

The Confessor's Tongue for December 29, A. D. 2013

Sunday After Nativity; Holy Innocents, Venerable Marcellus

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.

The Sunday After Nativity

On this Sunday is commemorated the righteous Joseph, the Betrothed of the Most Holy Virgin Theotokos, David the King, and James, brother of God. The Holy righteous elder Joseph came from the royal line of David (Mt. 1:6; Lk. 1:27). The holy Evangelist calls him "righteous" (Mt. 1:18), and this name, according to the remarks St. John Chrysostom, demonstrates that the betrothed of the Most Holy Virgin "had all virtues". He lived in Nazareth and earned his living by working with his hands, being a woodworker, i.e. carpenter. As the man was strictly God-fearing, quite honorable, quiet, meek, humble, modest, sincere, peace loving, attentive to the voice of his conscience and to the announcements from above, Joseph was quite worthy of the great honor of living as the nearest spectator of the fulfillment of the "great mystery of godliness" (1 Tim. 3:16). He was already an eighty year old man and, according to the witness of St. Epiphanius, already "lived many years as a widower", when he was taken by his selection of the Providence of God to be the protector of the virginity of the Most Holy Virgin Mary (see Nov. 22). In the opinion of some, St. Joseph died soon after his visit to Jerusalem with the twelve year-old Jesus Christ (Luke 2:41-52), as he is not mentioned in the Gospels after that.

Nativity of our Lord

We celebrate the birth of Christ through the Leavetaking December 31, greeting each other with "Christ is born!" "Glorify Him!" and using the Troparion and Kontakion (see bulletin) of the Feast at meals.

Nativity, Troparion, tone 4

Thy Nativity, O Christ our God / hath shone upon the world the light of wisdom. / For by it, those who worshiped the stars / were taught by a star to adore Thee, / the Sun of Righteousness, / and to know Thee, the Orient from on high. // O Lord, glory to Thee!

Questions at Christmas

St. John of Kronstadt

You are preparing yourselves to meet the Feast of the Nativity of Christ, you must ask yourselves: Have you preserved the spiritual birth from God which we each received in Baptism? Are you always heedful of your Divine sonship and the sacred treasure of the Spirit which you acquired in Baptism? Have you grown closer to God through faith and love, like His beloved children? Have you loved on another as befits children of God? Have you despised evil and all-destructive sin? Have you loved truth and every virtue? Have you loved immortal and eternal life prepared in a land which will not pass away and to which we are called by Him who now has come to

our corrupt earth? These are questions which we must ask ourselves now and decide; not only with our minds, but above all, with our hearts and our very deeds.

Changes for a New Year

A new year will be born this week, and in it a new chance is offered to each of us to make a beginning of good, even if we have done little good before God. Making New Year's resolutions all too often expresses a good intention but accomplishes little. This need not be.

Christ calls us to new life in Him in which we become conformed to His image and take on His character, His goodness. Comparing ourselves to Him and discerning how short we fall of that goal can be so overwhelming and discouraging that we don't know what to do, how to do it, or where to start. To try to change everything at once will be to change nothing. So there we are stuck: everything must change, but we can't change everything at once, and because we can't, we end up drifting, changing nothing.

"It's the job that's never started as takes longest to finish". We must take up our cross to die to ourselves and follow Christ—today, not tomorrow. "Getting started is half finished." So many things never get done because we don't begin them. Let us make that beginning of good today, and we'll be well on our way of getting there.

Major change to our life begins with small but strategic changes. A small number of modest but strategic changes empower us to gain traction against the intractable problem of changing ourselves to be conformed to Christ. Writing New Year's resolutions cast as attainable goals that will make us more like Christ can be an effective means to this end.

It must be said that we are not alone in this work. We are told "Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind." We have to want the work, desire the change, start the work, take the first step, but as Christ said, "Without Me, ye can do nothing." He took the initiative for us in becoming man and dying and rising for us to open the path of salvation. We have to respond to His initiative by taking action ("follow Me", "take up your cross"). We respond, crying out to Him in humility to enable us to do what is needed, what He asks. He quickly meets our feeble response to His initiative with His powerful grace.

In setting goals for change, we look at a few small steps that will enable us to respond to Christ's initiative and will set us on a different trajectory in life which will bring us closer to Him. We take the needed step and look to Him for grace to continue.

