

The Confessor's Tongue for January 3, A. D. 2016

Sunday before Theophany; Prophet Malachi, Matyr Gorius, Ven. Genevieve of Paris
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.

On How We Should Shun Evil and Do Good

St. Nikolai of Zicha

Shun evil and do good...Psalm 33:15

With these words are expressed all the efforts by which we should labor here on earth and in the earth, i.e., on this material earth and in this physical body. In what, the, should our labor consist? To achieve two habits: first, to avoid evil, and, second, to do good. Concerning that which is good and that which is evil, our conscience tells us incompletely and unclearly, because our conscience is darkened by sin; but the teaching of Christ tells us completely and clearly that which is good and that which is evil.

Brethren, what does our Lord ask of us? He asks that, as our altars always face the east, so should our souls be turned toward good. That we leave evil behind us; leave evil in the shadows; leave evil in the abyss of oblivion; leave evil in the darkness of the past; that we, from year to year, from day to day, extend ourselves toward good—think about good, yearn for good, speak about good, do good. The Lord is seeking builders and not destroyers. He who builds good by the same act destroys evil.

The Apostle of Christ teaches us: *Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good* (Romans 12:9), Hate evil but do not hate the man who commits evil, for he is sick. If you can, heal the sick person but do not kill him with your hatred. Adhere to good and only good, for good is from God, and God is the treasury of all good.

O Good and All-gracious Lord, teach us to avoid evil and to do good for the sake of thy glory and for the sake of our salvation. To Thee be glory and praise forever. Amen. *From the Prologue of Obrid*

St. Nikolai gives us our assignment for the new year.

The verse on which he preaches encapsulates the mechanics of repentance, to "shun evil and do good." The more we build good in our lives, the less room there is for evil.

January 6: The Holy Theophany of Our Lord

Luminous was the feast which hath passed [Nativity], yet even more glorious is this present day; for on the former the magi worshipped the Savior, but on this a glorious servant hath baptized the Master. Then the shepherds, piping, beheld and marvelled; but now, the voice of the Father hath proclaimed the only-begotten Son.

Vespers Aposticha for January 2

The feast of the Baptism of our Lord is also called the *Theophany* or *Epiphany* (*Manifestation of God, Manifestation from above*), because at the baptism of Jesus Christ, the Trinity was present and manifested: the Son of God received baptism in the Jordan River; God the Father testified to His Son by a voice from Heaven; and the Holy Spirit, appearing in the form of a dove, confirmed the words of God the Father. In ancient times, the catechumens used to receive the

Sacrament of Baptism on the vigil of this day, whence it also received the name of "Feast of Illumination."

The special feature of the Feast of Theophany is "the consecration of the waters." In all churches it takes place on the eve of the feast, after the Liturgy or Vespers. In some churches, it is repeated on the day of the Feast after Liturgy, on rivers and lakes, whither the clergy go in procession, with cross and banners. The first consecration is retained as a reminder of the baptism which catechumens used to receive on this day, and of the vows which we ourselves took at our own baptism. The second consecration takes place in memory of the Baptism of Our Lord; hence the procession is called "going to Jordan."

Theophany is indeed a great feast. Liturgically it renews the joy of Christmas, shows us the incarnate God in a new light, and deepens our appreciation of the Incarnation itself. It is, in fact, so much like another Christmas that even the services are similar. As Christmas is the manifestation of the boundless love of God for man, so Theophany is the great revelation of the divinity of our Lord. The two feasts thus supplement one another. Theophany proclaims that the little Child of Bethlehem is really God, pointing from earth to heaven. Christmas, on the other hand, tells us that God became for us a little Child, tracing His descent from heaven to earth. Where at Christmas only shepherds saw that the Word was made flesh, at Theophany the voice of God the Father summons the whole world to adore Jesus. The faithful do well to participate as fully as possible in the cycle of services for the feast.

We celebrate Theophany through its leavetaking on January 14. We use the troparion and kontakion of the Feast in our daily prayers and at meals in place of the usual "Our Father" and "We give thanks..."

Theophany, Troparion, tone 1

When Thou, O Lord wast baptized in the Jordan / the worship of the Trinity was made manifest. / For the voice of the Father bare witness to Thee, / naming Thee His beloved Son. / And the Spirit, in the form of dove, / confirmed the certainty of that word. / O Christ our God, who hast manifested Thyself and enlightened the world // glory to Thee.

Theophany, Kontakion, tone 4

Today Thou hast appeared to the universe / and Thy Light, O Lord, hath shone on us, / who with understanding praise Thee: / Thou hast come and revealed Thyself, // O Light unapproachable!

