

# SOBORNOST

## St. Thomas the Apostle Orthodox Church

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*American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese*

*ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE  
OF CONSTANTINOPLE*

## SERVICES

**Wednesdays in Great Lent: Liturgy of  
the Presanctified Gifts 7:00 PM**

**Friday: Moleben to the Cross 6:00 AM**

**Saturday: Confession 5:00 PM**

**Great Vespers 5:30 PM**

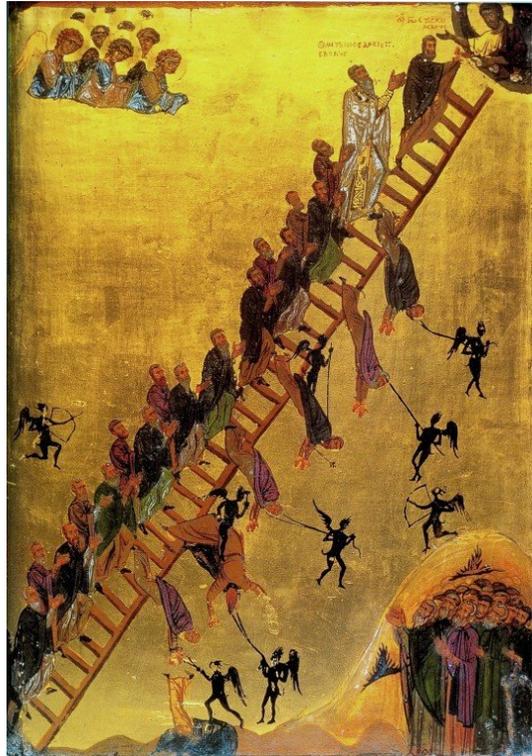
**Sunday: Matins (Orthros) 8:45 AM**

**Divine Liturgy 10:00 AM.**

**March 26, 2017 – St. John Climacus (4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Lent)**

A sermon from Holy Cross Monastery

When I was a teenager, I became the best of friends with another young man who was my age, and I spent most of my free time with him. This young man was known for being a very negative and critical person. My parents were not happy about our friendship, fearing the negative influence he would have on me, and they sometimes expressed their concern, but I would hear nothing of it, making excuses for him. One of the primary effects of that friendship was the terrible habit I developed of gossiping about people and slandering those whom I did not like. At first, I joined in with the desire to be liked and accepted by him, but later it became a part of me, whether I was with him or not. This friend and I would spend hours upon hours nearly every time we spoke, mocking and deriding other people, laughing at their expense, blinded by our pride and self-love, thinking we were better than everyone else. Deep down, I knew this behavior was wrong, but after several years of indulging in this sin, when I began to repent and change my way of life, this deep-rooted passion proved very difficult to uproot. I still remained very judgmental because my efforts to change were half-hearted.



A few years later, after my friend had moved away and we had lost contact, I remember having a conversation with a girl I knew, where I was mocking a mutual friend of ours, pointing out what I didn't like about him, thinking that she was in sympathy with my poisonous words. At some point after I had amused myself for quite a while with these biting remarks, she blurted out, "**My goodness! When I'm not around, do you talk about me like that?**" *Like apples of gold in settings of silver is a word aptly spoken*, so says the book of Proverbs (25:11). I fumbled for excuses, and tried to assure her that I never would speak about *her* like that, but I don't think that she believed me. Why would she? Her words haunted me then, and twenty years later I still remember them with pain of heart.

Today we remember our venerable father, St. John Climacus. I wish to speak with you now, using quotes from a chapter in St. John's book, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*. Each chapter is called a step, meaning a step on the spiritual ladder, and each step is connected with the one that comes before it and also the one that comes after it. St John says: "The holy virtues are like Jacob's ladder, and the unholy vices are like the chains that fell from the chief Apostle Peter. For the virtues, leading them one to another, bear him who chooses them up to Heaven; but the vices by their nature beget and stifle one another."

Frequently you will hear St. John say such things like "this virtue is the mother of that virtue" or "this vice gives birth to many daughters" and so on. Virtues and vices are connected with one another, like links in a chain, like steps on a ladder.

The chapter I will be quoting from is Step Ten, "On Slander or Calumny."

