

The Confessor's Tongue for January 1, A. D. 2023

29th Sunday After Pentecost; Circumcision of Christ; St. Basil the Great

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 1 as the Start of the New Year

At the present time we celebrate January 1 as the beginning of the new year. Forty five years before the Nativity of Christ the Romans celebrated the New Year on January 1 instead of March 1, as they had before, and spent this day in licentious noisy games in disguises, in mad entertainment and abominable dissolution; therefore Christians for a long time did not dedicate this day as the New Year, and their days of the New Year looking at the different countries and times were: March 1, March 25, September 1, September 23 and December 25. In 1594 French King Charles IX established that the year begins on January 1; eventually other western countries accepted this establishment. At first Russia began the year on March 1 (see March 1), and then later on September 1 (see September 1). At the end of 1699 Emperor Peter 1 issued a decree to begin the civil year on January 1, and 1700 was the first year, which began with this month.

January 1: Circumcision of Christ

Circumcision was established by God in the Old Testament as a sign of the covenant of God with Abraham and his posterity. The Lord Jesus Christ on the eighth day after His Nativity was obliged to undergo, in the accordance with the law, the rite of circumcision (Gen 17:14; Lev. 12:2-3) with the assigning to him the name of Jesus (Luke 2:21; 1:31). The Old Testament circumcision in the New Testament has conceded its place to the sacrament of baptism, of which it was a prototype (Col. 2:11-12). In the East evidence for the celebration of the Circumcision of the Lord arises in the fourth century. Stephen the Sabbaite wrote the Canon for the Circumcision in the seventh century. . . . By celebrating the circumcision of the Savior and His naming the Holy Church confirms our faith in that unchangeable truth that He is the God-man, "and yes not as the heretics say that he became incarnate as an illusion, but he truly has flesh and was not opposed to the law, but its fulfiller". Together with this example of the Savior, Who, "did not disdain circumcision of His flesh", "today of His own will was circumcised in the flesh", and, "the law fulfilling the law of the Creator", "gave to His own Self an image and a plan for the salvation of all", the Holy Church teaches us to be constantly obedient and submissive to the laws for our own good and for a Christian example to others. The circumcision which the Lord accepted as a sign of the covenant of God with man, and the name as a seal of His Service for the salvation of the world, inspire us, that as we enter into the New Covenant with God we should be circumcised "with a circumcision made without hands, by cutting off the body of sinful flesh, in the circumcision of Christ (Col. 2:11). Our Christian name must not be a dead

sound, but the living testimony that we are devoted to the service of God and we are in a beneficial union in Him for His glory and our eternal salvation and blessedness.

On the Importance of Grammatical Knowledge

St. Basil the Great

If "To the fool on his asking for wisdom, wisdom shall be reckoned," at how high a price shall we value "the wise hearer" who is quoted by the Prophet in the same verse with "the admirable counsellor"? It is right, I ween, to hold him worthy of all approbation, and to urge him on to further progress, sharing his enthusiasm, and in all things toiling at his side as he presses onwards to perfection. To count the terms used in theology as of primary importance, and to endeavour to trace out the hidden meaning in every phrase and in every syllable, is a characteristic wanting in those who are idle in the pursuit of true religion, but distinguishing all who get knowledge of "the mark" "of our calling;" for what is set before us is, so far as is possible with human nature, to be made like unto God.

Now without knowledge there can be no making like; and knowledge is not got without lessons. The beginning of teaching is speech, and syllables and words are parts of speech. It follows then that to investigate syllables is not to shoot wide of the mark, nor, because the questions raised are what might seem to some insignificant, are they on that account to be held unworthy of heed. Truth is always a quarry hard to hunt, and therefore we must look everywhere for its tracks. The acquisition of true religion is just like that of crafts; both grow bit by bit; apprentices must despise nothing. If a man despise the first elements as small and insignificant, he will never reach the perfection of wisdom.

Yea and Nay are but two syllables, yet there is often involved in these little words at once the best of all good things, Truth, and that beyond which wickedness cannot go, a Lie. But why mention Yea and Nay? Before now, a martyr bearing witness for Christ has been judged to have paid in full the claim of true religion by merely nodding his head. If, then, this be so, what term in theology is so small but that the effect of its weight in the scales according as it be rightly or wrongly used is not great? Of the law we are told "not one jot nor one tittle shall pass away;" how then could it be safe for us to leave even the least unnoticed? The very points which you yourself have sought to have thoroughly sifted by us are at the same time both small and great. Their use is the matter of a moment, and peradventure they are therefore made of small account; but, when we reckon the force of their meaning, they are great. They may be likened to the mustard plant which,

though it be the least of shrub-seeds, yet when properly cultivated and the forces latent in its germs unfolded, rises to its own sufficient height.

