

# The Confessor's Tongue for December 27, A. D. 2015

Sunday after Nativity; Joseph the Betrothed, King David, James Brother of the Lord, Protomartyr Stephen  
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.

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## 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.

## The Sayings of St. Anthony the Great 36

*Abba Anthony also said, "Obedience with abstinence gives men power over wild beasts."  
Saying 36 Sayings of the Desert Fathers*

*Commentary:* The primary wild beast to be tamed is ourselves. Our self will, our insistence on doing what seems best to us, what makes sense to us, what pleases us, is cut off by obedience to God and to the proper authorities He has placed in the life of each person.

In the desert, a monk submitted to his elder and to his brother monks. As Anthony puts it in the next two sayings, many monks fall away because of spiritual pride in trusting in their own works and not consulting with their spiritual father. Likewise, a monk should be able to tell his elders "how many steps he takes and how many drops of water he drinks in his cell, in case he is in error about it."

In the monastery, a monk submits to the abbot and to the monastery's particular way of life set by its Typicon (there is a saying that you do not bring your own Typicon with you to another place). He presumes to do nothing without the blessing of his Abbot.

In the world, in the parish, we also practice obedience, but it normally takes different forms from those in the monastery. Instead of getting a blessing for everything from our priest (though some try this),

we cut off self-will by submitting to those God has put into our lives: the governing authorities, our parents, our teachers, our employer, our spouse, our family, our bishop and priest, our local parish and its way of doing things, our Father-confessor, and the Church in general.

When we are young, our most important relationship is with our parents, and we should know that God never blesses disobedience or disrespect to them. One of the most important tasks of parents is to train their children in willing, humble obedience. But this is only possible if the parents model obedience in their own lives.

As adults in the world, we cut off self-will in many ways. At work, we obey our boss and treat him with respect. In the family, though now largely rejected in the Western 'progressive' world, the wife submits to her husband. Failure to do this can destroy her marriage, and many marriages are damaged or destroyed by the wife usurping her husband's headship. The husband also has to submit to his condition of being married and the responsibilities it imposes on him. He must submit to God's command to love his wife as Christ loves the Church, a command which demands right actions, not feelings. He can no longer live for himself first, but for his wife and children and what is best for them. Many marriages are harmed or destroyed by a husband refusing to submit himself to his marriage and what it requires of him.

In the parish, we follow the guidance of our Confessor, our Priest, and our Bishop. They are not there to run every aspect of our lives, but they are there to care for our souls. As St. Paul writes, "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you." (Hebrews 13:17) The obedience here is limited and specific, having to do with the services, parish life in general, and whatever is said to us in Confession. When we constantly resist the priest or our bishop and disregard their spiritual guidance, we resist God who gave them to us and lose an opportunity to tame the wild beast in us. Obedience freely chosen frees us from slavery to our whims and having to have it our way.

One note of caution must be sounded here. A parish priest is not an abbot and is rarely an elder. The obedience rendered to the priest is not comprehensive as is the obedience a monk renders his abbot. It happens occasionally that those who live in the world, inspired by monastic literature and feeling the need for intensive guidance, will try to get their priest to run their lives as a abbot does; sometimes it is a priest who goes beyond proper bounds in trying to be a 'spiritual father' to his flock.

While a monk in a strict monastery may need a blessing to do anything, it is not so in the parish. By virtue of being married, for example, we have a general blessing to do everything needed to care for our families and spouses: we don't need to get a blessing to go to the grocery store, to change homeschooling curriculum, or to buy a car. We may request our priest's counsel in the significant decisions of our lives, but he is not there to make those decisions for us.

Obedience is supplemented with abstinence, which is another way of saying 'fasting.' Fasting is necessary to subject the body to the soul, so that the body does not tyrannize the soul through addiction to pleasure and the ensuing misuse of the good things God has given us. Instead of eating what we want (what will taste good to us at the moment), we limit our freedom by eating only fast-worthy foods; instead of eating when we want, we wait until the appointed time to eat, and then we eat a due measure avoiding excess. In fasting this way, we daily teach the body to be subject to the soul which rationally provides what the body needs for health and strength without letting the body enslave the soul to serve its desires.

Fasting is especially important in our time of general abundance, when, thanks to the global economy, we can eat just about anything we want all year long. We readily become accustomed to indulging our desires and whims for particular foods and tastes, having such abundance readily available and the means to purchase what we want. Few of us have the experience of having to 'tighten our belts' due to not having enough to eat or of eating the same two or three basic foods at every meal for a month at a time. The relative weakness of our faith in our time is due in large part to abundance and ease of life and our indulging our bodies.

