

The Confessor's Tongue for July 23, A. D. 2017

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost: Matyrs Trophimus, Theophilus, et al.

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.

Allegories from Athos, Part Two The Nature of Walking

Fr. Justin Frederick

Walking is a fundamental activity for man. When a child, rising from crawling on all fours, learns it early in childhood, a he achieves a distinctive stage in his growth. The ability to walk upright confers upon the child a significantly greater measure of freedom—which tries his parents. Yet no one would deny the child the freedom of walking. Walking is man's normal means of navigating his world, and he uses it (if he is not ill or crippled) every day of his life. Man's ability to walk upright on two legs distinguishes him from every other animal, even from the apes who have the capability but do not use it exclusively.

If the character of natural life is greatly conditioned by the ability to walk, spiritual life, too, is often referred to as “a walk” or a pilgrimage. It is a walk with a destination in mind. Christians are likened to pilgrims who are passing through this world on their way to the kingdom of God. St. Paul in the Epistle to the Ephesians uses the word “walk” eight times as a metaphor one's way of life. He begins the practical half of his epistle by beseeching Christians to walk worthy of their calling in Christ. They are not to walk as non-believing Gentiles in vanity of mind with darkened understanding, alienated from God and given over to living according to the lusts of the flesh. Rather they are to walk in love and good works as children of light.

Walking is a suitable metaphor for spiritual life in ways that driving or flying can never be, no matter how much some like the idea of Christ being one's copilot. The ability to walk is natural to man made in the image of God in a way that driving or flying are not. Walking requires a man to make a personal physical effort with his own body. Unless the day is hot, the grade is steep, or the ground is rough, walking does not require great effort, but if one walks all day, one realizes the effort it takes. A man can walk all day, but he cannot sprint all day. He cannot even jog all day. Even if a man can run the twenty six miles of the marathon in about three hours, he will be spent the next day or two. By walking, however, a man, refreshed by brief rests, can walk all day and cover the same distance and still be able to get up and do it again the next day.

Walking is a slow but steady and reliable way to move from one place to another. Each adult step gains two to three feet. An average pace is three miles per hour, though some can comfortably walk at a rate of four to five and a half miles per hour. Thirty miles in a day is a worthy accomplishment.

Walking appears simple, but requires much coordination and the use of many muscles for movement and balance. It involves picking one foot

off the ground, moving it ahead, setting it down, shifting one's weight over the just-planted leg, and the lifting the rear leg and repeating. One can talk, read, think, sing, or whistle while walking, things one cannot do while running.

Walking puts man in close connection with his surroundings. The texture of the ground underfoot imposes itself on his feet, whether rocks, or sand, or mud, slick ice, or forest floor softened with humus. The breeze presses on his checks. His nostrils take in the scent of flowers, of trees, of rain, of decay. Plants brush against him, some attaching themselves to his clothing. His ear catches the rustle of the breeze, the song of the birds, the surge of the sea, the sound of his foot on the ground. His skin perceives the changing temperature of the air and feels the wetness of the rain and the sting of snow. Over time, his muscles grow tired, and his load-bearing feet grow sore. His exertion induces sweat and thirst, and a good long walk will never fail to work up an appetite or render sleep at day's end sweet.

Driving or flying contrasts sharply with walking. The traveller need not exert himself. He sits in a space where the climate is mechanically controlled. He is out of touch with the weather, the surrounding country, the animals, the plants, the smells. Only man-made noises fill his ears. He can sleep, he can read, he can talk, he can eat—oblivious all the while to the mechanical motion carrying him to his intended destination.

Such things make walking a metaphor for spiritual life in a way driving or flying can never be. Spiritual life requires effort. No one can do it for a man. Each must seek God for himself. Each must pray. Each must humble himself. Each must believe. By car or plane, a man may reach his destination overnight, but no one becomes a saint overnight. The small gain of each step far better captures the daily and moment-by-moment labor of spiritual life than any mechanical conveyance or the strenuous but unsustainable effort of running. Thus the Christian is called to walk (not run) worthy of his calling, and we are ready to consider more directly how walking relates to spiritual pilgrimage in our next installment.

The first installment of this series, “Allegories from Athos”, ran in the Confessor's Tongue on June 18, 2017.

On Idle Curiosity

We all know the saying “Curiosity killed the cat.” The cat, which is viewed as a curious creature sticking its nose into all matters, in this case did so to its disadvantage. We say this when our curiosity gets us into trouble, when it leads us not to mind our own business but that of others.

