



# HOLY TRINITY

## ROMANIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH



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# CHURCH BULLETIN

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## Sunday of Saint John Climacus

### Gospel Reading Marc 9: 17– 32

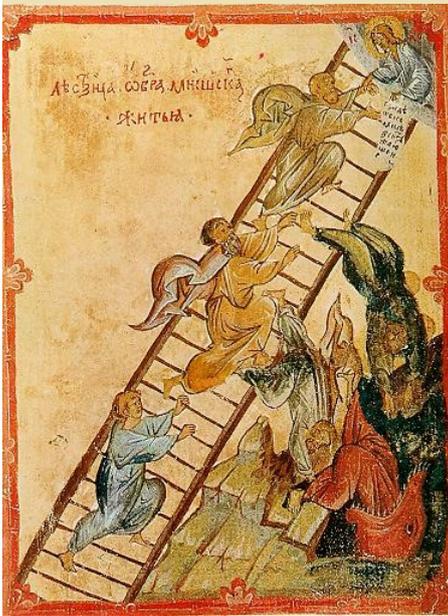
*At that time*, someone from the crowd answered him, ‘Teacher, I brought you my son; he has a spirit that makes him unable to speak; and whenever it seizes him, it dashes him down; and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid; and I asked your disciples to cast it out, but they could not do so.’ He answered them, ‘You faithless generation, how much longer must I be among you? How much longer must I put up with you? Bring him to me.’ And they brought the boy to him. When the spirit saw him, immediately it threw the boy into convulsions, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth. Jesus\* asked the father, ‘How long has this been happening to him?’ And he said, ‘From childhood. It has often cast him into the fire and into the water, to destroy him; but if you are able to do anything, have pity on us and help us.’ Jesus said to him, ‘If you are able!—All things can be done for the one who believes.’ Immediately the father of the

child cried out, ‘I believe; help my unbelief!’ When Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, ‘You spirit that keep this boy from speaking and hearing, I command you, come out of him, and never enter him again!’ After crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out, and the boy was like a corpse, so that most of them said, ‘He is dead.’ But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he was able to stand. When he had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately, ‘Why could we not cast it out?’ He said to them, ‘This kind can come out only through prayer.’ They went on from there and passed through Galilee. He did not want anyone to know it; for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, ‘The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again.’ But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him.

### Apostle Reading Hebrews 6: 13 – 20

*Brethren*, when God made a promise to Abraham, because he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, saying, ‘I will surely bless you and multiply you.’ And thus Abraham, having patiently endured, obtained the promise. Human beings, of course, swear by someone greater than themselves, and an oath given as confirmation puts an end to all dispute. In the same way, when God desired to show even more clearly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he

guaranteed it by an oath, so that through two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible that God would prove false, we who have taken refuge might be strongly encouraged to seize the hope set before us. We have this hope, a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters the inner shrine behind the curtain, where Jesus, a forerunner on our behalf, has entered, having become a high priest for ever according to the order of Melchizedek.



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Synaxarion; Sunday April 7, 2019 (Saint John Climacus Sunday): Holy Martyr Kaliopius and Akylina; Holy Hierarch George the Confessor, Bishop of Mitilena; Saint Tikhon of Alaska

## Pastoral Message from HE Metropolitan Nicolae Condrea

Reverend Fathers,  
Esteemed members of the Parish  
Councils,  
Beloved Brothers and Sisters in the  
Lord,

Both in the United States and in more and more nations throughout the world the emergence of the Coronavirus has created a situation that is altering our normal way of life. Everyone is being tested, even those of us who have faith in God's mercy. As Christians we are called to something more, to demonstrate this faith through our patience and love for one another, especially the vulnerable among us. The Church has always respected and valued persons gifted with the grace of healing. We should listen those entrusted with guarding public health. Even as we know that God can and does work wonders, we also know that we should never "put God to the test."

Yesterday, 12 March 2020, I convened an extraordinary teleconference session of the Eparchial Council of our Romanian Orthodox Metropolia of the Americas in order to evaluate the present situation, and make recommendations regarding the spiritual life of our communities in those places effected by the epidemic. We would like to share with you the following information:

Presently, the situation in the United States is: 41 have died and over 1,600 persons have been infected (the report of the CDC as of 03/13/2020). The virus is in 47 states, including the District of Columbia, and the most affected areas are in Washington State (the Seattle area) with over 457 sickened, New York State (NYC) with 328, and the State of California (primarily Santa Clara) with 198 cases.