Through obedience and fasting, the wild beast that is the man untamed by Christ's yoke and made wild by his passions gains power to govern himself and not live as a slave to passions and sins. Freedom in any meaningful sense is this ability gained to govern oneself so that one may carry out Christ's commandments. Self-government of this sort is not only essential to Christian life, it is also the only firm basis for freedom in society. If we fail to govern ourselves, a stronger authority will be needed to force us to live in peace with others in society.

The lives of the saints do provide examples of a saint living at peace with wild animals. The prophet Daniel in the den of lions, St. Gerasim and the lion, St. Seraphim and the bear, and others reveal a preview of life in the kingdom of God, where God brings peace between wild animals and man and also causes the lion to lie down with the lamb. Obedient submission to God demonstrated by doing His will in all things along with the power to control oneself acquired through abstinence are prerequisites for this reconciliation between man and animal to take place. The wild beast in man must first be tamed. *Fr. Justin Frederick*

### St. Basil the Great on the Psalms

According to the teaching of St. Basil the Great: "the Book of Psalms is in itself the most useful of all books. It prophesies the future, it commemorates an event, it gives laws for living, and it lays down the rules for activity. In short, it is a general treasury of good teachings that one carefully finds to everyone's benefit. It heals even the chronic wounds of the soul, and the recently wounded submits to a speedy healing, and it raises the ill, and supports the uninjured; in general, in howsoever many ways possible, it subdues the passions that in human life under various conditions dominate the souls. And herewith it produces in man that quiet delight and satisfaction, which makes the mind chaste.

The Holy Spirit knew that it is difficult to lead the human race to virtue, and that because of the propensity to pleasure we neglect the right way. And so what is one to do? The pleasantries of sweet singing is mixed in with the teachings, that together with the sweetness and the melodiousness to the ear, we received by an imperceptible image even that which is pleasing in the word. And wise physicians, who prescribe bitter medicine to drink to those who turn away from him in disgust, often smooth it over with a cup of honey. To this end this structured chanting of psalms is invented, so that even children and grown-ups, or in general those not brought up by the rules, or so it seems, only sang them, and actually trained their souls.

Is it not, then, likely that the common people, usually careless, will go from here (that is, from the temple), comfortably keeping in their memory the apostolic and prophetic commandment, and sing verses from the psalms even in their homes, and even exclaim them in the market place. And if he, who like the wild beasts becomes furious with anger, will soon become pleasant upon hearing the psalms, his anger goes away, immediately taming the ferocity in his soul with sweet singing. The psalm is the quietness in souls, the dispenser of peace; it pacifies rebellious and agitated thoughts; it softens the irritability of the soul and makes intemperance be wise. The psalm is the mediator of friendship, the solidarity among the distant, the reconciliation of combatants. For who can still count as an enemy one who uplifts with one voice to God?

Therefore psalm singing delivers to us one of the greatest good that is love, discovering singing together instead of knots for unification, reducing the people to one harmonious choir. The psalm is a refuge from demons, the accession under the protection of Angels, a weapon against nightly terrors, rest from daily work, safety for children, the adornment of blossoming age, the consolation of old age, the most appropriate apparel for women. The psalm inhabits deserts, makes the market places fully wise. For the new ones walking in the way it is the beginning of learning, for the successful it is the increase of leadership, for the perfected it is the

affirmation; it is the voice of the Church. It makes feasts bright; it brings forth sorrow as if from God. For the psalm even compels tears from a heart of stone. The psalm is the preoccupation of Angels, the heavenly cohabitation, and the spiritual incense. It is the wise invention of the Teacher, who constructed it in order that we sing and together study what is useful. From this even the lessons are better imprinted on our souls. For what is studied with compulsion does not remain in us for a long time; but that with pleasure and pleasantness is accepted and takes root more firmly in our souls. What will you learn from the psalms? Will you not know from here great courage, strict justice, honest chastity, perfection of good sense, image of repentance, a measure of patience, and anything good, what would you call that? Here is the perfect theology, prediction of the coming Christ in the flesh, the threat of the judgment, the hope of resurrection, the fear of punishment, the promise of glory, the revelation of mysteries. Everything is gathered in the Book of Psalms as if it were in a great and common treasury.

### **Resolutions for a New Year**

The New Year offers us an opportunity to make a new 'beginning of good' in our lives to strengthen our faith and abide more fully in Christ.

