

The Confessor's Tongue for December 27, 2009

Sunday After the Nativity of Christ; Prophet David, Joseph the Betrothed, James
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 are commemorated the righteous Joseph, the Betrothed of the Most Holy Virgin Theotokos, David the King, and James, brother of the Lord, author of the General Epistle bearing his name.

December 27: Protomartyr Stephen

He belonged to the group of seven deacons installed by the apostles to serve meals for the widows (Acts 6) and was called archdeacon because he was the eldest of them. Filled with the Holy Spirit and power, he preached the word of God, confirming it with signs and wonders. During his last sermon about Christ in the Sanhedrin, those sitting there saw his face, "as the face of an Angel". Upon finishing his sermon, St. Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, "gazed into heaven and saw the glory to God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God" (Acts 7:55). He underwent the hatred of the Jews for this sermon, who slandered him for blasphemy of God and Moses and they stoned him (about the year 34). Before his death St. Stephen, "knelt down", prayed for his murderers, and cried "with a loud voice: 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them'. And when he had said this, he fell asleep" (Acts 7:60). St. Stephen was the first of the Christians who suffered for their faith, according to St. Asterius, being "the first of the martyrs, teacher of suffering for Christ, the foundation of good confession, because before Stephen nobody poured out blood for the Gospel", is why he is called Protomartyr. The body of Holy Protomartyr Stephen was honorably buried on the grounds of the Jewish teacher Gamaliel near Jerusalem. Refer to Aug. 2 and Sep. 15. The right hand of the Holy Protomartyr and Archdeacon Stephen is kept in a special ark (kivot) in the Serapion vault near the church of the Ven. Nikon in the Trinity- St. Sergius Laura.

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 similiar prayer for a set period of time, or a set number of prayers counted on a prayer rope. Use the Creed and Psalm 50. Compline could be read in the 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.

Fr. Justin Frederick

Upcoming Events 2009-2010

- 28 December – 2 January: 5th Annual Orthodox Service Retreat at St. George, Pharr, Texas, for teens and college-age adults.
- 5-6 January: Holy Theophany and Houseblessings: Vigil 7:00 p.m., Divine Liturgy 8:00 a.m.
- 20-21 January: Feast of St. Maximus Vigil 7:00 p.m., Divine Liturgy 9:00 a.m.
- 23 January, 2010, North Texas Orthodox Mission (NTOM) Pre-Lenten Retreat at Holy Trinity with Fr. Joseph Honeycutt, 8:45 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.
- 13 February 2010, 6:00 p.m. Forgiveness Vespers, Great Lent Begins. If you attend this parish, you should plan on attending this service.
- 26-27 February 2010 Metropolitan Jonah visits.
- 4 April 2010, Holy Pascha, the Feast of Feasts.

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!