

SOBORNOST

St. Thomas the Apostle Orthodox Church

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American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese

ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE
OF CONSTANTINOPLE

SERVICES

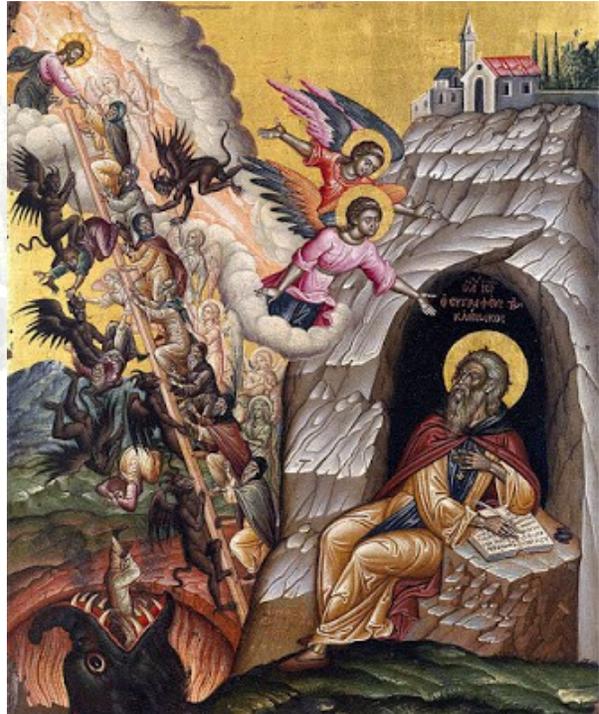
Wednesday in Great Lent: Liturgy
of Presanctified Gifts 7:00 PM

Friday: Mol. to the Cross 6:00 AM

Saturday: Great Vespers 5:00 PM

Sunday: Matins (Orthros) 8:45 AM

Divine Liturgy 10:00 AM



***Please note that attendance is currently limited by restrictions dictated by local response to the COVID-19 pandemic; if you are currently not assigned to an attendance group, please contact outreach@apostlethomas.org for information on when you may attend.**

April 11, 2021 | St. John Climacus (4th Sunday in Lent)

On the Fourth Sunday of the Fast, we celebrate the memory of our Holy Father John, the author of *The Ladder*.

John, who when alive in the flesh was dead, lives eternally, though he appears a breathless corpse. He left a writing, in which he shows a Ladder of Ascent, the journey of his own ascent.

This Father, at the age of sixteen, and being shrewd of mind, offered himself as a most sacred sacrifice to God, after making the ascent to Mount Sinai. He then arose after nineteen years and entered the arena of hesychasm, five semeia away from the place where Saint Kyriakos had struggled in asceticism. He took over a monastery by the name of Thola, where he spent forty years in perpetual yearning, ever ablaze with the fire of Divine love. He would eat everything that was permitted, without reproach, by the monastic profession, but in very small quantities and not to satiety, and in this way, I reckon, he very wisely broke the horn of vanity. But what mind could recount the fountain of his tears? He partook of sleep as much as was necessary to avoid damaging the fabric of his mind by

keeping vigil; his way of life consisted of unceasing prayer and unimaginable longing for God. Having lived a God-pleasing life by all these accomplishments and written *The Ladder*, in which he set forth most beneficial teachings, he reposed worthily in the Lord at the age of eighty, in the year 603 A.D., leaving behind many other writings. His memory is celebrated on the 30th of March; but it is also celebrated today, perhaps because in monasteries it is customary to read *The Ladder* from the beginning of the holy Fast. (from johnsanidopoulos.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

Why does the Church place this Saint in the middle of the Fast, as the most holy image, so that all would behold him? Saint John of the Ladder. Who is he? He is the man who experienced and wrote the *Ladder of Paradise*, who experienced the ascent of man from hell to heaven, to paradise. He experienced the ladder from earth to heaven, the ladder that extends from the bottom of the hell of man to the peak of paradise. He experienced and wrote. A very educated man, well studied. A man who led his soul along the path of Christ, entirely leading it from hell to paradise, from the devil to God, from sin to sinlessness, and who in a divinely wise way recorded this journey, namely what takes place when a man fights with each devil that is behind sin.

The devil fights us with sin, both you and I, my brothers and sisters. He fights against you with every sin. Do not fool yourself, do not think that a small and weak force attacks you. No! He attacks you! Even if it is a grimy thought, only a thought, know that he is rushing on you. A thought of pride, a thought of desire, a thought of avarice, an innumerable multitude of thoughts come upon you from every side. And you, what are you?

O, Ladder of Paradise! How, Father John, were you able to make this ladder from paradise stand between earth and heaven? Did not the demons tear it down, cut it or break it? No! His fasting was a flame, a fire, an inferno. What devil could endure it? All fled panic stricken, all the demons fled being chased away by his glorious and divine prayers, all the demons fled terrified by his fasting, all the demons disappeared by his fiery and fervent prayer.