St. John begins in this way: *No sensible person, I think, will dispute that slander is born of hatred and remembrance of wrongs. ... Slander is an offspring of hatred, a subtle yet coarse disease, a leech lurking unfelt, wasting and draining the blood of love. It is simulation of love, the patron of a heavy and unclean heart, the ruin of chastity.*

I will add here that to those who have struggled for some time, it is no secret that our chastity can be ruined by both anger and judging. Slander is verbalizing our judgmental thoughts, but we can be overwhelmed with lustful passions even if we speak not a word, but merely judge and slander others in our thoughts, harboring ill feelings towards our neighbors, our brothers, our spouses, our spiritual fathers. God, in His mercy and providence, will allow temptations to beset us, so that we humble down and cease judging and slandering our neighbor and instead focus on the multitude of our own sins that we need to repent of. Our job is not to change other people, but to change ourselves.

St. John continues: *I have heard people slandering, and I have rebuked them. And these doers of evil replied in self-defense that they were doing so out of love and*

*care for the person whom they were slandering. I said to them: 'Stop that kind of love, otherwise you will be condemning as a liar him who said: "I drove away he who privately talked against his neighbor" (Psalm 100:5, LXX). If you say you love, then pray secretly, and do not mock the man. For this is the kind of love that is acceptable to the Lord.' But I will not hide this from you... Judas was in the company of Christ's disciples, and the thief was in the company of murderers. Yet it is a wondrous thing, how in a single instant, they exchanged places.*

*He who wants to overcome the spirit of slander should not ascribe the blame to the person who falls, but to the demon who suggests it. For no one really wants to sin against God, even though we all sin without being forced to do so. I have known a man who sinned openly and repented secretly. I condemned him as a profligate, but he was chaste before God, having propitiated Him by a genuine conversion.*

*Do not regard the feelings of a person who speaks to you about his neighbor disparagingly, but rather say to him: 'Stop, brother! I fall into graver sins every day, so how can I criticize him?' In this way you will achieve two things: you will heal yourself and your neighbor with one plaster. This is one of the shortest ways to the forgiveness of sins; I mean, not to judge. 'Judge not, and you shall not be judged' (Luke 6:37).*

There is a story from *The Prologue of Ohrid* for March 30th that illustrates the beauty and ease with which someone may enter paradise. The monk's name is not even remembered on earth, but he is known in heaven for this one virtue which he practiced his whole life. St. Nikolai writes: *This monk was lazy, careless, and lacking in his prayer life, but throughout all of his life he did not judge anyone. When dying, he was happy. When the brethren asked him how it was that with so many sins he could die joyfully, he replied, "I now see angels who are showing me a page containing my numerous sins. I said to them, 'Our Lord said: Judge not, and you shall not be judged (Luke 6:37).' I have never judged anyone, and I hope in the mercy of God that He will not judge me." And the angels tore up the paper. Upon hearing this, the monks were astonished and learned from it.*

St. John continues: *Fire and water are incompatible; and so is judging others in one who wants to repent. If you see someone falling into sin at the very moment of his death, even then do not judge him, because the Divine judgment is hidden from men. Some have fallen openly into great sins, but they have done greater good deeds in secret; so their critics were tricked, getting smoke instead of the sun. Listen to me, listen, all you malicious reckoners of other men's accounts! If it is true (as it really is true) that 'with what judgment you judge, you shall be judged' (Matthew 7:2), then whatever sins we blame our neighbor for, whether bodily or spiritual, we shall fall into them ourselves. That is certain.*

This brings to my mind what the psalmist writes: *and let the trap, which he has hidden, catch him, and into that same snare let him fall* (Psalm 34:8, LXX).

St. John continues in Step Ten: *Hasty and severe judges of the sins of their neighbor fall into this passion because they have not yet attained to a thorough and constant remembrance and concern for their own sins. For if anyone could see his own vices accurately without the veil of self-love, he would worry about no one else in this life, considering that he would not have time enough for mourning for himself, even though he were to live a hundred years, and even though he were to see a whole River Jordan of tears streaming from his eyes. I have observed such mourning, and I did not find in it even a trace of calumny or criticism.... This is one of the marks by which we can recognize spiteful and slanderous people: they are piteously plunged in the spirit of hatred; and with pleasure and without a qualm, they slander the teaching or affairs or achievements of their neighbor.*

*I have seen some committing the gravest sins in secret and without exposure; and in their supposed purity, they have harshly inveighed against persons who have had a petty fall in public. To judge others is a shameless arrogation of the Divine prerogative; to condemn is the ruin of one's soul.*

*Even without any other passion, self-esteem can ruin a man; and in the same way, if we have formed the habit of judging, we can be utterly ruined by this alone; for indeed, the Pharisee was condemned for this very thing. A good grape-picker, who eats the ripe grapes, will not start gathering unripe ones. A charitable and sensible mind takes careful note of whatever virtues it sees in anyone. But a fool looks for faults and defects. And of such it is said: 'They have searched after iniquity, and in searching they are grown weary of searching' (Psalm 63:7, LXX). Do not condemn, even if you see with your eyes, for they are often deceived.*