Prayer: Each Orthodox Christian should have a rule of prayer. This includes morning and evening prayers each day, prayers in preparation for Holy Communion, and prayer in preparation for Confession. Life in Christ is impossible without prayer! Take a look at your prayer rule. Adjust it if need be. Establish one if you haven't had one. As a minimum, every rule should include the basic prayers "O Heavenly King", "Holy God", "All-Holy Trinity, have mercy on us", "Our Father", and at least one prayer suitable to morning and evening. It should include prayers for others, either using a set form or our own words. It can include Psalms: in fact, using the Psalter as the prayerbook it is is a good way in strengthen one's rule of prayer: take a Psalm each day until you have read through the Psalter and then do it again; read a stasis each day, and get through the Psalter in 60 days; read a kathisma each day and you'll finish it in 20 days. Use the Jesus Prayer or other similar prayer for a set period of time, or a set number of prayers counted on a prayer rope. A common practice is to do three prayer ropes of the Jesus Prayer to Christ and one rope of "Most Holy Theotokos, save me". Use the Creed and Psalm 50. Compline may be read in the evening instead of the evening prayers or in addition to them. The Ninth Hour could be read in the afternoon upon returning home from work to help bridge the gap between morning and evening.

Whatever you do, pray each morning and evening! Consult your priest or spiritual father if you have questions or to ask if your intended rule is suitable for you.

Scripture: The inspired words of Holy Scripture nourish our souls. Without them, spiritual life tends to weaken and die. Establish a personal rule for reading Scripture each day. A basic suggested program: read the chapter from Proverbs corresponding to the day of the month, one chapter from the Gospels, and two from the rest of the New Testament. That will get you through the whole NT in three months—four times a year. Ignorance of the Scriptures is the cause of many of our problems.

Fasting: Consider your practice of fasting and how you can do better with the end in mind of humbling yourself to attract God's grace. Consider especially how to keep Great Lent and try to avoid unnecessary travel, etc., during that time that would cause you to break the Fast. Plan to set aside Clean Week and Holy Week as fully as you can. In general, consult the Church calendar when planning travel.

Almsgiving: Offering to God the first part of our income is part of our worship of God, and living in such a way that we have something available for those in need – both are essential to vibrant spiritual life. To disregard this a sign of a spiritual problem and invites other problems, particularly financial.

In general, we need not make many resolutions. It is better to make one or two and keep them rather than make a whole list and do none of them. Even one or two small changes wisely chosen made now can change the trajectory of our lives and result in a big difference later.

*Fr. Justin Frederick*

### **On the Profit in Reading the Scriptures**

*St. John Chrysostom*

For, tell me, who of you that stand here, if he were required, could repeat one Psalm, or any other portion of the Divine Scriptures? There is not one.

And it is not this only that is the grievous thing, but that while ye are become so backward with respect to things spiritual, yet in regard of what belongs to Satan ye are more vehement than fire. Thus should any one be minded to ask of you songs of devils and impure effeminate melodies, he will find many that know these perfectly, and repeat them with much pleasure.

But what is the answer to these charges? "I am not," you will say, "one of the monks, but I have both a wife and children, and the care of a household." Why, this is what hath ruined all, your supposing that the reading of the divine Scriptures appertains to [monks] only, when ye need it much more than they. For the that dwell in the world, and each day receive wounds, these have the most need of medicines. So that it is far worse than not reading, to account the thing even "superfluous:" for these are the words of diabolical invention. Hear ye not Paul saying, "that all these things are written for our admonition?"....

For if thou wouldest learn how great is the profit of the Scriptures, examine thyself, what thou becomest by hearing Psalms, and what by listening to a song of Satan; and how thou art disposed when standing in a Church, and how when sitting in a theatre; and thou wilt see that great is the difference between this soul and that, although both be one. Therefore Paul said, "Evil communications corrupt good manners." For this cause we have need continually of those songs, which serve as charms from the Spirit. Yes, for this it is whereby we excel the irrational creatures, since

with respect to all other things, we are even exceedingly inferior to them.

### God Has Entered the Bosom of Human Life

*A Homily of St. Justin of Chelije*

Christ is Born! Truly, God has been born as Man, on earth! Why? – “That we might live through Him” (I John 4: 9). For without the Incarnate God, the God-Man Lord Jesus Christ, human life is overall, a completely suicidal absurdity; death is truly the most obvious and awful absurdity on earth. To comprehend death is to comprehend life — all of the height and depth, the boundless eternity, of life. This is something accomplished only by the All-man-loving Lord, Who in His immeasurable love becomes man, while ever remaining God Incarnate, God-Man in the world of man. Human life acquires its eternal meaning, its purpose, as Divine-life, life in God. Outside of God, life is absurd and utter nonsense, filled to overflowing with offense and bitterness.