As a result, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), at the Federal level, as well as the agencies of the states most effected by COVID-19, have adopted steps follow.

After consulting the members of the Eparchial Council, we are offering the following spiritual guidelines for the parishes under the jurisdiction of our Metropolia, in the United States, as well as in the nations of Latin America:



First of all, we urge all of you: clergy, monastics, and faithful, to direct your firm prayers to our Savior Jesus Christ, the Physician of our souls and bodies, and to ask for the intercessions of the Most Holy Theotokos, and all the Saints, to preserve and defend us against this epidemic. We should similarly pray for all those infected and their families, as well as the medical teams engaged in caring for those sick;

You should also add to the services, at the Litany of Fervent Supplication, special petitions in times of epidemic illness, as is found at the back of the Liturghierul. And, in those places where there are Holy Relics, you should bless the faithful with the Reliquary in which these Holy Relics have been placed;

The faithful should sign themselves daily, with the sign of the Cross, as well as their children, along with signing the Cross over their food and drink;

We recommend that as soon as possible the Mystery of Holy Unction be celebrated in every parish of our Metropolia. The faithful should then take the Oil they receive from this Mystery and anoint themselves and their children daily, for the healing of their souls and bodies, with the sign of the Cross on their forehead, throat, and hands;

Each morning, before one has eaten, the faithful should take from the anaphora and drink from their reserve of Holy Water, and also sprinkle their homes in the sign of the Cross. We urge the parishes to prepare the Holy Bread (Prescura) as hygienically as possible, as well as the Anaphora (Antidoron) for distribution to the faithful. A person specially designated by the priest should be the only one who prepares the Anaphora wearing gloves in order to distribute it to those present;

One should pray the Lord's Prayer as often as possible, as well as the Jesus Prayer: Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on us and your world, with our thoughts directed to all those suffering or who are seized by anxiety and fear;

Each WEDNESDAY EVENING, at 9pm EDT; 8pm CDT, and 6pm PST, until this pandemic passes, the clergy and the faithful of the parishes of our Metropolia are asked to read the Paraklesis to the Theotokos in their homes.

In addition to the spiritual direction given above, we also have some general guidelines that are extremely necessary in order to combat this pandemic:

A notice — in both English and Romanian — should be placed at the entrance to the Church with the CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) recommendations for preventing becoming ill with the Novel Coronavirus Covid-19 (thorough hand and face washing with soap and water, covering mouth and nose for those coughing or sneezing, frequent disinfecting of objects and surfaces, maintain “social” distances of 6ft between persons, etc.). Please find attached the materials and recommendations. Detailed measures that can be taken may be found on the CDC site at: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/.../prevention.html>.

At the parish level, when possible, there should be consultation with competent medical personnel to identify appropriate measures to prevent the spread of Novel Coronavirus (i.e., persons who appear to have a cold, should be advised to stay at home; a recommendation by the priest to persons suspected of having the flu or this virus who regularly come to Church, to seek medical attention; to disinfect the accesses and hallways of the facility and to air-out the Church and building), also to disinfect the liturgical area before and after each service;

A place at the entrance of the Church should be designated for persons to sanitize their hands, with a proper product;

Measures established by the civil authorities should be respected and cooperated with, at the same time assuring religious liberty for the faithful to participate in the liturgical life of the Church and to receive religious assistance in the church and their homes. The CDC has created a set of regulations for religious organizations to prepare for and manage this pandemic. We ask you to review all of these measures at the link below:

<https://www.cdc.gov/.../20.../community/organizations/index.html>

Where possible, the Parishes should establish a weekly program where the priests might be able to respond to all the requests of the faithful for Confession, Communion, and various prayers, in order to lessen the crowding of faithful in the Church;

Toward the end of the service, before the Dismissal, special prayers should be read for repentance, cessation of the present epidemic, for the recovery of those ill, and for the spiritual strengthening of medical teams and the persons working for preventing and combating the epidemic.

