

SOBORNOST

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American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese

*ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE
OF CONSTANTINOPLE*

SERVICES

Saturdays: Confession 5:00 PM,

Great Vespers 5:30 PM

Sundays: Matins (Orthros) 8:45 AM Divine Liturgy 10:00 AM.

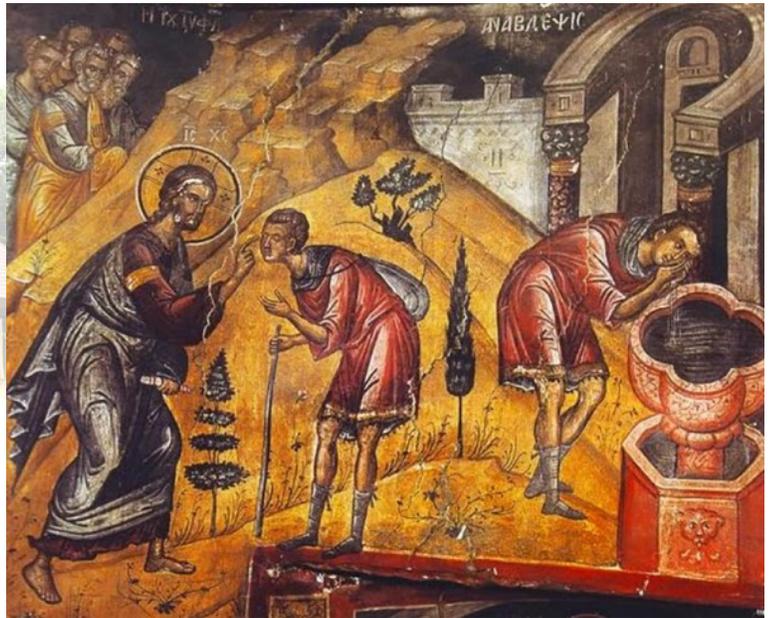
June 5, 2016 – Sunday of the Blind Man

The Man Born Blind and the Malicious Exaggeration of the Scribes and Pharisees

By His Eminence Metropolitan Seraphim of Kastoria

Saint Asterios, Bishop Amaseia, interpreting empirically the sacred text of the Gospel Reading that refers to the miracle of the man born blind, is both revealing and timely. Besides, the Holy Fathers, having in their hearts the living presence of Christ and being enlightened with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, are always relevant and timeless. Saint Asterios reveals, through a series of explanations, the problem which occupied the Scribes and Pharisees, that came from the healing of the man born blind, which primarily was the sickness which hid in the space of their heart, where the evil passion of slander resided.

He wrote: "They (the Scribes and Pharisees) occupied themselves first with whether or not the blind man was the same person and not someone else who presented himself as the blind man. Their second strategy ... was to deny the event and try to prove that Christ was not the One who performed the healing. Third, they rush again to examine the malady to see if the man was indeed blind from birth, seeking out the parents of the man and scrutinizing every detail, not to certify the act, but to find out by overthrowing it how this miracle indeed took place, manufacturing a conspiracy to overthrow the momentum of the crowd that believed. O malicious exaggeration!" (*Homily 7*)



First. *Behold the ancestral illness, slander.* What is it? How is it defined? It is an unfounded accusation neither based on truth or reality. It is a medium which people always used and continue to use in order to harm others. It is a wound in the body of society. It is a sick and pathological condition, indicating the muck that exists in the heart of man. The Fathers of the Church, those experienced physicians, call slander the daughter of hatred and envy. This is why the slanderer is a copycat of the first accuser and slanderer, who is the devil. The slanderer envies the virtues of others and hates the truth. Even hypocrisy defines them, which was so loudly denounced by Christ: "Woe to you Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!" (Mat. 23:13).