Only in God, O man, does your life find its sole rational, logical meaning. And your intelligence, my brother, your human thought, finds its Divine and eternal meaning only in God, only as Divine-intelligence. It is only in the God-Man Lord Jesus Christ that Human thought becomes Divine intelligence. Likewise, only in God do your senses, O man, find their Divine, eternal purpose. Lacking that, your senses are but your most merciless torturer, constantly crucifying you on an eternal cross, with no resurrection to follow. And your conscience? Where do we people find this savage stranger? It is only through Divine-conscience that it unites itself with its divine, eternal, purpose. Without it, human conscience is also a savage and terrible absurdity. And your death and mine, everyone's death overall: in all of Creation, is it not the cruelest torture within human existence? Yes, that is truly so. Yet even it achieves its eternal meaning and purpose only through the death and Resurrection of the God-Man, our Lord Jesus Christ, for through Him, through Him alone, is the victory over death accomplished, and does death in the human world have meaning. Likewise, it is only as the good and grace-filled God-Man, in the worshipping and all-quickening Body of Christ the Incarnate God – the Church – that all mankind, all humanity in its infinite variety, discovers its Divine, eternal, Godly and human higher meaning.

With His Incarnation, becoming Man, God entered most patently entered into the womb, the bosom of human life, entered into the blood, the heart, and the center of all existence. Through His Incarnation, by becoming Man, God, Whom man had voluntarily crowded out of the human world, out of the human soul, comes back into the world, into the body, into the soul. He becomes fully Man, and being Him, labors for man, makes his abode in the world, in the midst of His Creation; He saves Creation, exercises His Providence over Creation, sanctifies and saves Creation, transfigures and deifies Creation. God's Incarnation is the greatest, most staggering,

and most providential event to have occurred either on earth or in Heaven, for in [the Incarnation] the miracle of miracles is accomplished. If, to date, the greatest miracle had been the creation of the world out of nothing, God's Incarnation as Man surely surpasses it as a miracle. If in the creation of the world, God's words were transformed into matter, in the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ, God Himself took on a body and became matter, became flesh. Thus God's Incarnation became providential for each individual, for each creature throughout all Creation.

As for you: live in Him, live in God-Man, and you will be healed of all deaths, sins, passions, and of every work of the devil. Let your life become Divine-life. In that, O man, as soon as you become a member of the Church, a member of the Divine-human Body of Christ, rests all of the Mystery of Heaven on earth: And how does one live in the Church of Christ? Live by the Holy Mysteries and the Holy Virtues. This is why the Feast of the Nativity is preceded by a Fast. Fasting is the first among the virtues, and is always accompanied by prayer. Those two fundamental virtues lead man to God-Man, and through Divine Wisdom teach him how to live by Him and in Him. And what is to be done with the body given you by God? – Purify it, free it from all uncleanness, from all passion, from all evil, from every demon. What does that mean? It means to purify it of every sin, for the devil hides in any sin, in every sin the devil works without regard to your free will. In great sins, it is prince of demons, in little sins, a little demon. You and I and everyone else, have been given all of the resources with which to defeat all of those demons, all of the passions, all of the sins, all of the deaths in us and in the world around us. First and foremost among those resources are prayer and fasting. From the truthful lips of the Lord Jesus Christ, who always speaks the real Truth, [we hear] the life-giving truth: “This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting” (Matthew 17: 21),—“this kind” of all manner of sins, all manner of passions, all manner of demons.

Lying before you and me, before all of us, brothers and sisters, is the Nativity: God is born as a person “so that we might receive life through Him” and so that through God we might perfect both soul and body. That is something easiest to achieve through prayer and fasting, which cleanse and purify both body and soul, so that the sweetest Divine Infant, our Lord Jesus, might joyously come to dwell in them, and that by God our human essence, in all its infinite variety might be fulfilled and perfected. For that was why your body and your soul, o man, were created, so that they might be fulfilled through God and [you] might live in God in God's kingdom above. Our God-given teachers in this matter are humble prayer and fasting with humility. They are sacred and fundamental virtues [found in the] Gospels. May they soar with us, may they anticipate and proclaim to us and to all people throughout Creation the all-salvific and all-joyous Good News: Christ is born! *The Nativity of Christ, 1970*

#### Upcoming Events 2015-16

31 December All-Night Vigil for St. Basil  
1 January Open House at Rectory, 5:00 p.m.  
20-21 January Visit of Bishop Maxim for the Feast of St. Maximus

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!