Before the Dismissal of either the Divine Liturgy, Vespers, or Compline, the priest says: Let us Pray to the Lord! The faithful respond: Lord have mercy! Then the priest, facing east, reads this prayer on the solea:

*Lord our God, You who are rich in mercy, and with careful wisdom direct our lives, listen to our prayer, receive our repentance for our sins, bring an end to this new infectious disease, this new epidemic, just as you averted the punishment of your people in the time of David the King. You who are the Doctor of our souls and bodies, grant restored health to those who have been seized by this*

*illness, raising them from their bed of suffering, so that they might glorify You, Merciful Savior, and to those who are healthy keep them from every sickness. By your grace, Lord, bless, strengthen, and preserve, all those who out of love and sacrifice care for the sick, either in their homes or in the hospitals. Remove all sickness and suffering from your people, and teach us to value life and health as gifts from You. Give us Your peace, O God, and fill our hearts with unflinching faith in Your protection, hope in Your help, and love for You and our neighbor. For Yours it is to have mercy on us and save us, O our God, and to You we give glory: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, now and forever, to the ages of ages. The faithful respond: Amen.*

We would suggest that the parish priests and members of the parish councils collaborate with other Orthodox churches in their area, the Honorary Consuls of



Romania, and other associations and foundations in the creation of committees to assist the elderly in their respective communities who might be living alone, as well as those with compromised immune systems who might become isolated in their homes. We know from CDC information that the elderly and persons with compromised immunity are advised to limit their exposure to the public, in stores, public spaces of all types, buses, trains, etc. Similarly, the CDC recommends voluntary home quarantining for other persons, who seem to be perfectly healthy, if it is presumed that they have come in contact with a possibly infected person. After they have contacted their family physician for a personalized action plan, and the person if cannot leave their home, or has the need for deliveries of necessities, these committees could be of help. We also suggest that the priest regularly contact by telephone persons in the parish over 65, checking on them, and responding to whatever they might need, and ensuring them that they are remembered in our prayers at the Divine Liturgy and the other Holy Services.

Religious Education Classes should not be suspended, but the parish priest in collaboration with the director of parish religious education and the teachers should take special care to ensure that the spaces have been sanitized and measure implement to guarantee the children's safety.

The clergy do not have the blessing to grant interviews to the press. Rather, they should direct all these inquiries to official communications from the Metropolia. Finally, we again urge you to pray. Pray for those who are sick. Pray for those who are ministering to them. Pray for those who have been entrusted with directing this effort to contain and eliminate this illness, in the government and public health organizations. Pray for the medical researchers and the doctors who are searching for a vaccine. Pray for those who are frightened, and who need us to console them. And, we should pray for one another!

God, who is merciful and loving, will not abandon us. He will, as He always has, rescue and comfort us!

With Hierarchical blessing and concern,

† **Archbishop and Metropolitan Nicolae**



## **HOLY TRINITY'S Liturgical Schedule from March 28 to April 5, 2020**

### **Saturday March 28 (Soul Saturday):**

9:00 am - Matins

9:30 am - Holy Liturgy

11:00 am - Memorial Service

### **Sunday March 29 (St. John Climacus Sunday - the 4th Sunday of the Great Fast):**

9:00 am - Matins

10:00 am - Holy Liturgy

### **Saturday April 4 (Soul Saturday):**

9:00 am - Matins

9:30 am - Holy Liturgy

11:00 am - Memorial Service

### **Sunday April 5 (St Mary of Egypt Sunday - the 5th Sun- day of the Great Fast) :**

9:00 am - Matins

10:00 am - Holy Liturgy



## St John Climacus

From his life, written by Daniel, a monk of Raithu, soon after his death, and from his own works. (See Bulteau, *Hist. Monast. d'Orient, and d'Andilly*, or rather his nephew, Le Maitre, in his life prefixed to the French translation of his works. See also Jos. Assemani, in *Cal. Univ. ad 30 Martii*, t. vi. p. 213.)