The Ladder of Paradise! What is it? It is the holy virtues. The holy evangelical virtues: humility, faith, fasting, gentleness, patience, kindness, goodness, compassion, truthfulness, the love for Christ, the confession of Christ, suffering for the sake of Christ. These and many other New Testament holy virtues. Every command of Christ, my brethren, is a virtue. Do you keep them? Do you apply them? Fasting is a holy virtue, it is a step on the ladder from earth to heaven. Fasting, blessed fasting, like the entire ladder leads from earth to heaven.

Each virtue is a small paradise. Each virtue nourishes your soul, making it blessed, and brings down into your soul divine, heavenly rest. Each virtue is a gold and diamond step on the ladder of salvation, the ladder that unites earth and heaven, that stretches out from your own hell to your own paradise. This is why none of them are ever on their own. Faith in our Lord Jesus Christ is never on its own. It is manifested by prayer, by fasting, by almsgiving, by humility, by suffering on behalf of one's neighbor. Not only does it manifest itself this way but it also lives every virtue, because the other virtue exists. Faith lives with prayer, prayer lives with fasting, fasting is nourished by prayer, fasting is nourished by love, love is nourished by compassion. Thus every virtue is alive through the other. And when one virtue resides in your soul, all the others follow, all will slowly emerge and grow through it and with it.

Yes, the ladder of paradise depends on you. Let's say I fast with fear of God, with reverence, with mourning, with tears. But then I give up on it. There, I began to build the ladder and I myself tore it down, I broke it. And you, you fast often, and are temperate with every physical food. But, at the time of fasting, you allow sin to dwell in your soul, and allow various unclean thoughts and desires sprout in your soul. It belongs to you to immediately chase them far away with prayer, with mourning, with reading or with any other exercise. If you, however, although you physically fast, nourish your soul with some sin or some hidden passion, then you, although you began to build each step one by one with fasting from earth to heaven, you yourself will pull it down and destroy it.

Fasting requires compassion, humility and gentleness. They all go together. It is like a group of builders, whose head is prayer. This is the master builder, the architect, the chief engineer of our spiritual life, our spiritual desire, the ladder that we will make stand between earth and heaven. Prayer occupies the first place. When prayer becomes established in your heart, and it is inflamed with an unquenchable thirst for the Lord, when it continuously sees Him, continuously senses Him, then with prayer you import into your soul all the other virtues. Then the engineer (prayer) has excellent craftsmen, and quickly builds marvelous ladders from earth to heaven, the ladders of your gradual ascent to God, towards your perfection. When you have power, powerful prayer, then no type of fasting will be difficult for you, no type of love will be impossible. Holy evangelical love!

Prayer sanctifies everything within you, your every exercise, your every thought, your every feeling, your every mood. Prayer! A divine power, which the Lord gave us to sanctify whatever is within us, in our souls. Prayer will unite you with the Most Compassionate Lord, and He will pour into your heart compassion for every person, for the sinner, for the brother who is weak like you, that falls like you, but also can get up like you; who yet needs your help, your brotherly help, your

prayerful help, your ecclesiastical help. Then, when you give help, without a doubt you will build your own ladder, the ladder that leads from your hell to your paradise; then, with certainty in your heart you will ascend step by step, from virtue to virtue, and you will arrive at the top of the ladder, Heaven, and you will step down onto Heaven, you will step down onto heavenly Paradise.

We have everything, you and I: nine Beatitudes, nine holy evangelical virtues. This is the gospel of fasting, the gospel of Saint John of the Ladder. Virtues, my brethren, great virtues. The difficult ascetic practices of fasting, prayer and humility, were presented by the Lord in the Beatitudes. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven" (Matt. 5:3).

Humility! This is the beginning of the Christian life, the beginning of our faith, the beginning of our virtues, the beginning of our ascent to Heaven, the foundation of our ladder. Lord, I am a nothing. You are everything! I nothing, You everything! My mind is nothing before Your Mind, my spirit is nothing before Your Spirit, my heart, my knowledge... O nothing, nothing before Your knowledge Lord! I, I, nothing, nothing, and behind it countless nothings. This is what I am before You, Lord. Humility! This is the first holy virtue, the first Christian virtue. Everything begins from this.

But the Christians of this world, who build this ladder of our salvation, are always in danger from unclean forces. What are these? Sins, our sins, our passions. And behind these are the devil. Just as the holy virtues build the heavenly ladder between earth and heaven, so do our sins build a ladder to hell. Every sin. If there are sins in your soul, be careful. If you hold hate in your soul for one, two, three, five days, notice into what kind of a hell your soul has changed into. It is the same if you hold anger, avarice, obscene desire. And what are you doing? Indeed, you are making for yourself a ladder to hell.