In his book *Path of Salvation*, St. Theophan the Recluse defines ‘curiosity’ as “an irresistible

inclination to see and hear without purpose". It "consists of trying to know everything without order, without aim, without distinguishing whether it is needful or not" (pp. 54-55).

Curiosity is a gift from God. It helps us to live and learn in our world. Without curiosity, there would be little innovation, little advance of knowledge. Asking why things are this way and how they work and then investigating guided by such questions leads to much knowledge.

The curiosity that kills the cat and that of which St. Theophan writes might be termed "idle curiosity" to distinguish it from curiosity purposefully directed towards an end. "Idle curiosity" seeks to see and hear and know things without aim, without purpose, without need. It pokes its nose unabashedly into the business of others. The tabloids are full of material that panders to our idle curiosity. The internet and Google make indulging in idle curiosity easier than it has ever been.

Idle curiosity will inevitably get us, like the cat, into trouble. Curiosity properly used will bring us to knowledge of God.

Fr. Justin Frederick

From Elder Epiphanius of Greece

The Elder urged a certain spiritual child of his who worked until late at night and would not go to vigils: "My child, look a little upward. Not all downward, on the earthly things. Look at your soul a bit, too."

"Father," he persisted, "I don't have time, I don't have the opportunity."

Once that youth became ill, and the Elder visited him in the hospital. As soon as he saw the youth lying in the bed, he put the index finger of his hand on his temple, telling him: "Do you remember what I was telling you?"

The youth replied, "You were right, Elder."

"Now you must look upward against your will," continued Fr. Epiphanius. "When you become well, you will look up of your own will."

The Commandments of Christ

"If ye love Me, keep My commandments." (John 14:15)

Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth. Luke 12:15

Christ warned His disciples and us of a number of dangers: false prophets, men, hypocrisy, and the deceit of false teachers who claim to come in Christ's name, but this may be the only sin Christ addresses with words of warning: "You keep looking out and keep yourselves from covetousness", as it may be more literally expressed. This covetousness is greed, a "thirst for having more." Instead of the blessed state of hungering and thirsting for righteousness, it directs man to hunger and thirst for material things.

Covetousness is not the insignificant sin many consider it to be. In St. Paul's epistle to the

Ephesians, he puts it with fornication and uncleanness as things that should "not be once named among you" who are called to be holy (Eph 5:3). He goes on to say that no fornicator, unclean person, or covetous man will inherit the kingdom of heaven (5:5) and connects covetousness to idolatry—the worship of false gods. So it is no light thing to be covetous or greedy, nor is covetousness the province only of the rich. A beggar can be a slave of covetousness as well as a rich man.

The command is not isolated in the Gospel. It is elicited by someone who came to Christ asking Him to make his brother share the inheritance with him. Christ responds by saying, "Who made me a judge or divider over you?" and then issued the command to beware of covetousness. He then follows with the parable of the rich fool, who laid up ever-increasing treasure for himself but was not rich towards God. To cinch the point, He asks the disciples to consider the birds and the lies to see how God cares for them. God will care for those made in His image, too, so they may seek His kingdom first and safely trust God to provide the material things they need. All this, Christ directs against the sin of covetousness, which readily assails man.

How may we escape this deadly sin? Christ expresses the attitude of mind necessary to us in relation to things: "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." Understanding that more stuff does not make our lives better is the first step, and, as St. Paul said, the Christian may be fully content in this life if he has but food and clothing. The second is to choose to seek first the kingdom of God, to put the search for the heavenly food of immortality before that for earthly food. The third, to keep covetousness and the love of money growing in our hearts, is to give God the first part of our income (our tithe) and to give alms above and beyond that. This teaches us to entrust our lives to God and helps make us aware of how frivolously we are wont to use what God gives us. Our faith in God overcomes our fear that we shan't have enough, and our awareness makes us more ready to put the needs of others over our own frivolous desires. By such steps, we may walk free from covetousness.

Fr. Justin Frederick

Upcoming Events 2017

25-28 July Diocese of the South Assembly,
Chattanooga
1-14 August Dormition Fast
6 August Feast of the Transfiguration
13 August Summer Feast of St. Maximus
15 August Feast of the Dormition of the Theotokos
1 September Church New Year
8 September Nativity of the Theotokos
14 September Elevation of the Cross
24 September Annual Meeting

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!