

The Confessor's Tongue for January 6, A. D. 2019

Holy Theophany of Christ

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.

January 6: The Theophany of Christ

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 meaning of each Feast and each Mystery is found in its hymns. Thus, we learn that Theophany is even greater than Nativity (contrary to the emphasis of our culture which makes Christmas the feast of feasts, pays no heed at all to Theophany/Epiphany, and reduces Holy Pascha (Easter) to one Sunday). At the Nativity of Christ, we celebrate the birth of the God-man in the flesh. At the Theophany, we celebrate the manifestation of not only Christ's divinity but also the first manifestation to man of the Holy Trinity as the Forerunner, the Father, and the Spirit all bear witness to Christ as the Son and Lamb of God. Christ sanctifies the waters through His Baptism for our regeneration. The sinless One who needs no cleansing receives baptism from the hand of a servant for our cleansing. Let us rejoice in 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!

The Sayings of St. Anthony the Great 9

Abba Anthony said, "Our life and our death is with our neighbor. If we gain our brother, we have gained God, but if we scandalize our brother, we have sinned against Christ."

Saying 9 in *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*

Commentary: There is an old saying that "one Christian is no Christian." We are not saved alone in isolation from others; we cannot live as Christians if we ignore the bond to our brother, a bond we acquired at Baptism. We cannot be close to God if we scandalize and alienate the people around us, for this is a sin against love. As St. John puts it in his first epistle, "How can a man love God whom he has not seen if He does not love his brother whom he has seen?" Loving God and loving our neighbor are

connected; showing love for our neighbor, even to our enemy, reveals and proves our love for God, who loves all men equally.

Hence the authenticity of our faith and love for God is revealed in our relations to those around us. The Christian faith, life in the Church, is not some abstract intellectual affair, but the mundane, daily, and often dirty business of learning to love the people God has put in our lives, especially the members of our families and our parish.

How can we love our brother and not scandalize him, understanding that love in essence is not a feeling but a choice to do what is right towards him? Let us here count at least a few of the ways:

1. Come to church regularly. By doing this, we affirm to others that our relationship to Christ is our first priority, and that example encourages them. Neglecting to come sends the subtle message that Christian worship is not of first importance to us and tempts others to think and act likewise.

2. When in church, dress neatly and modestly and conduct yourself with great care so as not to distract others. Come on time. Don't go in and out during the Liturgy. Don't get caught in conversations outside of church during the Liturgy, thus showing disrespect for what is happening in the church and distracting others.

3. Come to Confession regularly. By dealing with your own sins, you make yourself more receptive to God's grace by which alone you can truly love others.

4. Prepare yourself for Communion regularly, thus showing your faith in the Mystery and setting a good example to others. No one who takes his faith seriously should commune less frequently than four times a year (the four fasts). Preferably we should commune at least once a month if not more frequently with the blessing of our spiritual father.

5. Parents: show your love for your brethren by taking the time to discipline and train your children to conduct themselves with reverence and self-control in church. Letting them do as they will, going in and out repeatedly, talking, screaming, playing with noisy toys, running around, etc., not only reflects poorly on you, it sends the message to others that you don't respect your brethren enough to keep your children under control.

6. Others: show your love for parents by helping with children, by not encouraging children to misbehave by playing with them or making faces at them, and by praying for and encouraging them.

7. All: pray for one another, especially for the brethren who annoy you. If you don't know what else to say, use the Jesus prayer and insert the other person's name: "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on N." Do this throughout the day as the thought of a person comes to you, especially if the thought of

the person comes with anger, annoyance, judgment, or bitterness. We ought to turn every thought into prayer, especially the negative ones.

8. Shoulder your part of the burden of caring for the parish by giving of your time and resources to develop and improve what God has given us. Don't expect others to do it all.

9. Participate in coffee hour both by being there and providing food. You need not bring food every week, but if you rarely or never bring it, you risk scandalizing those who notice.

10. Before you come to church, offer yourself to God in prayer. Ask Him to use you to be a blessing to someone while at church. As we all have a ministry to fulfill towards one another, we come not only to receive from God but to give to Him and one another. Really listen to your brethren and get to know them. Be sensitive to their needs and be willing to let God use you to meet them. Be willing to be God's hand reaching out in love to someone with whom you'd rather not bother, if were up to your druthers.

11. Help clean up, and, in general, help keep the church clean. If you see something that needs doing, take initiative and get it done after checking with the priest or a council member.

11. Pray for the members of your family. Choose to love them rather than scandalizing or alienating them by harsh words, wrong actions, disrespect, and disobedience. Quickly and sincerely say you are sorry when you do wrong. Bear your part of the burden of maintaining the home economy: even children can and should be taught to clean, cook, and care for the home.

Furthermore, in winning our brother, we shall win also the lost. Jesus said, "By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples in that ye love one another." As Christ's peace is a peace the world cannot give, so is the love of Christ in our hearts for one another a love that has not its source in this world. This love in us is what the world needs, what it craves, and it is this love that bears witness to the truth of our faith in the God-man Jesus Christ. Developing this love in us for one another will attract those outside the Church who are searching for truth and love.

So brethren, let us love one another, look out for one another, seek one another's good, and be willing to limit our own freedom to avoid offending or scandalizing others, for "our life and death is with our neighbor." *Fr. Justin Frederick*

On The Holy Water

Let all be aware concerning the Holy Water which we bless at Theophany: those who abstain from drinking the Holy Water because they have eaten are not acting correctly; for the Holy Water has been provided by the grace of God for the sanctification of the world and all creation. Wherefore, it is sprinkled in all places, even dishonorable ones, and even in places where it may be trodden underfoot. Where, then, is the logic in abstaining from it? But be aware that impurity comes upon us not because of eating, but because of our abominable acts; and

that we may be cleansed from them, we drink this Holy Water without doubting.

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.

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.

Blessing of Homes

Homes are customarily blessed after the Great Blessing of Waters at Theophany. This is a brief service in the home of prayer and sanctifying the house through the sprinkling of holy water. A longer order of blessing is often used for the first blessing and cleansing of a new home.

With the house cleaned and ready, we dress as we would for a church service. When the priest arrives, we turn off the television, radio, stereo, etc. Pets that may interfere are placed out of the way. A small table may be set up before the Icon Corner, upon which a wide-mouthed but small bowl full of newly blessed water is placed. A lit candle, censer (if you have one), and icon are placed on the table. These things should be arranged before the priest arrives.

Family members and any guests gather and stand before the small table. The first names of those residing in the home are printed on a piece of paper and placed on the table. Proper baptismal names should be used.

One family member may carry the lit candle, going before the priest and leading him through the house, turning on lights, opening doors, etc. The other family members may accompany the priest or may stay at the table (children, though, usually want to see their rooms blessed).

After the service, some of the faithful will make an offering to the church or give a gift to the priest. There is no obligation to do this, but if done, it is done following the service.

Take advantage of having the priest in your home for the house blessing to ask questions or to voice any concerns you may have. Some parishioners desire a more extended visit or to have a meal with the priest. This should be arranged beforehand.

Upcoming Events 2018

21 January: Feast of St. Maximus, Mark Tarpley speaks on the reconciliation of male and female in Christ.

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!