When the slanderer cannot deny reality, they use satanic skills and the perversion of the truth as a pretext to justify themselves, to be "blameless" and "moral," in order to beat their opponent in the battle. Sometimes they don't even need to open their mouth in order to hit someone with the poison of slander, but they fire the arrows of grimaces, gestures, smiles full of innuendos and a spirit of irony. The mud is fashioned with such mastery, that the accused is unable to defend themselves. Therefore the pious psalmist asks God: "Redeem me from the slanders of men that I may keep your commandments" (Ps. 118:134 LXX).

Second. *The Fathers of the Church, when speaking of slander, call it a killer virus.* This virus harms: a) the object of the slander, b) the one who accepts the slander, c) the one who slanders, who incurs God's wrath and the indignation of the people. This is why Basil the Great, who tasted of these awful arrows, adds his own experience: "Slander makes a man humble and slander makes a man poor." (Ep. 223)

The throat of a slanderer resembles a grave: "Their throat is an open grave; they flatter with their tongue." (Ps. 5:10). This is because the sting of a scorpion can be cured, but the wound caused by an unjust accusation cannot be healed. No one is able to predict and stop this slander, says Saint Cyril the Patriarch of Alexandria. At the same time it is revealing what the wise opinion of the author of Ecclesiastes says about this passion: "Again I looked and saw all the slandering that was taking place under the sun: I saw the tears of the slandered - and they have no comforter; power was on the side of their slanderers - and they have no comforter." (Ecc. 4:1)

Third. *The slanderer is characterized by Saint John Chrysostom as worse than the beasts, and even worse than the devil: "The devil accuses and slanders people, but none of the other demons."* For this reason the God-bearing Fathers characterize this crime as worse than murder. The murderer removes life instantly, while the slanderer removes the reputation leading the victim to a perpetual death. How many families were dissolved, how many spiritual efforts

destroyed, how many spiritual workers were defamed and leaders erased unfairly, leaving this world with bitterness on their lips? But what am I saying? Was not Christ Himself slandered during His earthly life? Is He not slandered until today, when some impute their own passions and diseases onto the all-holy face of Christ? Is not the Church, where Christ Himself dwells, defamed and slandered until today?

We talk about the social service of the Church and we are deliberately silent about its core mission and work, which is the salvation of immortal souls. How right was the ancient philosopher Theophrastus who, when asked what was the most bloodthirsty beast, replied: "In the hills bears and lions, in the cities publicans and slanderers." It should be remembered that responsibility for slander comes not only from the one who shoots the arrow, but those who accept it with much pleasure and without complaint. This is why Saint Augustine in one of his homilies says that the responsibility for the stoning of Stephen lay not only on those who threw the stones, but also on those who observed the event. Everyone, therefore, is responsible. Within us we all, more or less, have this awful passion.

Therefore, those who are hit by its arrows and drink from the cup of its poison, should bear in mind the words of the Apostle Paul: "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, says the Lord." (Rom 12:19) God is the One who will reciprocate in full.

Those of us who have come to depend on this awful passion, let us run to God our Savior with tears of repentance and ask for the remission of our faults and the healing of our passions that we may receive His mercy and His grace. *"The Blind Man, regarding the whole of life as night, cried out to You, O Lord, open my eyes, O Son of David, our Savior, that with all people I too may hymn Your power."* (Doxastikon of Aposticha for Vespers, Sunday of the Blind Man) (*from johnsanidopoulos.com*)

Today's Epistle Lesson – The Acts of the Apostles 16:16-34

In those days, as we went to prayer, a certain slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination met us, who brought her masters much profit by fortune-telling. This girl followed Paul and us, and cried out, saying, "These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation." And this she did for many days. But Paul, greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And he came out that very hour. But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged *them* into the marketplace to the authorities. And they brought them to the magistrates, and said, "These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city; and they teach customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe." Then the multitude rose up together against them;

and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded *them* to be beaten with rods. And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw *them* into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely. Having received such a charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks. But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were loosed. And the keeper of the prison, awaking from sleep and seeing the prison doors open, supposing the prisoners had fled, drew his sword and was about to kill himself. But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, "Do yourself no harm, for we are all here." Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. And he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" So they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household." Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed *their* stripes. And immediately he and all his *family* were baptized. Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household.