St John, generally distinguished by the appellation of Climacus, from his excellent book entitled *Climax*, or the Ladder to Perfection, was born about the year 525, probably in Palestine. By his extra-ordinary progress in the arts and sciences he obtained very young the surname of the Scholastic. But at sixteen years of age he renounced all the advantages which the world promised him to dedicate himself to God in a religious state, in 547. He retired to Mount Sinai, which, from the time of the disciples of St. Anthony and St. Hilarion, had been always peopled by holy men, who, in imitation of Moses, when he received the law on that mountain, lived in the perpetual contemplation of heavenly things. Our novice, fearing the danger of dissipation and relaxation to which numerous communities are generally more exposed than others, chose not to live in the great monastery on the summit, but in an hermitage on the descent of the mountain, under the discipline of Martyrius, an holy ancient anchoret. By silence he curbed the insolent itch of talking about every-thing, an ordinary vice in learned men, but usually a mark of pride and self-sufficiency. By perfect humility and obedience he banished the dangerous desire of self-complacency in his actions. He never contradicted, never disputed with anyone. So perfect was his submission that he seemed to have no self-will. He undertook to sail through the deep sea of this mortal life securely, under the direction of a prudent guide, and shunned those rocks which he could not have escaped, had he presumed to steer alone, as he tells us (Gr. 1).

From the visible mountain he raised his heart, without interruption, in all his actions, to God, who is invisible; and, attentive to all the motions of his grace, studied only to do his will. Four years he spent in the trial of his own strength, and in learning the obligations of his state, before he made his religious profession, which was in the twentieth year of his age. In his writings he severely condemns engagements made by persons too young, or



before a sufficient probation. By fervent prayer and fasting he prepared himself for the solemn consecration of himself to God, that the most intense fervour might make his holocaust the more perfect; and from that moment he seemed to be renewed in spirit; and his master admired the strides with which, like a mighty giant, the young disciple advanced daily more and more towards God, by self-denial, obedience, humility, and the uninterrupted exercises of divine love and prayer.

In the year 560, and the thirty-fifth of his age, he lost Martyrius by death; having then spent nineteen years in that place in penance and holy contemplation. By the advice of a prudent director,

he then embraced an eremitical life in a plain called Thole, near the foot of Mount Sinai. His cell was five miles from the church, probably the same which had been built a little before, by order of the Emperor Justinian, for the use of the monks at the bottom of this mountain, in honour of the Blessed Virgin, as Procopius mentions (Procop. 1.5 de aedif. Justin.). Thither he went every Saturday and Sunday to assist, with all the other anchorets and monks of that desert, at the holy office and at the celebration of the divine mysteries, when they all communicated. His diet was very sparing, though, to shun ostentation and the danger of vainglory, he ate of everything that was allowed among the monks of Egypt, who universally abstained from flesh, fish, &c. Prayer was his principal employment; and he practiced what he earnestly recommends to all Christians, that in all their actions, thoughts, and words they should keep themselves with great fervour in the presence of God, and direct all they do to his holy will (St. Jo. Clim. gr. 27, n. 67). By habitual contemplation he acquired an extraordinary purity of heart, and such a facility of lovingly beholding God in all his works that this practice seemed in him a second nature. Thus he accompanied his studies with perpetual prayer. He assiduously read the holy scriptures and fathers, and was one of the most learned doctors of the church. But, to preserve the treasure of humility, he concealed, as much as possible, both his natural and acquired talents, and the extraordinary graces with which the Holy Ghost enriched his soul. By this secrecy he fled from the danger of vainglory, which, like a leech, sticks to our best actions and, sucking from them its

nourishment, robs us of their fruit. As if this cell had sufficiently remote from the eyes of men, St. John frequently retired into a neighbouring cavern which he had made in the rock, where no one could come to disturb his devo-tions or interrupt his tears. So ardent were his charity and compunction, that his eyes seemed two fountains, which scarce ever ceased to flow; and his continual sighs and groans to heaven, under the weight of the miseries inseparable from his moral pilgrimage, were not to be equaled by the vehemency of the cries of those who suffer from knives and fire. Overcome by importunities, he admitted a holy anchoret named Moyses to live with him as his disciple.

God bestowed on St. John an extraordinary grace of healing the spiritual disorders of souls. Among others, a monk called Isaac was brought almost to the brink of despair by most violent temptations of the flesh. He addressed himself to St. John, who perceived by his tears how much he underwent from that conflict and struggle which he felt within himself. The servant of God commended his faith, and said, "My son, let us have recourse to God by prayer." They accordingly prostrated themselves together on the ground in fervent supplication for a deliverance, and from that time the infernal serpent left Isaac in peace. Many others resorted to St. John for spiritual advice; but the devil excited some to jealousy, who censured him as one who, out of vanity, lost much time in unprofitable discourse. The saint took this accusation, which was a mere calumny, in good part, and as a charitable admonition; he therefore imposed on himself a rigorous silence for near a twelvemonth. This, his humility and modesty, so much astonished his calumniators that they joined the rest of the monks in beseeching him to reassume his former function of giving charitable advice to all that resorted to him for it, and not to bury that talent of science which he had received for the benefit of many. He who knew not what it was to contradict others, with the same humility and deference again opened his mouth to instruct his neighbour in the rules of perfect virtue, in which office, such was the reputation of his wisdom and experience, that he was regarded as another Moses in that holy place.

