

## September, New Year?

Sometimes in our Church we take practical things and then develop a theological view on it. For example, there is a liturgical asterisk, which consists of two arched metal bands that fold together and then are opened forming a cross-shaped frame that has the purpose of keeping the veil off the bread. The shape of the cross is important because it is a reminder that the bread will become our Lord. This then brings one's mind to the incarnation, the teaching that Jesus is both human and divine. Then someone, thinking of the incarnation, decided to hang a little star in the center of the cross over the bread to focus attention to the birth of our Lord. It is from this star we get the name asterisk which in Greek means "star".

The same thing developed with the concept of "new years". We actually celebrate several different New Years. People who follow the Church calendar might point to the Fast of Phillip as one, just as Roman Catholics and say the liturgical year begins on the First Sunday of Advent. Another New Year is January first. We do not celebrate this liturgically because going back to the days of St John Chrysostom on January 2, 388 when he called the New Year celebration a festival of Satan because of the "disorderly throng of feasters." He praised those who were in Church partaking of that "cup, not overflowing with unmixed wine, but filled with spiritual instruction." While New Year's Day may not be celebrated liturgically as such in our parishes, it is definitely celebrated by our faithful. The third New Year is September 1st. This may be related to 537 when Justinian I decreed that year would begin on September first. But as Byzantines we would like to point to the Indiction of Constantine the Great on September 1, 312. It is a date that is set up to mark the position of the tax year. What does this have to do with Church?

Nothing, except it is Constantinian, and hence it is called the Greek or Constantinian indiction. But since our secular lives revolved around the date, we just brought it into the Church.

We need to mark the passing of time. Whether we like it or not, we need to know how many years we have lived. We need to mark the seasons for the planting of crops and flowers. Time is an important part of our lives. The problem always is we do not know how much time we have. Back in the old days of high school sports, the time clock was on the sideline not the scoreboard and you really did not know how much time was left unless the coach or fans let you know. Life is like that we are playing the game of life and we do not know if we are closer to the beginning or the end at any moment. As we age we assume, we are closer to the end, but is it a matter of minutes or years?

In the old Douay-Rheims translation of the Bible, St Paul tells us in Ephesians 5:26 that we are to be wise: "redeeming the time." The newer translations say, "making the most of the opportunity." They both stress that we are given time for a purpose. We are given time to be redeemed, a term that meant something closer to be "spent" or "used". It has a purpose. It is to be spent on what is good and necessary and not wasted. (For those who are thinking that this is saying that we are given time to be used for our salvation. While this is true remember that St Paul was a tent maker which provided for his income when donations were low. Remember that our Lord went off by Himself while praying it was also resting.)

We redeem time by becoming what we were created to be: a person so united with Christ that we partake of His divine nature and His will becomes our will. This seems to focus on the spiritual, and it does. We are not called to withdraw from the world but rather be *in* the world rather than *of* the world. Our Lord

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worked as a carpenter and that was not time away from God. He was always with the Father as we are called to be always with Him.

We are not meant to live our lives only for and with ourselves. God said, "It is not good for man to be alone." We are to live in participation with God and since we are with God we live in participation with one another. We cannot make it on our own. When we are born, we are born dependent, and when we are dying, we are dependent. That dash on our tombstone between the date of our birth and the date of our death is where we live. We can live as we were created and as we die, depend-

ent or we can fool our selves and try to be self-sufficient.

In our creation, God "communicated" to us four of His own properties, according to Maximus the Confessor. These four divine properties are: being, eternity, goodness, and wisdom. "Being" and "eternity" are part of our essence; "goodness" and "wisdom" are offered to us. These properties allow us to "participate" in the divine life. Only when we live "in God" are we truly what we were created to be, and we do this naturally. We are not a static being but rather one who grows in divine life. Divine life is a gift from God, yet it is also a task.

We redeem our time in doing out task,

which is to live ("be"ing), understand that we are immortal and grow in goodness and wisdom. We do this by participating in our Church life, but also in the lives of our families, co-workers and neighbors. We share with them the life that Christ gave us not so much in words but in how we live our lives. A simplified example is that our lives are lives of love. We share love and others grow in love, not in the human sense but in the sense that we share with them the love that God has given to us. This brings us closer to God so we fulfill our task of being in the image and likeness of God.

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