Today's Gospel Lesson – Saint John 9:1-38

At that time, as *Jesus* passed by, He saw a man who was blind from birth. And His disciples asked Him, saying, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him. I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; *the* night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." When He had said these things, He spat on the ground and made clay with the saliva; and He anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay. And He said to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which is translated, Sent). So he went and washed, and came back seeing. Therefore the neighbors and those who previously had seen that he was blind said, "Is not this he who sat and begged?" Some said, "This is he." Others *said*, "He is like him." He said, "I am *he*." Therefore they said to him, "How were your eyes opened?" He answered and said, "A Man called Jesus made clay and anointed my eyes and said to me, 'Go to the pool of Siloam and wash.' So I went and washed, and I received sight." Then they said to him, "Where is He?" He said, "I do not know." They brought him who formerly was blind to the Pharisees. Now it was a Sabbath when Jesus made the clay and opened his eyes. Then the Pharisees also asked him again how he had received his sight. He said to them, "He put clay on my eyes, and I washed, and I see." Therefore some of the Pharisees said, "This Man is not from God, because He does not keep the Sabbath." Others said, "How

can a man who is a sinner do such signs?” And there was a division among them. They said to the blind man again, “What do you say about Him because He opened your eyes?” He said, “He is a prophet.” But the Jews did not believe concerning him, that he had been blind and received his sight, until they called the parents of him who had received his sight. And they asked them, saying, “Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?” His parents answered them and said, “We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; but by what means he now sees we do not know, or who opened his eyes we do not know. He is of age; ask him. He will speak for himself.” His parents said these *things* because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had agreed already that if anyone confessed *that* He *was* Christ, he would be put out of the synagogue. Therefore his parents said, “He is of age; ask him.” So they again called the man who was blind, and said to him, “Give God the glory! We know that this Man is a sinner.” He answered and said, “Whether He is a sinner *or not* I do not know. One thing I know: that though I was blind, now I see.” Then they said to him again, “What did He do to you? How did He open your eyes?” He answered them, “I told you already, and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear *it* again? Do you also want to become His disciples?” Then they reviled him and said, “You are His disciple, but we are Moses’ disciples. We know that God spoke to Moses; *as for* this *fellow*, we do not know where He is from.” The man answered and said to them, “Why, this is a marvelous thing, that you do not know where He is from; yet He has opened my eyes! Now we know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does His will, He hears him. Since the world began it has been unheard of that anyone opened the eyes of one who was born blind. If this Man were not from God, He could do nothing.” They answered and said to him, “You were completely born in sins, and are you teaching us?” And they cast him out. Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when He had found him, He said to him, “Do you believe in the Son of God?” He answered and said, “Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?” And Jesus said to him, “You have both seen Him and it is He who is talking with you.” Then he said, “Lord, I believe!” And he worshiped Him.

May Treasurer’s Report

Operating income \$9,984.40 | Operating Expenses \$10,122.64 | Over/Under income \$-138.24

This month's major expenses were the purchasing of the A/C equipment for the house (to be installed later this month) and the replacement of two sump pumps to keep the basement dry. Please remember to pay your diocesan assessment. Thank you for being good Stewards of God's House. Kari David, Treasurer (Emeritus)

On Stewardship and the Orthodox Life – Part 73: Present Wrapping



“When Christ came into the world, he said, ‘Sacrifices and offerings thou hast not desired, but a body hast thou prepared for me; in burnt offerings and sin offerings thou hast taken no pleasure.’ Then I said, ‘Lo, I have come to do thy will, O God...’” (Hebrews 10:5-7 RSV)

Approaching the end of the Nativity Fast, many are busy with the pre-Christmas task of wrapping presents that will be given or exchanged on the Great Feast Day of the Nativity of our Lord. Gifts have been shared between people for countless millennia. The gifts themselves may have little value, or may be very valuable. But the purpose of gift-giving lies in the relationship that exists between the giver and the receiver.