How often I myself have learned from experience that my eyes can deceive me, that my thoughts against someone are completely false and imaginary and untrue. And yet, I can still nurture them, preferring the vanity and pride of believing my own eyes and my own thoughts over the way of Christ, who, even though He knew Judas would betray Him, even though He knew Peter would deny Him, even though He knew the apostles would abandon him and flee at His hour of need, even though He knew the Jews would demand His death, even though He knew Pilate would wash his hands of Him, even though He knew the Roman soldiers would spit on Him, even though he knew the multitudes would praise Him one day and the next day cry: "Crucify Him!", even though He knew Thomas would doubt Him, even though He knew that all of us would be guilty of denying His love for us all, slandering and mocking one another, God's very image; still He looks at us with unfathomable compassion and says to you and me, "Do you know how much

I love you, my child? Do you know? If I were to show you how much, you could not bear it. I love everyone as my own children, from the least to the greatest, both saints and sinners. Why, therefore do you mock and slander and gossip about one another, crucifying me anew with these sins that are so easily overcome with very little effort? Let Me fill you with My love so that you may see yourselves as the worst of sinners, and everyone else as angels and saints: children of My love. Then you shall be with Me in Paradise.”

St. John concludes: “*The tenth ascent. He who has mastered it is one who practices love or mourning.*”

When I was growing up, my parents used to have a quote that was decoratively written and hung in a picture frame in our kitchen. It said, “**The absent are safe with us,**” which means that those who were not present with us need not fear that they would be spoken ill of in our home. Although I can still remember that quote and where it hung in our kitchen, I did not apply that wise saying in my life, as you heard me tell you at the beginning. If that saying were hanging in *your* kitchen, here in *our* trapeza, would it be true? Are the absent safe with *us*?

Every weekday during the Great Fast, we hear in church multiple times a day the prayer of St. Ephraim. In a way, it is the golden rule of Great Lent. Someone asked me recently if they should say this prayer outside of the Great Fast. Of course, we don’t say it liturgically in church outside of Lent, but certainly, this prayer can be said throughout the year. With the last line especially we should imitate that nameless but blessed monk whose list of sins were torn asunder by the angels, and with all our hearts, beseech our loving and merciful Savior, “Yes, O Lord King, grant me to see **my own** failings, and **not judge** my brother, for blessed are You now and ever and forever. *Amen.*” (*adapted from holycross-hermitage.com*)

### **Today’s Epistle Lesson – St. Paul’s Letter to the Hebrews 6:13-20**

Brethren, when God made a promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, saying, “Surely blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply you.” And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise. For men indeed swear by the greater, and an oath for confirmation *is* for them an end of all dispute. Thus God, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed *it* by an oath, that by two immutable things, in which it *is* impossible for God to lie, we have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before *us*. This *hope* we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the *Presence* behind the veil, where the forerunner has entered for us, *even* Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.

## Today's Gospel Lesson – Saint Mark 9:17-31

At that time, one of the crowd said, “Teacher, I brought You my son, who has a mute spirit. And wherever it seizes him, it throws him down; he foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth, and becomes rigid. So I spoke to Your disciples, that they should cast it out, but they could not.” He answered him and said, “O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Bring him to Me.” Then they brought him to Him. And when he saw Him, immediately the spirit convulsed him, and he fell on the ground and wallowed, foaming at the mouth. So He asked his father, “How long has this been happening to him?” And he said, “From childhood. And often he has thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him. But if You can do anything, have compassion on us and help us.” Jesus said to him, “If you can believe, all things *are* possible to him who believes.” Immediately the father of the child cried out and said with tears, “Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!” When Jesus saw that the people came running together, He rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it: “Deaf and dumb spirit, I command you, come out of him and enter him no more!” Then *the spirit* cried out, convulsed him greatly, and came out of him. And he became as one dead, so that many said, “He is dead.” But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose. And when He had come into the house, His disciples asked Him privately, “Why could we not cast it out?” So He said to them, “This kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting.” Then they departed from there and passed through Galilee, and He did not want anyone to know *it*. For He taught His disciples and said to them, “The Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of men, and they will kill Him. And after He is killed, He will rise the third day.”

## *A Word From the Holy Fathers*

What is pleasanter than this joy? What is more splendid than this festival [of the Annunciation]? What is more exalted than the present feast? We are lifted up from the earth; we are raised to the skies. We put off corruption; we put on incorruptibility. We have escaped the labors and thorns of the curse; we are enriched with the fruitfulness of the blessing....