St. John was now seventy-five years old, and had spent forty of them in his hermitage, when, in the year 600, he was unanimously chosen Abbot of Mount Sinai, and superior-general of all the monks and hermits in that country. Soon after he was raised to this dignity, the people of Palestine and Arabia, in the time of a great drought and famine, made their application to him as to another Elias, begging him to intercede with God in their behalf. The saint failed not, with great earnestness,

to recommend their distress to the Father of mercies, and his prayer was immediately recompensed with abundant rains. St. Gregory the Great, who then sat in St. Peter's chair, wrote to our holy abbot (St. Greg. l. 11; Ep. 1, l. 12; Ep. 16 t. 2, p. 1091), recommending himself to his prayers, and sent him beds, with other furniture and money, for his hospital, for the use of pilgrims near Mount Sinai. John, who had used his utmost endeavours to decline the pastoral charge when he saw it laid upon him, neglected no means which might promote the sanctification of all those who were entrusted to his care. That posterity might receive some share in the benefit of his holy instructions, John, the learned and virtuous Abbot of Raithu, a monastery situate towards the Red Sea, entreated him by that obedience he had ever practiced, even with regard to his inferiors, that he would draw up the most necessary rules by which fervent souls might arrive at Christian perfection. The saint answered him that nothing but extreme humility could have moved him to write to so miserable a sinner, destitute of every sort of virtue; but that he received his commands with respect, though far above his strength, never considering his own insufficiency. Wherefore, apprehensive of falling into death by disobedience, he took up his pen in haste, with great eagerness mixed with fear, and set himself to draw some imperfect outlines, as an unskillful painter, leaving them to receive from him, as a great master, the finishing strokes. This produced the excellent work which he called "Climax; or, the Ladder of religious Perfection." This book, being written in sentences, almost in the manner of aphorisms, abounds more in sense than words. A certain majestic simplicity- an inexpressible unction and spirit of humility, joined with conciseness and perspicuity-very much enhance the value of this performance; but its chief merit consists in the sublime sentiments and perfect description of all Christian virtues which it contains. The author confirms his precepts by several edifying examples, as of obedience and penance (Gr. 4 and 5). In describing a monastery of three hundred and thirty monks which he had visited near Alexandria, in Egypt, he mentions one of the principal citizens of that city, named Isidore, who, petitioning to be admitted into the house, said to the abbot, "As iron is in the hands of the smith, so am I in your hands." The abbot ordered him to remain without the gate, and to prostrate himself at the feet of everyone that passed by, begging their prayers for his soul struck with a leprosy. Thus he passed seven years in profound humility and patience. He told St. John that, during the first year, he always considered himself as a slave condemned for his sins, and sustained violent conflicts; the second year he passed in tranquillity and confidence; and the third with relish and pleasure in his humiliations. So great was his