We need not despise small steps of change. A small change carried out, a slight modification of our vector of travel, over time will take us far from our original destination.

So what steps do we need to take in 2014? To pray? To worship? To give? To fast? To love God by keeping His commandments? To love our wives as Christ loves the Church? To honor and submit to our husbands? To honor and obey our parents? To love our enemies and our neighbors? To bring glory to Christ at work? at school?

The following ten points come from a writer named Michael Hyatt. He explains well how to set effective goals—goals that we actually carry out.

Here are the top ten most common mistakes I see people make when it comes to goal-setting:

1. They don't write them down. Unless a goal is written, it is merely an aspiration—lifeless and devoid of power. Once you commit it to writing, you set something in motion. You clarify what you want and begin focusing on how to attain it.

2. They create too many. An old Chinese proverb says, "Man who chases two rabbits catches neither." While you probably need more than a single goal, you need to stay focused on a manageable number of them. I recommend no more than 7-10.

3. They only set them for one area of their life. Most people are accustomed to the idea of setting career goals. But life is far more than your job. If you are going to be happy and fulfilled, you need goals in each of the major areas of life—spiritual, physical, marital, relational, etc.

4. They don't make them specific. Most goals—even written ones—suffer from being too vague. "I want to write a book" or "I want a better marriage" are too general. *Which* book do you want to write? *How* do you want to improve your marriage?

5. They don't make them measurable. The only way to know if you have achieved a goal is to quantify it. "Lose 25 pounds" is much better than "lose weight." "Earn 10% more than I did last year" is better than "earn more money." When in doubt, assign a number or a percentage.

6. They don't assign a due date. So often the important gets sacrificed on the altar of the urgent. A deadline is one way to create urgency and force yourself to pay attention to what's important. Without a deadline, there's little pressure to get it done. It's easy to procrastinate.

7. They don't keep them visible. How many times have you written down a set of goals and never looked at them again? I've done it plenty of times. That's why you need a plan to keep them visible, whether that means reviewing them daily, weekly, or at some other regular interval.

8. They don't stretch out of their comfort zone. Safe goals are boring goals. Unless we set our goals

outside our comfort zone, we won't find them compelling enough to actually follow through and achieve them. They shouldn't be unrealistic, but they should be challenging.

9. They don't make them personally compelling. When you pursue a meaningful goal, it is exhilarating. Accomplishing it, even more so. But the "messy middle" is where most of us get stuck. This is why we need to write down a set of motivations for each goal identifying *why* it is important and *what* is at stake.

10. They don't identify the next action. You don't need an elaborate action plan for each goal. (Often this can just be a fancy way of procrastinating.) But you do need to identify the next action, so you can initiate and maintain momentum. Michael Hyatt, Writer

Here are some sample goals.

1. I want and need to read the Bible. Instead of saying "I resolve to read it more this year", write, "I'll read one chapter of the gospels and two from the rest of the New Testament each day. That way I'll finish the NT four times this year. If I get behind, I'll spend time Saturday evening after Vigil or on Sunday catching up each week.

2. Instead of saying, "I resolve to increase my giving" write, "When I receive my paycheck, the first check I write shall be to the Church and it will be no less than 5% of my paycheck for that period.

3. Instead of saying, "I resolve to pray more", be more specific. If you don't pray much in the morning, set a goal to get to bed by a specific time so that you can wake up at a time with sufficient sleep that you'll have time to pray before work or school. God will bless such a resolution.

4. Instead of saying, "I resolve to attend church more frequently," write, "I will attend Divine Liturgy every Sunday, at least half of Vigil every Saturday, and Wednesday evening Vespers and the class before it."

5. Husbands and wives: think about small but significant ways you could improve your relationship and deepen your love and respect. Men: "When my wife asks me to do something that she needs done, whenever possible, I'll do it right away rather than tempting her to nag me." This sets an example of obedience to your children, too, by the way. Women: "I'll consult with my husband before making any purchase over \$50."

Upcoming Events 2012-2013

31 December -1 January All-Night Vigil for St. Basil
18 January 9:00 a .m. Parish Workday
20 January 6:00 p.m. Vigil for St. Maximus
17-20 February Diocese of the South Pastoral
Conference at St. Maximus
2 March Forgiveness Sunday, Vespers, 6:00 p.m.
20 April Great and Holy Pascha

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!