

The Confessor's Tongue for August 22, 2010

13th Sunday After Pentecost: Martyr Agathonicus, Postfeast of Dormition

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.

August 22: Martyr Agathonicus et al.

Holy Martyr Agathonicus, Zoticus, Theoprepus, Acindynus, Severian and others, suffered during the reign of Maximian. St. Agathonicus, descended from a notable family, and converted a chief of the senate to Christ, together with other Christians were tortured in Byzantium. St. Zoticus with his disciples were killed in place called Carpe. Sts. Theoprepus and Acindynus suffered in Potamon, Thrace, and St. Severian near Chalcedon. In the service only Martyr Agathonicus is glorified.

Virgin Martyr Eulalia suffered for her faith in Christ during the reign of Diocletian in about the year 303. She lived near Barcenona (today Barcelona, Spain) and, having heard about the persecution of Christians, secretly left her parent's house for the city. There she strongly confessed her faith in Christ before the hegemon, despite her 14 years. On the order of the latter, they began to beat the virgin with rods, and during the torture the hegemon tried to convince the virgin martyr to spare her youth and beauty. But the holy virgin remained unbowed. Then they bound her to a cross and lit torches until she gave up her soul to God in the form of a white dove which emerged from her mouth and flew up to heaven. Searching for their missing daughter, her parents finally found her. They also cried, regretting her youth, and together were pleased that their daughter received a martyr's crown. Christians obtained the remains of the holy virgin martyr and turned them over for Christian burial.

From the Bulgakov Handbook, Fr. Eugene Tarris, translator.

On the Basis for Christian Unity

Fr. George Florovsky

In modern times, it has been widely believed and often suggested that it was precisely theology that was primarily responsible for the tensions and divisions in the Church and in the wider world of religion. And possibly the same prejudice still prevails in many quarters in our day too. It has often been contended that "tensions" and divisions were initiated exactly at the moment when the Church, or rather, her leaders and teachers, decided or attempted to stabilize and formulate beliefs. If only people could escape once again into the realm of personal religion (it was contended), all dissensions would have been overcome.

A freedom of "personal religion" is in fact the main divisive and disrupting factor of our spiritual life. Unity and "agreement" can be achieved only on the level of doctrine.

Religion and doctrine (i.e. precisely, theology) are usually still contrasted in our day. Men in pews sometimes pretend that they would have been united across all historical borders had they not been

prevented by men in pulpits who impose upon them divisive "doctrines." An average believer is inclined to apply the famous dictum of Goethe to the word of religion also. "All theories, i.e. doctrines, are gray and dull, but the tree of life is ever green."

Yet precisely at this point the major doubt arises. Berdiaev has recently suggested that, as a matter of fact, it is exactly our actual life that is gray and dull and hopeless, and often dirty, and only in "theory," in *theoria*, i.e. in contemplation, can we recover the dimension of truth.

It is a very helpful suggestion indeed. And, first of all, in the world of "personal religion" (of an "immediate" religious experience) we meet exactly a hopeless "variety of religious experience" which evades any integration and provides no unity at all. A freedom of "personal religion" is in fact the main divisive and disrupting factor of our spiritual life. Unity and "agreement" can be achieved only on the level of doctrine.

Historically speaking, in the Christian Church, theology was usually a remedy and a safeguard against an utter confusion of free experience, an only means to overcome the vagueness of an immediate experience. *From volume 13 of Collected Works, "Theological Tensions Among Christians", pp. 9-10.*

The Sayings of St. Anthony the Great

Abba Anthony said, 'I believe that the body possesses a natural movement, to which it is adapted, but which it cannot follow without the consent of the soul; it only signifies in the body a movement without passion. There is another movement, which comes from the nourishment and arming of the body by eating and drinking, and this causes the heat of the blood to stir up the body to work. That is why the apostle said, "Do not get drunk with wine for that is debauchery." (Eph 5:18) And in the Gospel the Lord also recommends this to His disciples: "Take heed to yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness.: (Luke 21:34) But there is yet another movement which afflicts those who fight, and that comes from the wiles and jealousy of the demons. You must understand what these three bodily movements are: one is natural, one comes from too much to eat, the third is caused by demons.' Saying 22 Sayings of the Desert Fathers

Commentary: This is not an easy saying for us to understand. It is not so much that we do not live as monks, but that we are so habituated to abundance of good things and an ease of acquiring whatever our body desires that we are deadened to the dynamic Antony describes. We are acquainted, at least, or know all too well, the effect drinking too much alcohol has: it decreases our inhibitions, loosens the rational mind's control over the body, and allows the passions free rein, particularly anger and lust. Antony and many other experienced fathers bears witness to the same dynamic, only more subtle, in response to

eating too much, pandering too much to the taste, and pampering the body.