virtue that the abbot determined to present him to the bishop in order to be promoted to the priesthood, but the humility of the holy penitent prevented the execution of that design; for, having begged at least a respite, he died within ten days. St. John could not help admiring the cook of this numerous community, who seemed always recollected, and generally bathed in tears amidst his continual occupation, and asked him by what means he nourished so perfect a spirit of compunction, in the midst of such a dissipating laborious employment. He said that serving the monks, he represented to himself that he was serving not men, but God in his servants; and that the fire he always had before his eyes reminded him of that fire which will burn souls for all eternity. The moving description which our author gives of the monastery of penitents called the Prison, above a mile from the former, hath been already abridged in our language. John the Sabaite told our saint, as of a third person, that seeing himself respected in his monastery, he considered that this was not the way to satisfy for his sins; wherefore, with the leave of his abbot, he repaired to a severe monastery in Pontus, and after three years saw in a dream a schedule of his debts, to the amount in appearance of one hundred pounds of gold, of which only ten were cancelled. He therefore repeated often to himself, "Poor Antiochus, thou hast still a great debt to satisfy." After passing other thirteen years in contempt and the most fervent practices of penance, he deserved to see in a vision his whole debt blotted out. Another monk, in a grievous fit of illness, fell into a trance, in which he lay as if he had been dead for the space of an hour; but, recovering, he shut himself up in a cell, and lived a recluse twelve years, almost continually weeping, in the perpetual meditation of death. When he was near death, his brethren could only extort from him these words of edification, "He who hath death always before his eyes will never sin." John, Abbot of Raithu, explained this book of our saint by judicious comments, which are also extant. We have likewise a letter of St. John Climacus to the same person concerning the duties of a pastor, in which he exhorts him in correcting others to temper severity with mildness, and encourages him zealously to fulfil the obligations of his charge; for nothing is greater or more acceptable to God than to offer him the sacrifice of rational souls sanctified by penance and charity.

St. John sighed continually under the weight of his dignity during the four years that he governed the monks of Mount Sinai; and as he had taken upon him that burden with fear and reluctance, he with joy found means to resign the same a little before his death. Heavenly contemplation, and the continual exercise of divine love and praise, were his delight and comfort in his earthly pilgrimage: and in this imitation of the functions of the blessed spirits in heaven he placeth the essence of the monastic state (Gr.1). In his excellent

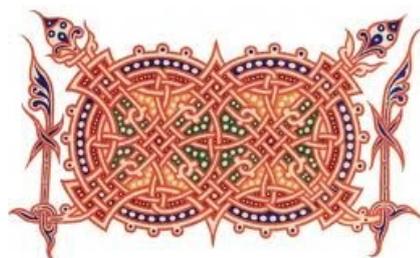
maxims concerning the gift of holy tears, the fruit of charity

(Gr. 7, 27, 30), we seem to behold a lively portraiture of his most pure soul. He died in his hermitage on the 30th day of March, in 605, being fourscore years old. His spiritual son, George, who had succeeded him in the abbacy, earnestly begged of God that he might not be separated from his dear master and guide; and followed him by a happy death within a few days. On several Greek commentaries on St. John Climacus's ladder, see Montfaucon, Biblioth. Coislina, pp. 305, 306.

St. John Climacus, speaking of the excellence and the effects of charity, does it with a feeling and energy worthy of such a subject: "A mother," says he (Grad. 30, n. 12), "feels less pleasure when she folds within her arms the dear infant whom she nourishes with her own milk than the true child of charity does when united as he incessantly is, to his God, and folded as it were in the arms of his heavenly Father (Gr n. 14).—Charity operates in some persons so as to carry them almost entirely out of themselves. It illuminates others, and fills them with such sentiments of joy, that they cannot help crying out: The Lord is my helper and my protector: in him hath my heart confided, and I have been helped And my flesh hath flourished again, and with my will I will give praise to him (Ps xxvii). This joy which they feel in their hearts, is reflected on their countenances; and when once God has united, or, as we may say, incorporated them with his charity, he displays in their exterior, as in the reflection of a mirror, the brightness and serenity of their souls: even as Moses, being honored with a sight of God, was encompassed round by his glory." St. John Climacus composed the following prayer to obtain the gift of charity: "My God, I pretend to nothing upon this earth, except to be so firmly united to you by prayer that to be separated from you may be impossible; let others desire riches and glory; for my part, I desire but one thing, and that is, to be inseparably united to you, and to place in you alone all my hopes of happiness and repose."

**Rev. Alban Butler**

(From Vol. III of "The Lives or the Fathers, Martyrs and Other Principal Saints". The 1864 edition published by D. & J. Sadlier, & Company)



## St John Climacus and the Ladder of Divine Ascent

More than once, brethren, the fact has been mentioned that on each Sunday in the Great Fast (i.e., Lent) there are other commemorations besides that of the Resurrection. Thus, on this day, the Church glorifies the righteous John of the Ladder, one of the greatest ascetics, which the Church, in speaking of them, calls "earthly angels and Heavenly men."

These great ascetics were extraordinary people. They commanded the elements; wild beasts willingly and readily obeyed them. For them, there were no maladies they could not cure. They walked on the waters as on dry land; all the elements of the world were subject to them, because they lived in God and had the power of grace to overcome the laws of terrestrial nature. One such ascetic was St. John of the Ladder.