In the Biblical accounts of the history of God’s people, there existed what was called a covenant, an agreement, between God and His people. He would be their God. They would be His people. This agreement was sealed with the laws and rules that were summarized in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20). Further, God’s people were to give proper worship and sacrifice in the tabernacle and the temple – in fact, anywhere the people were, they were to offer *“burnt offerings and sin offerings”* according to the laws laid down by God. If the people would offer these gifts to God, God would give back to them His great gift of the Promised Land. It didn’t happen. They got to that Land. But then God’s people were conquered and hauled off into exile. They lost the gift that was the Land of Promise. Why?

In the course of history, God’s people seemed very good at providing to God *“burnt offerings and sin offerings.”* What they failed to do was God’s will. There was far more to God’s agreement with His people than just keeping the laws about worship. The people seemed to forget the rest of the Ten Commandments. They had wrapped up their gifts of *“burnt offerings and sin offerings”* but had broken their relationship to God that had been outlined in the Ten Commandments. It was like giving a Christmas gift to someone you either do not know, or maybe actively dislike. It is no gift at all.

Good stewards give gifts to God regularly. Those gifts might be monetary offerings to the local parish; they might be time spent teaching or supervising the children of the parish; they might be shoveling snow or cutting the grass or sweeping the sidewalk or buying groceries for someone who just can’t do that anymore. Good stewards do these things because they have developed a

relationship with God. They love God. They love His Holy Orthodox Church. And what do good stewards receive as their gift? Good stewards have already received their gift – packaged in “swaddling” cloths and lying in a cave. The gift has been given: Christ our Lord. (*from acrod.org*)

A Word From the Holy Fathers

It happens that a man is minding his own business, sitting at peace and quiet; when a brother comes up and says an annoying word to him, he is put out by it. He thinks that he is justifiably angered, and he speaks against the one who troubled him, saying, ‘If he had not come and spoken to me and annoyed me I should not have been at fault.’ This is false reasoning! It was not the one who spoke that put him in a bad mood. He only showed that it already existed in him; so that he could, if he chose, make reparation for his fault. But the man referred to above is like clean-looking winter wheat, externally good and ready to use; but when someone crushes it, its corruption is revealed. He was sitting at peace but he had this anger inside him and he did not know it. One word to him from the other and the corruption hidden inside him leapt out. – St. Dorotheus of Gaza

Also Commemorated Today: Hieromartyr Dorotheus the Bishop of Tyre

The Hieromartyr Dorotheus was bishop of the Phoenician city of Tyre, during the time of the persecution against Christians under the emperor Diocletian (284-305). Heeding the words of the Gospel (Mt.10:23), the saint withdrew from Tyre and hid from the persecutors. He returned to Tyre during the reign of St Constantine the Great (306-337, May 21), again occupying the bishop’s throne he guided his flock for more than fifty years, and converted many of the pagans to Christianity. When the emperor Julian the Apostate (361-363) began openly to persecute Christians, St Dorotheus was already over 100 years old. He withdrew from Tyre to the Myzean city of Udum (present day Bulgarian Varna). Delegates of the emperor arrested him there for his refusal to offer sacrifice to idols. They began to torture the holy Elder, and under torture he surrendered his soul to the Lord (+ ca. 362) at the age of 107. (*from oca.org*)

Venerable Abba Dorotheus of Palestine (or Gaza)

The Holy Abba Dorotheus was a disciple of St John the Prophet in the Palestinian monastery of Abba Seridus in the sixth century. In his youth he had zealously studied secular science. “When I sought worldly knowledge,” wrote the abba, “it was very difficult at first. When I would come to take a book, I was like a man about to touch a wild beast. When I forced myself to study, then God helped me, and diligence became such a habit that I did not

know what I ate, what I drank, whether I had slept, nor whether I was warm or not. I was oblivious to all this while reading. I could not be dragged away by my friends for meals, nor would I even talk with them while I was absorbed in reading. When the philosopher let us go, I went home and washed, and ate whatever was prepared for me. After Vespers, I lit a lamp and continued reading until midnight.” So absorbed was Abba Dorotheus in his studies at that time.