But the Good Lord gives us an amazing example. Here, in the middle of the Fast, is displayed the great and wondrous Saint John of the Ladder. He entirely shines with the holy evangelical virtues. We see him ascend quickly and wisely the ladder of paradise, which he made to stand between earth and heaven. As a teacher, as a holy guide, he gives us Christians his *Ladder* as a model so that we may ascend from hell to Paradise, from the devil to God, from earth to Heaven.

I pray that our merciful and great Holy Father John of the Ladder, will influence us in our struggles against all our sins with the aim of the holy virtues; that we may also build with his help our own ladder and following him we will arrive at the Kingdom of Heaven, Paradise, where there exists all heavenly rests, all eternal joys, where together with him we will glorify the King of all those good things, the

Eternal King of the Heavenly Kingdom, our Lord Jesus Christ, to Whom belongs all glory and honor now and forever and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

– St. Justin Popovich, *Homily on the Fourth Sunday in Lent*

Also Commemorated Today: Hieromartyr Antipas

The Hieromartyr Antipas, a disciple of the holy Apostle John the Theologian, was bishop of the Church of Pergamum during the reign of the emperor Nero. During these times, everyone who would not offer sacrifice to the idols lived under threat of either exile or execution by order of the emperor.

While St. John, to whom the Lord revealed the future judgment of the world and of Holy Church, was imprisoned on the island of Patmos, he wrote: “And to the angel of the Church of Pergamum write: the words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword. I know where you live, where the throne of Satan is, and you cleave unto My Name, and have not renounced My faith, even in those days when Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwells” (Rev 2:12-13).

By his personal example, firm faith and constant preaching about Christ, St. Antipas began to turn the people of Pergamum from offering sacrifice to idols. The pagan priests reproached the bishop for leading the people away from their ancestral gods, and they demanded that he stop preaching about Christ and offer sacrifice to the idols instead. St. Antipas calmly answered that he was not about to serve the demons that fled from him, a mere mortal. He said he worshiped the Lord Almighty, and he would continue to worship the Creator of all, with His Only-Begotten Son, and the Holy Spirit. The pagan priests retorted that their gods existed from of old, whereas Christ was not from of old but was crucified under Pontius Pilate as a criminal. The saint replied that the pagan gods were the work of human hands and that everything said about them was filled with iniquities and vices. He steadfastly confessed his faith in the Son of God, incarnate of the Most Holy Virgin. The enraged pagan priests dragged the Hieromartyr Antipas to the temple of Artemis and threw him into a red-hot copper bull, where they usually put sacrifices to the idols. In the red-hot furnace the martyr prayed loudly to God, imploring Him to receive his soul and to strengthen the faith of the Christians.

He went to the Lord peacefully, as if he were going to sleep (+ 68). At night Christians took the body of the Hieromartyr Antipas, which was untouched by the fire. They buried him at Pergamum. His tomb became a font of miracles and healings from various sicknesses. (*from oca.org*)

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In Your Prayers – Please Remember... His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch BARTHOLOMEW, His Eminence Metropolitan GREGORY, Fr. Joseph & Family, Greek Orthodox Archbishop Paul Yazigi of Aleppo, Syriac Orthodox Archbishop Yohanna Ibrahim of Aleppo, His Grace Bishop Neofitos of Nyeri & Mt. Kenya, Fr. John & Pani Betty Jean Baranik, Presbyteria Katie Baker & family, Santiago Alzugaray, Patty Blaydoe, Jeffrey Carey, Tatyana & Slava Chumak & family, Xenia Chilkowich, Jon Church, Ramius Connour, Luke & Marlena Cooper, Tina Crull, Mary Diane David, Ron Dominiecki, Linda A. Georgiev, Heather Himler, John Homick, Howl family, Helen Janowiak, John M. Janowiak, Tucker Karl & family, Robert & Pam Karpin, Andrew Kinn, Kopan family, Brian, Helen, Luke & Mia Mahony, Valentina Makowelski, Susan Matula, Anna Meinhold, Dn. Henry Middleton, David & Kathryn Newman, Bobby Nutter & Family, Henry & Lisa Osborne, Nicholas Pavlik, Westin Perry & Parents, John Reece, Mary Reed, Chris & Kaitlin Rixey, Jerry Von Ronne, Anne Rosario, James, Theodore & Christina Ristas, Robinson Family, Samson Family, Sharon Sheptak, Bernie Takabayashi & family, Sandy Tucker, Dawn & Faith Ulmschneider, Joe & Darlene Waters, Christine, Jo, Marshall, Nathaniel, Dcn. Nectaros & Ia, the Syrian Christians displaced by war, Mother Virginia Marie & the Carmelite Nuns of Port Tobacco, and those in need of our prayers. (Please advise Fr. Joseph of changes.)