Hail, full of grace, through whom what had been diseased is strengthened, and what had been crushed is recreated, and the devil who strikes with the heel and is the cause of our crushing is slain, suppressed and trampled down. Hail, full of grace, through whom the bitter verdict against our kind is wiped off by the sweetness of your tidings, and putting off the ugliness of transgression, we are crowned with the beauty of the divine advent which is from you. Hail, full of grace, intelligible and God-made mirror of the inspired prophets' mystical

discernment, in which they mysteriously saw reflected the condescension of the Word to us, and, like trumpets resounding with the divine Spirit, they encompassed the ends of the entire world, noising abroad your pregnancy. Hail, full of grace, workshop of the world's joy, in which the condemnation of the first curse has been melted down, and the dignity of joy through you has been forged. Hail, full of grace, whose beauty, kept pure in soul, body and thought, the King of all has desired, for the renovation and recreation of the image decayed through the devices and various rebellions of the Evil one. For this reason the nations will supplicate you with gifts, who through you have been enriched with piety, and have rid themselves of those ugly wrinkles of alien semblance.

May you rejoice, palace not built by hands, in which the King of glory has put on our garment, dyed red with your virginal blood like imperial purple, and has clothed the unseemly nakedness of our first father. May you rejoice, who lent flesh to the Creator and absolved us from our debt, who did not undo the bonds of virginity and who tore up the document of sin. May you rejoice, living ark of God, in which the second Noah, having come to dwell, took in and saved well-nigh our entire human race, that had been submerged by the storm of sins, and afforded us models and examples of a second life and a more divine conduct. May you rejoice, furnace forged by God, in which the Creator, having leavened anew our nature with your most-pure and virginal substance, has cleansed us of that sour and distressing staleness, renovating man into a new creature.

...May we all without condemnation be deemed worthy of the mystical and immortalizing table through the mediation of the ever-virgin Mother of God, at whose intercession may Christ, our true God, born of her in a manner surpassing words and under-standing, deem us worth of the heavenly bridal-chamber. For His is the kingdom, and to Him we send up glory, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and ever and forever. Amen.

– St. Photius the Great, Patriarch of Constantinople, *Homily 7.6-8*

## **Patriarchal Pence – Support Patriarch Bartholomew**



During this season of increased prayer, fasting, and charity all the parishes in our Diocese send a token of our affection to support the work of the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew. To this end we will take a special collection on the Sunday of Saint Mary of Egypt (April 2). Please be generous! [Photo Credit: Nikolaos Manginas]

## CAMP NAZARETH

Camp Nazareth is eagerly awaiting and preparing for the arrival of the Summer Camping Season, and registration is now open. Apostle Thomas campers will be attending Week 2, July 23-29, 2017. May 15<sup>th</sup> is the deadline for clergy and volunteer applications, and is the last day for registrants to receive the \$20 early bird discount. For more information, please visit the Camp website.

REGISTRATION FOR CAMP WILL ONLY BE ABLE TO BE DONE ONLINE THROUGH THE CAMP'S WEBSITE – [CAMPNAZARETH.ORG](http://CAMPNAZARETH.ORG).

## UPCOMING DIOCESAN EVENTS

The Altar Boy Retreat (ABR) and the Young Women's Encounter (YWE) are scheduled for 25-29 June. The ABR is open to our Altar Boys ages 8-18 and the YWE is open to the young ladies of the parish ages 13-18. More information will be coming out on those events in the near future.

## On Stewardship and the Orthodox Life – Part 121: Almsgiving



*“But give for alms those things that are within; and behold, everything is clean for you.”* (Luke 11:41 RSV)

The above verse deals with Jesus scolding the Pharisees who complained that Jesus did not wash his hands before eating which was the Jewish custom. Jesus calls them “fools” because they did not understand that God made us wholly - within and outwardly. What did he mean? The Pharisees put on an outward show of piety but were dead on the inside. Do we imitate the Pharisees? Do we say

we love Christ and our neighbor but do nothing to help them, standing idly by as they slip deeper into secularism and sin? Where is the almsgiving that we promised to give to our neighbors?

Almsgiving, *eleemosune* in Greek, means mercy, pity, charity, to show one's compassion. Do we take the **time** to help our neighbor, show compassion and be charitable? Giving alms is not just about money, it is about taking the **time** to care about your neighbor, being a steward of the gift of time God has given you. Unfortunately, many of us are preoccupied - with watching our favorite TV program, sporting event or other secular activities - and fail to give time to save another's soul.

