

APRIL 11, 2021

ST. GEORGE GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH OF THE DESERT

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# THE LADDER

ST. JOHN OF THE LADDER



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– Fr. Theodore Pantels,  
Proistamenos (Pastor)  
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M.D.

**Holy Communion Order**

1. Please remain standing while following the directions of our ushers.
2. Ladies, kindly remove lipstick before receiving.
3. When receiving Holy Communion, make the Sign of the Cross, state your name (baptismal name), and naturally receive as if being fed.
4. Non-Orthodox Christians may not receive Holy Communion, but they may receive the Holy Bread at the end of the service.
5. All Orthodox Christians must be spiritually prepared to receive the Sacrament of Holy Communion. Please see the priest if you have any questions.

**THE ATTITUDE OF FASTING**

An overview of the book by St. John, whose memory we celebrate today (the Fourth Sunday of Lent), entitled, *Ladder of Divine Ascent*, shows a book listing 30 spiritual steps that lead to a life of heavenly blessings. These “steps” are like steps to a ladder leading “heavenward.” Hence, he is known as *St. John of the Ladder*.

Most of the spiritual steps that he lists are focused on our inner person, beginning with one’s decision to “renounce the world.” “All who have willingly left the things of the world, have certainly done so

*either for the sake of the future Kingdom, or because of the multitude of their sins, or for the love of God. If they were not moved by any of these reasons, their withdrawal from the world was unreasonable.”* (pg. 50). Having become emotionally detached from such things as greed, luxury and glory, one is ready to become humble and obedient to God, free from anger, willing to repent of sins, knowing that an account is to be given at the dread Judgment Seat of Christ.

Prayer and love go hand-in-hand and, as such, one continues to grow in the grace of divine love, ascending to the

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**THE REMEDIES FOR TWO KINDS OF SIN**

In today’s Gospel passage we read about two kinds of sins that our Savior confronted, as He cried out, “O faithless generation! How long am I to be with you?” The one sin is that of faithlessness on the part of the father of the boy stricken with the dumb spirit. The other sin is that of pride on the part of the Apostles.

The remedies for these two kinds of sin are found in the narrative itself. The boy’s father confessed his sin of unbelief, saying, “I believe! Help my unbelief!” These words add up to one’s desire to believe in our Savior’s love, but also a confession of a weakness of faith. The Apostles confessed that, *by themselves*, without Jesus, they were powerless to cure the father’s boy. “Why could we not cast it out?”

In both cases, the remedies are the same: *fasting* and *prayer*. Fasting is a discipline tied to the surrender of one’s self to God. In the one case, our belief is strengthened when we realize that we need to have a relationship with God through prayer. It is in this relationship that faith in God is built. In the other case, pride is cured when we humble ourselves before our Lord, realizing that, without Him, we can do nothing. Fasting is tied to the building up of one’s humility, provided it is accompanied with prayer for God’s guidance and strength.

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Μιά επισκόπηση του βιβλίου του Αγ. Ιωάννου, του οποίου την μνήμη εορτάζουμε σήμερα (Τέταρτη Κυριακή της Τεσσαρακοστής), με τίτλο, *Κλίμαξ της Θείας Αναβάσεως*, δείχνει ένα βιβλίο με 30 πνευματικά βήματα που οδηγούν προς μία ζωή ουράνιων ευλογιών. Αυτά τα «βήματα» είναι σαν βήματα μίας σκάλας που οδηγεί στο «παράδεισο». Ως εκ τούτου, είναι ο Άγιος γνωστός ως ο Άγιος Ιωάννης της Κλίμακος.

Τα περισσότερα από τα πνευματικά βήματα που απαριθμεί εστιάζονται στο εσωτερικό μας ύπαρξη, ξεκινώντας με την απόφασή μας να «παραιτηθούμε από τον κόσμο». «Όλοι που έχουν αφήσει πρόθυμα τα πράγματα του κόσμου, σίγουρα το έχουν κάνει είτε για χάρη του μελλοντικού Βασιλείου, είτε λόγω του πλήθους των αμαρτιών τους, είτε για την αγάπη του Θεού. Εάν δεν συγκινήθηκαν από κανέναν από αυτούς τους λόγους, η απόσυρσή τους από τον κόσμο ήταν παράλογη.» (σελ. 50). Έχοντας αποστασιοποιηθεί συναισθηματικά από πράγματα όπως η απληστία, η πολυτέλεια, και η δόξα, ο άνθρωπος είναι έτοιμος να γίνει ταπεινός και υπάκουος στον Θεό, απαλλαγμένος από θυμό και πρόθυμος να μετανοήσει για τις αμαρτίες, γνωρίζοντας ότι πρέπει να δοθεί απολογισμός επί του φοβερού βήματος του Χριστού.

Η μετάνοια γεννάει πίστη, αγνότητα και φιλανθρωπία, με αγάπη για τον Θεό και τον πλησίον μας. Η αγάπη είναι η βάση για προσευχή. Μάλιστα, η προσευχή και η αγάπη πηγαινούν μαζί αιωνίως, όπως το λέγει ο Αγ. Ιωάννης. «Δεν θα σταματήσουμε ποτέ να προχωρούμε στην αγάπη, είτε στο παρόν είτε στο μέλλον, προσθέτοντας συνεχώς φως πάνω στο φως.» (σελ. 225).