The body is ever to be guided by the soul rather than to guide the soul. It is designed to serve the soul, especially the rational element in man and highest part of the soul, the *nous* illumined by Christ. In man disordered by sin, the soul becomes enslaved to the body and its desires. The body is not evil, and has a proper movement natural to it. When it is in subjection to the soul, it does not move without the soul's consent. We can stir up passionate movements in our bodies, however, by excessive eating and drinking (i.e. more than the body needs to maintain health), by pampering and indulging the body. These give the body pleasure and increase its desire for more. This movement is always passionate, and is involuntary, though it is voluntarily aroused through excessive eating and drinking. Increasingly, the body impresses the soul as its servant to fulfill its growing desires, even against the rational judgment of the soul. Hence we witness the drug addict or drunkard, who though he knows with his mind that he needs to stop and that what he is doing is self-destructive, his body lords it over his soul and compels the mind to scheme as to how it can get the next fix or drink.

Hence fasting is indispensable for keeping the body in proper subjection to the soul. Sometimes it is the demons who stir up the body directly, not natural motion or our over eating or drinking. This has to be borne with faith and patience, and is most often experience those who are actively engaged in spiritual combat and are making progress.

Fr. Justin Frederick

Preparation for Communion at Optina Monastery

According to the monastery rule, laymen must, for two days before Communion, eat food prepared without oil. There was always a special table for those who were preparing for Communion. During this time [of preparation] one had to attend all church services. The services were set forth as follows: Vespers and the reading of the Canons lasted from 3:30 until 5:30 p.m. Afterwards, at 7:00, there was supper, and at 8:30 there were Evening Prayers in a particular church [the monastery had several churches and chapels]. Then people would go and rest until 12:30 a.m. At this time the bell would sound for Matins. This would last until 4:00 a.m. From 4:00 until 5:00, the Canons were read and the prayers before Holy Communion. We were so exhausted after thenight that we were falling asleep. The early Liturgy was at 7:00 a.m.

When blessing those preparing for Communion, Elder Barsanuphius advised them, after Vespers [the night before] not to eat anything before communing the Holy Mysteries. In exceptional cases he would permit someone to have tea.

And we think it strict to be asked to attend a two-hour vigil on Saturday night in preparation for Holy Communion! If only we understood what we are doing in

Holy Communion, what a grace is given to us, what a privilege we are vouchsafed, we would not come only on Sunday morning and commune week after week. What grace we might know, what experience of God we might have, if we prepared ourselves to commune with greater seriousness and care!

From Elder Barsanuphius of Optina, by Victor Afanasiev.

On the All-Parish Meeting September 26

The all-parish meeting is held once a year to allow the priest, the treasurer, and other members of the mission council to address the whole parish and acquaint them with our history, our present situation, our vision, our goals, and our finances. It is a time for the faithful to ask questions, offer suggestions, and to discuss the direction of the mission here in Denton. It has the specific tasks of approving a budget for 2010-11 and electing a lay representative to represent our parish at the Diocesan Assembly and All-American Council. All adults who are Orthodox, who have partaken of Confession and Communion in the past year, and who uphold a financial commitment to the parish are members who are eligible to vote, according to the bylaws.

On Living in the Present

From *The Diary of a Russian Priest*

Our continual mistake is that we do not concentrate upon the present day, the actual hour, of our life; we live in the past or in the future; we are continually expecting the coming of some special moment when our life will unfold itself in its full significance. And we do not notice that life is flowing like water through our fingers, sifting like precious grain from a loosely-fastened bag.

Constantly, each day, each hour, God is sending us people, circumstances, tasks, which should mark the beginning of our renewal; yet we pay them no attention, and thus we continually resist God's will for us. Indeed, how can God help us? Only by sending us in our daily life certain people, and certain coincidences of circumstance. If we accepted every hour of our life as the hour of God's will for us, as the decisive, most important, unique hour of our life—what sources of joy, love, strength, as yet hidden from us, would spring from the depths of our soul!

Let us then be serious in our attitude towards each person we meet in our life, towards every opportunity for performing a good deed; be sure that you will then fulfill God's will for you in these very circumstances, on that very day, in that very hour.

Upcoming Events 2010

- 5 September: Church School Begins
- 6 September: Labor Day Picnic, noon to five
- 8 September: Nativity of the Theotokos
- 14 September: Elevation of the Cross
- 26 September: Annual Meeting, 11:30 a.m.

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!