

The Confessor's Tongue for January 2, A. D. 2011

32nd Sunday After Pentecost: Sunday before Theophany; St. Seraphim

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.

January 2: St. Sylvester of Rome

Saint Sylvester was born in Rome of Rufinus and Justa. He lost his father early and his virtuous mother gave him an education for a learned and devout presbyter. St. Sylvester, having learned "book knowledge" and "good morals", particularly distinguished himself by his love for hospitality to strangers. From his love for God and neighbor he entered the house for pilgrims, and following the example of the Savior he himself washed their feet and offered them "every kind of rest". Having attained thirty years of age and at this time already "accomplished in virtue and faith", St. Sylvester was enlisted among the clergy of the Roman church and received the rank of deacon, and later that of presbyter from Pope Marcellinus. His actions won him universal love and respect. Elected in 314 as Bishop of Rome, he in this dignity was "like a lighted candle placed on a candelabrum". "Overcoming illnesses through the action of the Spirit", St. Sylvester "healed the unhealthy passions", "turning from the lies of delusion", "he drove away the lies of heresies", "he humbled the strictness of the Jews, creating great miracles openly before them", and "he led the majority of the Hellenes to God". Firm in his faith, and by the light of Christ zealous in the education of unbelievers and those in error, and like a father cared for those entrusted to his supervision and for the education of souls to Christianity, St. Sylvester, "all adorned by virtue", peacefully departed to the Lord in extreme old age in 335. According to the witness of the Russian pilgrim Anthony, the relics of St. Sylvester were in the Hagia Sophia Cathedral in Constantinople in 1200. Today most of his relics are in Rome in the church of his name. *From the Bulgakov Handbook, Fr. Eugene Tarris translator.*

January 2: St. Seraphim of Sarov

One of the great luminaries of the Church and beloved by millions, St. Seraphim continues to touch the hearts of many today long after his repose January 2, 1833. He was canonized in Russian on July 19, 1903, the last saint canonized before the Bolshevik Revolution.

Becoming a monk in his youth, Fr. Seraphim spent his time in ascetical struggle. His cell rule of prayer was based on the rule of St. Pachomius for the ancient desert monasteries. He always carried the Holy Gospels with him, reading the entire New Testament in the course of a week. He also read the holy Fathers and the service books. The saint learned many of the Church hymns by heard, and sang them while working in the forest. Around his cell he cultivated a garden and set up a beehive. He kept a very strict fast, eating only once during the entire day, and on Wednesdays and Fridays, he completely

abstained from food. On the first week of the Great Fast (Clean Week), he did not partake of food at all until Saturday, when he received the Holy Mysteries.

In his maturity, he was revealed as an Elder. He saw into the hearts of people, and, as a spiritual physician, he healed their infirmities of soul and body through prayer and by his grace-filled words. Those coming to St. Seraphim felt his great love and tenderness. No matter what time of the year it was, he would greet everyone with the words, "Christ is risen, my joy!" He especially loved children. Once, a young girl said to her friends, "Father Seraphim only looks like an old man. He is really a child like us."

We all do well to read the life of St. Seraphim, ponder it, and regularly ask him for his intercessions on our behalf.

The Sayings of St. Anthony the Great

Abba Anthony said, "If he is able to, a monk ought to tell his elders confidently how many steps he takes and how many drops of water he drinks in his cell, in case he is in error about it."

Saying 38 Sayings of the Desert Fathers

Commentary: It is said that if anyone refuses to get spiritual guidance from others and relies on himself to figure things out, "he has chosen a fool" as his spiritual guide. The desert fathers had a deep awareness of the deceptiveness of the human heart: "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (Jeremiah 17:9) Man is very susceptible to delusion, especially in spiritual matters, and the root of delusion is pride and thinking one can manage on one's own without the help of others, especially those who are older and more experienced. Anthony takes the principle of getting counsel and submitting one's will to an experienced guide to a length that seems incredible to us—that a monk knows how many drops of water he drinks and how many steps he takes—so that his elder can correct him if he is in error about these details in his life, for if he is in error but doesn't ask, how shall he know? In the parish, we are not under this sort of obedience, but still, we make mistakes along these lines, making important life decisions without consulting our spiritual father—not because he runs our life, but as a check on our own willfulness, self-deception, and ready blindness to spiritual pitfalls along the way we wish to walk. For example, too often a couple who want to marry come to the priest only after they are engaged. The time to get counsel about such an important matter is when you first start to have serious thoughts that you might like to marry someone, not after the question is popped and wedding plans made. A self-reliant attitude that disdains counsel is pervasive in our time. Disregard for the aged, for those in authority, for the

wise and experienced and reliance on ourselves is like trying to see without using our eyes. Read the Proverbs of Solomon and see how many times we are advised to heed the instruction of our father and the teaching of our mother, to find victory from counsel and avoiding failure by relying on our own understanding. There we are also warned of the great harm we invite by despising the teaching and counsel of our elders.