Those precious few minutes, hours or days that you give to someone in need may show them the true nature of God within you and be the spark that brings them to Christ and Orthodoxy. God gave you the **gift of time** not to squander but to use for the benefit of your salvation *and* the salvation of others. Be a good steward of your time and give the alms that are within you! (*from acrod.org*)

## **ALSO COMMEMORATED TODAY: LEAVETAKING OF THE ANNUNCIATION / SYNAXIS OF THE ARCHANGEL GABRIEL**



On the Leavetaking of the Feast of the Annunciation, the Church commemorates the Archangel Gabriel, who announced the great mystery of the Incarnation of Christ to the Virgin Mary. There is no period of Afterfeast due to Great Lent. The Archangel



Gabriel was chosen by the Lord to announce to the Virgin Mary about the Incarnation of the Son of God from Her, to the great rejoicing of all mankind. Therefore, on the day after the Feast of the Annunciation, the day on which the All-Pure Virgin is glorified, we give thanks to the Lord and we venerate His messenger Gabriel, who contributed to the mystery of our salvation.

Gabriel, the holy Archistrategos (Leader of the Heavenly Hosts), is a faithful servant of the Almighty God. He announced the future Incarnation of the Son of God to those of the Old Testament; he inspired the Prophet Moses to write the Pentateuch (first five books of the Old Testament), he announced the coming tribulations of the Chosen People to the Prophet Daniel (Dan. 8:16, 9:21-24); he appeared to Saint Anna (July 25) with the news that she would give birth to the Virgin Mary.

The holy Archangel Gabriel remained with the Holy Virgin Mary when She was a child in the Temple of Jerusalem, and watched over Her throughout Her earthly life. He appeared to the Priest Zachariah, foretelling the birth of the Forerunner of the Lord, Saint John the Baptist.

The Lord sent him to Saint Joseph the Betrothed in a dream, to reveal to him the mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God from the All-Pure Virgin Mary, and warned him of the wicked intentions of Herod, ordering him to flee into Egypt with the divine Infant and His Mother.

When the Lord prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane before His Passion, the Archangel Gabriel, whose very name signifies “Man of God” (Luke. 22:43), was sent from Heaven to strengthen Him. The Myrrh-Bearing Women heard from the Archangel the joyous news of Christ’s Resurrection (Mt.28:1-7, Mark 16:1-8).

Mindful of the manifold appearances of the holy Archangel Gabriel and of his zealous fulfilling of God’s will, and confessing his intercession for Christians before the Lord, the Orthodox Church calls upon its children to pray to the great Archangel with faith and love. *(from oca.org)*

## Follow Our Diocese On-Line

Diocesan Website: <http://www.acrod.org>

Camp Nazareth: <http://www.campnazareth.org>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/acroddiocese>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/acrodnews>

You Tube: <https://youtube.com/acroddiocese>

***In Your Prayers – Please Remember...*** His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch BARTHOLOMEW, His Grace Bishop GREGORY, Fr. Joseph & Family, Greek Orthodox Archbishop Paul Yazigi of Aleppo, Syriac Orthodox Archbishop Yohanna Ibrahim of Aleppo, His Grace Bishop Neofitos of Nyeri and Mt. Kenya, Fr. John & Pani Betty Jean Baranik, Fr. Vincent Saverino, Presbytera Katie Baker and family, Alicia Barosio and family, Jeffrey Carey, Tatyana and Slava Chumak & family, Xenia Chilkowich, Jon Church, Ramius Connour, Curtis Cooper, Luke Cooper, Tina Crull, Ron Dominiecki, Linda A. Georgiev, Heather Himler, Alex Holthus, John Homick, Cameron Houk, Helen Janowiak, John M. Janowiak, Deanna Jarrett, Tucker Karl and family, Robert Karpin, Andrew Kinn, Kopan family, Brian, Helen, and Luke Mahony, Valentina Makowelski, Susan Matula, Kristen McNeil, Anna Meinhold, Dn. Henry Middleton, David & Kathryn Newman, Bobby Nutter & Family, Henry & Lisa Osborne, Westin Perry & Parents, John Reece, Mary Reed, Chris & Kaitlin Rixey, Jerry Von Ronne, Anne Rosario, James, Theodore and Christina Ristas, Samson Family, Sharon Sheptak, Dawn & Faith Ulmschneider, Lydia Vita, Christine, Marshall, Nathaniel, Subdcn. Nectaros and Ia, the Syrian Christians displaced by war, Mother Virginia Marie and the Carmelite Nuns of Port Tobacco, the newly reposed servants of God Steve Stephanadis and Alex Makowelski, and all those in need of our prayers. (Please advise Fr. Joseph of changes.)