Supplication to pray for the Assembly.

Under the chairmanship of His Eminence, Archbishop Demetrios of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, the Assembly will bring together all canonical Orthodox hierarchs across the continent.

Metropolitan Jonah and all diocesan and auxiliary bishops of the Orthodox Church in America will participate fully in the Assembly proceedings.

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Here is the official version of three petitions:

Again we pray to our merciful Lord that He may grant our Hierarchs gathering in Episcopal Assembly to grow in wisdom and strength, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and to increase in love for each other, deepening Christian fellowship so that conciliar decisions may build up a canonically united Orthodox Christian Church of the Americas: we pray Thee, O Lord, hear us and have mercy.

Again we pray that their work may be guided by the grace of the Holy Spirit, and that the Spirit of unity and love, of compassion and mutual respect, inspiring each to contribute what will build up the Body of Christ, may move us all to rejoice in the full unity of the Church, for the glory of Thy name, we beg Thee, hear us and have mercy.

O Lord, Thou hast ordered us to do all things for Thy glory. Bless Thy people, uniting them for the building up of Thy Holy Orthodox Church of the Americas: O generous Creator; hear us and have mercy.

Homily: On How the Love of God is Shed into Men's Hearts

St. Nicholas of Zicha (+1956)

"Because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us." Romans 5:5

Love is joy, and anoints the human heart with joy. Love is strength, and anoints the human heart with strength. Love is peace, and anoints the heart with peace. And from joy, strength, and peace is born fortitude, and love anoints the human heart with fortitude.

The love of God, like a fragrant oil, is shed upon our hearts in no other way than by the Holy Spirit, the all-good and all-powerful Spirit. Though we are utterly undeserving of it, the Spirit of God pours the divine Law of God into our hearts in the Mystery of Chrismation. But we sometimes neglect this love and estrange ourselves from God by sin, and fall into spiritual weakness. And the Holy Spirit, unable to dwell in an unclean vessel, departs from our hearts. When the Holy Spirit departs from us, joy and strength, peace and fortitude depart at once with Him, and we become miserable, enfeebled, disturbed, and afraid. But the all-good Spirit of God only puts Himself at a distance from us; He does not abandon us completely. He does not abandon us, but rather offers us, as to sick men, medicines through the Mysteries of Repentance and Holy Communion. And when we have cleansed ourselves anew by repentance and Communion, then God the Holy Spirit makes His abode in us again and pours the love of God into our hearts. We fall down and get up; we fall down again and get up again. When we fall, the Spirit of God stands beside us and lifts us up, if we desire to be so lifted. And when we are on our feet, the Spirit of God stands in us until, through our sinfulness and stupidity, we fall again. And so we are by turns a fruitful meadow and a wasteland, sons of repentance and of perdition, of fullness and emptiness, of light and darkness.

O all-good Holy Spirit, our God, do not depart from us either when we need Thee or when we do not feel the need of Thee. Abide with us until our death, and save us for life eternal. To Thee be glory and praise forever. Amen.

The Sayings of St. Anthony the Great

Abba Anthony said, "He who wishes to live in solitude in the desert is delivered from three conflicts: hearing, speech, and sight; there is only one conflict left for him, and that is with fornication."

Saying 11 in The Sayings of the Desert Fathers

Commentary: To live in the desert [a remote place] away from the world delivers one from three things that readily bring temptation and sin: hearing, speech, and sight.

Living in the world, we are constantly bombarded with noise: radio, television, music, news and especially the conversation of others. Our ability to hear is a portal to our soul. What we hear enters our minds and has an effect on us, for good or for ill. What we hear can readily stir up our passions and lead us into sin of various sorts.

Speech presents a grave challenge to us. In Proverbs it is said, "Where there are many words, sin is unavoidable." Talking too much robs us of God's grace, even when the conversation is not inherently sinful. One can even speak too much about spiritual things! Living around people tempts us to speak far more than we need to as Christians who are called to

wait upon the Lord and to be still and know that He is God. The desert provides a remedy to this.

How often sight leads us into temptation! Whether it is images in the media or just the physical forms of those around us, what we take into our souls through our eyes often leads us to lust, anger, greed, envy, and even hatred. The eye is never satisfied with new images; it is ever hungry for more if we indulge it. We may be going about our business only to be suddenly struck unawares with the sight of something and find our thoughts stimulated and quickly led into temptation. The desert frees one from this conflict.

Yet the desert does not free us from ourselves, from our thoughts or from bodily needs. Thoughts from fantasies or memories are ever at hand. Bodily need presses us. We have to eat and drink; eating too much, indulgence in the pleasure of food, eating to live, and so forth stimulates sexual desire and temptation. Indulging one form of bodily pleasure to the full stimulates the desire for others. This battle has to be fought wherever we may live, that our body with its needs lives in submission to our spirit which we have submitted to Christ.

Most of us will not flee to the desert to live, at least not permanently. But as Christians living in a fallen world in a wicked and perverse generation, we must cultivate the desert in our hearts, not allowing our senses to be constantly bombarded by the world's messages and not allowing our tongues to wag as a form of idle entertainment, but removing unnecessary outside stimulation so that we may be collected, at peace, and focused on Christ Jesus without the world's vain and harmful distractions to pull us away. We have enough to contend with what is already in our hearts, let alone the world's constant additions thereto.

Fr. Justin Frederick

From Elder 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.

Upcoming Events 2010

- 13 May, Thursday, Holy Ascension, Liturgy 7:00 a.m.; Vigil Wednesday evening at 7:00.
- 22 May Saturday, 10:00 a.m. Baptisms (Moses, Davis, Betz, Evangeline Lyda); 5:00 p.m. Vigil for Pentecost
- 23 May Sunday, Holy Pentecost, Kneeling Prayers
- 29 May, Saturday 2:00 p.m. Baptism of Thomas Jackson
- 30 May, Sunday, Pre-Memorial Day Picnic, 3:00 p.m.

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!