On the Use of Holy Water

Christ through His Baptism has sanctified the nature of water. For this reason, on the Eve of the Feast, after the blessing of the water, we take some home and keep it throughout the year, making regular use of it. The day of sanctifying the waters becomes a clear sign of God's grace, for the nature of these waters is not spoiled for a long time, but it endures

for a whole year or two, or three, or many years. Today the waters that are drawn remain fresh and new and after an extended time is as on the day in which it was drawn.

By pious custom, the blessed waters of Theophany are taken home after the Great Blessing of Waters for the spiritual refreshment of soul and body and the sanctification of our dwellings. The water is drunk every day from the Feast (Jan 6) through its leavetaking (Jan 14). At other times, when we cannot come to church, or when we feel ill, are embarking upon a journey, are especially tempted, etc., we should resort to these blessed waters, partaking of them with prayer and deep faith.

St. Seraphim, after hearing the confessions of pilgrims, always gave them to drink from a cup of holy water. The elder heiroschemamonk Serpaphim used to say that there was no stronger medicine than holy water and holy oil.

Holy Water is kept in the church throughout the year for the faithful to take home as needed.

Old Holy Water may be disposed of by pouring it out on plants. It should not be poured down the drain.

Prayer Before Partaking of Prospora and Holy Water

O Lord my God, may Thy holy gift and Thy holy water be for the remission of my sins, for the enlightenment of my mind, for the strengthening of my soul and body, for the health of my soul and body, for the conquering of my passions and infirmities, according to Thy mercy that hath no limit, through the prayers of Thy most pure Mother and all Thy saints. Amen.

The Sayings of St. Anthony the Great 37

Abba Anthony said, "Nine monks fell away after many labors and were obsessed with spiritual pride, for they put their trust in their own works and, being deceived, they did not give due heed to the commandment that says, 'Ask your father, and he will tell you.'" (Deuteronomy 32:7 LXX)
Saying 37 *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*

Commentary: It is often said that it is the condition in which Christ finds us at our death or at His return that determines our eternal destiny. The best beginning to life in Christ will avail us nothing if we do not end well. Here Anthony speaks of nine monks who labored long and hard in prayer, fasting, vigils, poverty, almsgiving, labor and so on. Yet they fell away, and unless they later repented before the end, it was that state of fallenness that determined their destiny, not all their prior struggle and virtues. For this reason, at every service in the Church, we pray for "a Christian ending to our life" and that we may end our life in repentance. Christian life begins with repentance, but unless it also ends in repentance, it will fall short of Christ.

Pride was the sin that brought about the fall of these zealous monks. Solomon writes in the Proverbs, "Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall." Pride is a luxury we cannot afford, for it

will always bring us down. These monks looked at their lives and works, probably compared themselves to others who weren't doing as much, were deceived into thinking that they were better than they were, and began to trust in themselves and their own virtue. This line of thought is strongly encouraged by our adversary, the devil, who is quick to suggest thoughts of saintliness when the struggler gains a small success.

Anthony explains in what form their pride manifested itself: they did not follow the commandment to "Ask your father, and he will tell you." Monks from early on have understood this to mean that they cut off their self-will by submitting to an abbot or an elder, and they do nothing without his blessing and they open their thoughts fully to him and hide nothing. These nine monks after considerable monastic experience had neglected to submit themselves fully to their abba. Perhaps it was small, seemingly insignificant matters that they did not ask him about at first, but as they neglected the command in little things, their neglect grew and with it the pride and self-will that overthrew them.

The great nineteenth century abbot of Optina Monastery, St. Moses, had little tolerance for self-will in his monks. He expected them to ask a blessing for everything they did and to do nothing on their own, knowing that self-will indulged would allow vainglory to grow in the soul and damage it.

For example, Father Moses noticed on one occasion that the steward was giving certain direction on his own without asking Father Moses's blessing, though he continued to come to the Superior daily for instructions. Without saying a word to him about this, the Father Archimandrite looked for an occasion to expose him in the normal course of events. While making the rounds of the monastery, he saw the steward, called him over, and asked, 'There was a pile of trash lying over there, but I don't see it any more—where did it go?' 'Oh, that—I told them to get rid of it, Batushka.' 'Why didn't you ask me?—I had something in mind for that trash. You're always doing things on your own without a blessing. You should ask before you do anything.' And he went on so long about this insignificant pile of trash that it was brought home to the steward that the Superior kept track of everything, even though he might not say anything. And from then on, the steward was careful to refrain from doing things on his own...."

We may not be under obedience to an elder as monks are, but we have our parents, our husbands, our wives, our employers, our teachers, our clergy who serve in limited ways a similar role. Neglecting to get counsel from the wise people God has put in our lives and failing to submit to our authorities (parents, spouse, etc.) is always a recipe for spiritual disaster.

Upcoming Events 2015-16

5-6 January Services for Holy Theophany, Great Blessing of Waters
20-21 January Visit of Bishop Maxim for the Feast of St. Maximus

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!