Fr. Justin Frederick

"Perverse Thoughts Separate Men from God" Part Four

From Elder Paisios in "Elder Paisios of the Holy Mt."

Once, a journalist, who had a negative way of thinking about everything, visited Elder Paisios. He began asking the Elder about various things and making him feel in distress. At one point, he asked him:

"Why are you staying here in the peace and quietness of Mount Athos being carefree, and you are not going out in the world to help people who have so many serious problems?"

The Elder, slightly raising his tone of voice, told him:

"Your mind machine is a broken one and produces only negative thoughts. You misunderstand everything you see or hear. Now, you see me living here and ask me why I am not going out in the world. If I go to live in the world, you will then say that it is unsuitable for a monk and that I should go back to the quietude of my cell. For this reason, I will only tell you one thing: Repair your broken mind-machine and bear in mind the old saying which says, 'Traffic lights are made for noisy streets, whereas lighthouses for deserted rocky mountains.'"

One afternoon, I went to visit the Elder. At the fence of his cell stood a man about thirty years old, waiting for him to open the door.

When I arrived, Father Paisios opened his window and asked who it was. I replied,

"It is I, Father, and one layman" I said (and I told him his name).

"Tell the layman to leave," he replied.

Then, the layman said beggingly: "Father, I really wish to see you."

The Elder answered reproachfully: "Go, because you upset me as you only trust your own way of thinking and do not listen to what I tell you. Why are you coming here wasting your time?"

And he told him to go away. Then, he came and opened the door for me to come in.

"He is a real burden," Fr. Paisios told me. "He does not listen to my words. He comes, asks questions, and leaves; after a short time, he comes back and asks me the same things over and over again. This happens because he always listens to his own thoughts; therefore, he forgets what I tell him, or does not understand a word."

To be continued...

Friday Night Prayer Vigil

Keeping Vigil, the practice of giving up a portion of one's customary (or not to sleep when the world is sleeping) for the purpose of keeping watch and prayer is an ancient Christian practice and one that even we are encouraged to do, being one of the Church's ascetic practices.

Friday nights, especially in a college town, are not known for quiet, watchful prayer vigils. Rather, the world keeps its own style of vigil which more often than not works to destroy souls. To counter this, we can keep a modest vigil to pray not only for ourselves but also for the world and for those destroying their souls

This month on January 28, we shall offer an opportunity to keep a quiet vigil of prayer in the church. The usual Vespers and Pannikhida will be served at 7:00, followed by an time of Confession. About 9:00, the vigil will begin with Little Compline and the Akathist to the Theotokos. A couple kathismata from the Psalter will be read, and then a half hour of praying the Jesus Prayer. We'll conclude the session with the Midnight Office, finishing probably at 11:00. Those who wish to remain longer in the church to read the Psalter or pray may do so. Help will be requested for reading.

If this goes well, it may become something the parish does once or twice a month, or even more frequently.

New Service Group

It has been proposed that we begin a group that will meet once a month to read and discuss the writings of St. Maria Skobtsova of Paris; the practical application of her writings would be in serving at a soup kitchen once a month and visiting a prison once a month. These activities are ways in which we can fulfill Christ commandments in the Gospel. An initial meeting will be held this month to organize and plan. Let Fr. Justin know if you are interested in participating, and stay tuned for more information.

Russian Class

If anyone is interested in learning the Russian alphabet and some basic Russian, Fr. Justin may be willing to offer a class. Please let him know if you are interested.

Upcoming Events 2011

6 January: Holy Theophany; House blessings begin
15 January: Russian Liturgy, 9:30 a..m.
16 January: Mission Council
28 January: Friday Night Prayer Vigil, 9:00
6 March 2011: Sunday, 6:00 p.m. Forgiveness Vespers
24 April 2011: Pascha

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!