+Ο ΠΑΤΗΡ ΘΕΟΔΩΡΟΣ

heavenly way of life, even while living in this life on earth. “We shall never cease to advance in love, either in the present or in the future life, continually adding light upon light.” (pg. 225).

When we think about the on-going growth in our love for God and others, *fasting* and *prayer* take on their deep meanings. Fasting is a *spiritual attitude* of thanksgiving to God, and becomes a *living prayer*.

A common “thank you card” serves as an example: 1) It is a small sacrifice on our part -- and the sacrifice that we make in terms of time and effort is an image of fasting in terms of giving of ourselves to Christ. 2) The loving, thoughtful message that we write in the card is akin to the prayer that we offer in thanksgiving for our blessings.

In many ways the Divine Liturgy is our “thank you card” to our Savior. We prepare ourselves to approach Him by abstaining from self-centered ways and make the physical journey to His House. Such is the *spiritual attitude* of fasting. Then, we actually express thanksgiving. Such is *living prayer*. In St. Basil’s Liturgy we find these words, giving us our reason for living in gratitude: “...We give thanks to You...[You are] the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the great God and Savior, the Object of our hope...[For] through Him the Holy Spirit was made manifest, the Spirit of Truth, the gift of adoption, the foretaste of the future inheritance...”

Given the fabric of our modern society, we are each faced with a critical spiritual question: Are we to feel *entitled* to receiving blessings, or are we to be *grateful* for receiving blessings? Orthodox Christian Saints, like St. John of the Ladder were always grateful to our Lord and Savior for everything and offered prayers of thanksgiving to Him. Being grateful inspires us to pray and prayer strengthens our faith -- and faith helps us to give of ourselves for the salvation of others.

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#### **BIBLE STUDY –Tuesday April 13, 2021 - 10:00 a.m.**

**Please note: This Bible Study class will take place in-person outside on the patio outside our parish hall and will not be presented in a “zoom format.” The passage that we will be studying is:**

**St. Mark 10:32-45**

**ANNUAL PHILOPTOCHOS EASTER BAKE SALE:** Today, following the celebration of the Divine Liturgy, the ladies of our St. George Philoptochos Chapter will be taking orders for their **Annual Easter Bake Sale**. Tomorrow is the deadline for receiving orders for bake sale items.

**BOOK STORE DISPLAY:** Today is an opportunity to visit our **book store display**. We are giving away for free icons for parishioners’ homes. Any general donation toward our book store is always appreciated.



*"Shine within our hearts, loving Master, the pure light of Your divine knowledge and open the eyes of our minds that we may comprehend the message of Your Gospel. Instill in us, also, reverence for Your blessed commandments, so that having conquered sinful desires, we may pursue a spiritual life, thinking and doing all these things that are pleasing to You. For You are the Light of our souls and bodies and to You we give glory together with Your Father Who is without beginning and Your all-holy, good, and life-giving Spirit, now and forever and to the ages of ages. Amen"*

EPISTLE - Hebrews 6:13-20

Brethren, when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore to himself, saying, "Surely I will bless you and multiply you." And thus Abraham, having patiently endured, obtained the promise. Men indeed swear by a greater than themselves, and in all their disputes an oath is final for confirmation. So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he interposed with an oath, so that through two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible that God should prove false, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to seize the hope set before us. We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner shrine behind the curtain, where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.

GOSPEL - St. Mark 9:17-31

At that time, a man came to Jesus kneeling and saying: "Teacher, I brought my son to you, for he has a dumb spirit; and wherever 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, and they were not able." And he answered them, "O faithless generation, how long am I to be

with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him to me." And they brought the boy to him; and when the spirit saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth. And Jesus asked his father, "How long has he had this?" And he said, "From childhood. And it has often cast him into the fire and into the water, to destroy him; but if you can do anything, have pity on us and help us." And Jesus said to him, "If you can! All things are possible to him who believes." Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, "I believe; help my unbelief!" And when Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, "You dumb and deaf spirit, I command you, come out of him, and never enter him again." And 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 arose. And when he had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately, "Why could we not cast it out?" And he said to them, "This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer and fasting." They went on from there and passed through Galilee. And he would not have any one know it; for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, "The Son of man will be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him; and when he is killed, after three days he will rise."

**ANNOUNCEMENTS**

**MEMORIAL** - Today's Memorial Service is for the Eternal Life and Salvation for the servant of God, **Jim Alex (1 year)**, the beloved father of **Kathy Gauger** and **Valerie Kreuser**, father-in-law of **Chuck Gauger** and **George Kreuser**. May our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ grant Eternal Life and Salvation to **Jim Alex** and may He grant peace and comfort to **Kathy and Chuck Gauger** and **Valerie and George Kreuser**. MAY HIS MEMORY BE ETERNAL!

Today.....Metropolis-Wide Sunday School Program - 12:30 p.m. ("Zoom" format)  
Metropolis Philoptochos Kids 'n' Cancer Celebration - 2:00 p.m. ("Zoom" format)

Monday, April 12th.....Philoptochos Board Meeting - 11:30 a.m. (in-person; social distancing)

Tuesday, April 13th.....Bible Study - 10:00 a.m. (in-person; social distancing)

Wednesday, April 14th..Presanctified Divine Liturgy - 6:00 p.m.  
AHEPA Meeting - 6:30 p.m ("Zoom" format)

Friday, April 16th.....Presanctified Divine Liturgy - 9:00 a.m.  
Akathist Hymn- 6:00 p.m.