If any one laughs when he sees our subtilty, to use the Psalmist's words, about syllables, let him know that he reaps laughter's fruitless fruit; and let us, neither giving in to men's reproaches, nor yet vanquished by their disparagement, continue our investigation. So far, indeed, am I from feeling ashamed of these things because they are small, that, even if I could attain to ever so minute a fraction of their dignity, I should both congratulate myself on having won high honour, and should tell my brother and fellow-investigator that no small gain had accrued to him therefrom.

While, then, I am aware that the controversy contained in little words is a very great one, in hope of the prize I do not shrink from toil, with the conviction that the discussion will both prove profitable to myself, and that my hearers will be rewarded with no small benefit. Wherefore now with the help, if I may so say, of the Holy Spirit Himself, I will approach the exposition of the subject, and, if you will, that I may be put in the way of the discussion, I will for a moment revert to the origin of the question before us. *From, On the Holy Spirit*

The Commandments of Christ

"If ye love Me, keep My commandments." (John 14:15)

Olivet Discourse

When Jesus tells his disciples that the day will come when not one stone of the temple will remain upon another, they are shocked. They ascend the Mt. of Olives, sit down, and privately ask him when this will be. They add a further question: "What shall be the sign of thy coming and of the end of the world." Jesus' answer to these questions is known as the "Olivet Discourse", a name taken from its setting. This discourse is reported in each of the three synoptic gospels, in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21. The discourse may be called "apocalyptic", which means the revelation of hidden things to come.

Christ gives his disciples several commands to enable them to navigate without spiritual shipwreck the coming storms. Let us survey them quickly now, and later we shall examine them in detail.

The very first command in the Olivet Discourse is a warning against being deceived by men. "Take heed that no man deceive you" (Matt 24:4); "Take heed lest any man deceive you" (Mark 13:5); "Take heed that ye be not deceived" (Luke 21:8). Jesus goes on to explain that many will come in His name claiming to be Christ and will deceive many. Christ reiterates and elaborates on this warning (Luke omits it) against deception later when he commands that his disciples not believe it if someone says "Lo, here is Christ", even if the supposed Christ shows "great signs and wonders." Mark expresses it thus: "And then if any man shall say to you, Lo, here is Christ; or, lo, he is there; believe him not: For false christs and false

prophets shall rise, and shall shew signs and wonders, to seduce, if it were possible, even the elect. But take ye heed: behold, I have foretold you all things" (Mark 13:21-23). Christ (in Matthew) then goes on to forbid not only believing the report but also going to see for yourself: "Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not" (Matt. 24:26,27). In Matthew's version, Christ then gives the reason why not to believe such reports or respond to them by investigating: His coming will not admit such. "For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be." In other words, it will be instantaneous, and all will know of it immediately; there will be no time to learn of it from the media. Such is the first set of commands warning against being deceived by false Christs and false prophets.

A second set of commands calls Christ's disciples to watch and take heed to themselves lest Christ's return catch them by surprise. "Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come" (Matt 24:42); "Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is" (Mark 13:33); "Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man" (Luke 21:36); "Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning: Lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch" (Mark 13:35-37); "And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth" (Luke 21:34-35); and "Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh" (Matt 24:44).

A third set of commands instructs Christ's disciples not to premeditate what they will say when they are arrested and brought before rulers, but to trust the Holy Spirit to give them what to say in the hour it is needed. "But when they shall lead you, and deliver you up, take no thought beforehand what ye shall speak, neither do ye premeditate: but whatsoever shall be given you in that hour, that speak ye: for it is not ye that speak, but the Holy Ghost" (Mark 13:11).

There is another set of commands that seems to relate to the past when Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans in A.D. 70. "Pray that your flight be not in the winter, nor on the Sabbath day." When you see the abomination of desolation, "flee to the mountains" without stopping in your house to take anything. They are commanded to contemplate the fig tree as a parable for reading the signs of the nearness of these things.

These commands which remain applicable to us in our time require closer examination and our attention in observing them. This, with God's help, we shall provide in installments to come. *Fr. Justin Frederick*

Upcoming Events 2022.

6 January Holy Theophany
21 January: Feast of St. Maximus

GLORY BE TO GOD FOR ALL THINGS!