He devoted himself to monastic activity with an even greater zeal. Upon entering the monastery, he says in his tenth Instruction, he decided that his study of virtue ought to be more fervent than his occupation with secular science had been. One of the first obediences of Abba Dorotheus was to greet and to see to pilgrims arriving at the monastery. It gave him opportunity to converse with people from various different positions in life, bearing all sorts of burdens and tribulations, and contending against manifold temptations. With the means of a certain brother St Dorotheus built an infirmary, in which also he served. The holy abba himself described his obedience, “At the time I had only just recovered from a serious illness. Travelers would arrive in the evening, and I spent the evening with them. Then camel drivers would come, and I saw to their needs. It often happened that once I had fallen asleep, other things arose requiring my attention. Then it would be time for Vigil.” St Dorotheus asked one of the brethren to wake him up for Vigil, and another to prevent him from dozing during the service. “Believe me,” said the holy abba, “I revered and honored them as though my salvation depended upon them.”

For ten years Abba Dorotheus was cell-attendant for St John the Prophet (Feb. 6). He was happy to serve the Elder in this obedience, even kissing the door to his cell with the same feeling as another might bow down before the holy Cross. Distressed that he was not fulfilling the word of St Paul that one must enter the Kingdom of Heaven through many tribulations (Acts 14:22), Abba Dorotheus revealed this thought to the Elder. St John replied, “Do not be sad, and do not allow this to distress you. You are in obedience to the Fathers, and this is a fitting delight to the carefree and calm.” Besides the Fathers at the monastery of Abba Seridus, St Dorotheus visited and listened to the counsels of other great ascetics of his time, among whom was Abba Zosima. After the death of St John the Prophet, when Abba Barsanuphius took upon himself complete silence, St Dorotheus left the monastery of Abba Seridus and founded another monastery, the monks of which he guided until his own death.

Abba Dorotheus wrote 21 Discourses, several Letters, and 87 Questions with written Answers by Sts Barsanuphius the Great and John the Prophet. In manuscript form are 30 Talks on Asceticism, and written counsels of Abba Zosima. The works of Abba Dorotheus are imbued with a deep spiritual wisdom, distinguished by a clear and insightful style, but with a plain and comprehensible expression. The Discourses deal with the inner Christian life, gradually rising up in measure of growth in Christ. The saint resorted often to the advice of the great hierarchs, Sts Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian, and Gregory of Nyssa. Obedience and humility, the combining of deep love for God with love for neighbor, are virtues without which spiritual life is impossible. This thought pervades all the writings of Abba Dorotheus.

In his writings the personal experience of Abba Dorotheus is felt everywhere. His disciple, St Dositheus (February 19), says of him, "Towards the brethren laboring with him he responded with modesty, with humility, and was gracious without arrogance or audacity. He was good-natured and direct, he would engage in a dispute, but always preserved the principle of respect, of good will, and that which is sweeter than honey, oneness of soul, the mother of all virtues."

The Discourses of Abba Dorotheus are preliminary books for entering upon the path of spiritual action. The simple advice, how to proceed in this or that instance, together with a most subtle analysis of thoughts and stirrings of soul provide guidance for anyone who resolves to read the works of Abba Dorotheus. Monks who begin to read this book, will never part from it throughout their life. The works of Abba Dorotheus are to be found in every monastery library and are constantly reprinted. In Russia, his soul-profitting Instruction, together with the Replies of the Monks Barsanuphius the Great and John the Prophet, were extensively copied, together with The Ladder of Divine Ascent of St John Climacus and the works of St Ephraim the Syrian. St Cyril of White Lake (June 9), despite his many duties as igumen, with his own hand transcribed the Discourses of Abba Dorotheus, as he did also the Ladder of Divine Ascent. The Discourses of Abba Dorotheus pertain not only to monks, but this book should be read by anyone who aspires to fulfill the commands of Christ. *(from oca.org)*

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