He was surnamed "of the Ladder" (Climacus) because he wrote an immortal work, the "Ladder of Divine Ascent." In this work, we see how, by means of thirty steps, the Christian gradually ascends from below to the heights of supreme spiritual perfection. We see how one virtue leads to another, as a man rises higher and higher and finally attains to that height where there abides the crown of the virtues, which is called "Christian love."

Saint John wrote his immortal work especially for the monastics, but in the past his "Ladder" was always favorite reading in Russia for anyone zealous to live piously, though he were not a monk. Therein the Saint clearly demonstrates how a man passes from one step to the next.

Remember, Christian soul, that this ascent on high is indispensable for anyone who wishes to save his soul unto eternity. When we throw a stone up, it ascends until the moment when the propelling force ceases to be effectual.

So long as this force acts, the stone travels higher and higher in its ascent, overcoming the force of the earth's gravity. But when this force is spent and ceases to act, then, as you know, the stone does not remain suspended in the air. Immediately, it begins to fall, and the further it falls the greater the speed of its fall. This, solely according to the physical laws of terrestrial gravity.

So it is also in the spiritual life. As a Christian gradually ascends, the force of spiritual and ascetical labours lifts him on high. Our Lord Jesus Christ said: "Strive to enter in through the narrow gate." That is, the Christian ought to be an ascetic. Not only the monastic, but every Christian. He must take pains for his soul and his life. He must direct his life on the Christian path, and purge his soul of all filth and impurity. Now, if the Christian, who is ascending upon this ladder of spiritual perfection by his struggles and ascetic labours, ceases from this work and ascetic toil, his soul will not remain in its former condition; but, like the stone, it will fall to the earth. More and more quickly will it drop until, finally, if the man does not come to his

senses, it will cast him down into the very abyss of Hell.

It is necessary to remember this. People forget that the path of Christianity is indeed an ascetical labour. Last Sunday, we heard how the Lord said: "He that would come after Me, let him take up his cross, deny himself, and follow Me." The Lord said this with the greatest emphasis. Therefore, the Christian must be one who takes up his cross, and his life, likewise, must be an ascetic labour of bearing that cross. Whatever the outward circumstance of his life, be he monk or layman, it is of no consequence. In either case, if he does not force himself to mount upwards, then, of a certainty, he will fall lower and lower.

And in this regard, alas, people have confused thoughts. For example, a clergyman drops by a home during a fast. Cordially and thoughtfully, they offer him fast food (i.e., food prepared according to the rules of the Fast), and say: "For you, fast food, of course!" To this, one of our hierarchs customarily replies: "Yes, I am Orthodox. But who gave you permission not to keep the fasts?" All the fasts of the Church, all the ordinances, are mandatory for every Orthodox person. Speaking of monastics, such ascetics as St. John of the Ladder and those like him fasted much more rigorously than the Church prescribes; but this was a matter of their spiritual ardour, an instance of their personal ascetic labour. This the Church does not require of everyone, because it is not in accord with everyone's strength. But the Church DOES require of every Orthodox the keeping of those fasts which She has established.

Oftentimes have I quoted the words of Saint Seraphim, and once again shall I mention them. Once there came to him a mother who was concerned about how she might arrange the best possible marriage for her young daughter. When she came to Saint Seraphim for advice, he said to her: "Before all else, ensure that he, whom your daughter chooses as her companion for life, keeps the fasts. If he does not, then he is not a Christian, whatever he may consider himself to be." You see how the greatest saint of the Russian Church, Saint Seraphim of Sarov, a man who, better than we, knew what Orthodoxy is, spoke concerning the fasts?

Let us remember this. Saint John Climacus has described the ladder of spiritual ascent: then let us not forget that each Christian must ascend thereon. The great ascetics ascended like swiftly-flying eagles; we scarcely ascend at all. Nonetheless, let us not forget that, unless we employ our efforts in correcting ourselves and our lives, we shall cease our ascent, and, most assuredly, we shall begin to fall. Amen.

### Metropolitan Philaret Voznesensky

[From St. John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*,  
(Boston: Holy Transfiguration Monastery, 1978),  
pp. xxxi - xxxiii.]