

Just as if a man were bound hand and foot with chains, and someone came and loosed his bands, and let him walk free without interference, so the Lord looses from its bonds the soul that is bound with the chains of death, and lets it go, and sets the mind free to walk at ease and unhindered into God's air.

Suppose a man were in the middle of a river in full flood, and overwhelmed by the water lay lifeless, drowned, with dreadful monsters all round him.

If another man, who is not used to swimming, should wish to save the one who fell in, he too is lost, and is drowned with him. Clearly there is need of a skilled swimmer, an expert, to go out into the depth of the water of the gulf, and dive, and bring up the drowned man there among the monsters.

The water itself, when it sees a man skilled and knowing how to navigate it, helps such a man, and bears him up to the surface.

The soul, in the same way, has been plunged and drowned in the abyss of darkness and the deep of death, and is dead and parted from God among dreadful monsters; and who is able to go down into those secret chambers and the depths of hell and death, except that expert Workman who fashioned the body?

In His own person He enters into two quarters, into the depth of hell, and into the deep gulf of the heart, where the soul with its thoughts is held fast by death, and brings up out of the darksome hole the Adam that lay dead.

Saint Macarius the Great

**Sunday 30 March 2014 is the
Sunday of St John Climacus**

Matins Gospel: John 20:1-10

Epistle: Hebrews 6:13-20

Gospel: Mark 9:17-31

Apolytikion:

With the streams of your tears you cultivated the barren desert, and with deep sighings from the heart you made your toils bring forth fruit a hundredfold, and you became a beacon, shining in the world by your wonders, our venerable Father John; intercede with Christ God that our souls may be saved.

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Readings and saints for this week:

Monday: Isaiah 37:33-38:6; Genesis 13:12-18; Proverbs 14:27-15:4
Hieromartyr Hypatius; Metropolitan Innocent of Moscow

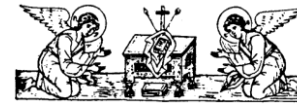
Tuesday: Isaiah 40:18-31; Genesis 15:1-15; Proverbs 15:7-19
Mary of Egypt; Martyrs Gerontius and Basilides

Wednesday: Isaiah 41:4-14; Genesis 17:1-9; Proverbs 15:20-16:9
Titus the Wonderworker; Theodora the Virgin-martyr of Palestine

Thursday: Isaiah 42:5-16; Genesis 18:20-33; Proverbs 16:17-17:17
Nicetas the Confessor; Joseph the Hymnographer

Friday: Isaiah 45:11-17; Genesis 22:1-18; Proverbs 17:17-18:5
George of Maleon; Plato the Studite

Saturday: Hebrews 9:1-7; Luke 1:39-49, 56
Claudius & Companions; Theodora the Righteous



Evangelion

A Bulletin of Orthodox Christian Faith

30 March 2014

**Archbishopric of Good Hope
Patriarchate of Alexandria & All Africa**

Lord, I Believe. Help my Unbelief!

Today, on the Sunday of Saint John Climacus, we hear the account of the healing of the boy with a dumb spirit. His father, desperate that he was going to destroy himself, had brought him to Jesus' disciples, but they had been unable to cast out the spirit. However, Jesus Christ declares that everything is possible for those who have faith, at which his father cried out: "I believe; help my unbelief."

This incident reminds us that the salvation that Jesus Christ offers us involves our healing. And this healing can involve more than we sometimes expect. We may not be possessed by spirits that try to throw us into the fire, but we have all been affected by a spirit of dumbness. Our human communication has been affected by the fall, we have lost the ability to speak as we should, and human speech has too often become marked by anger and aggression. And yet, if we are honest with ourselves, we know that this is not as it should be and that we long for healing.

We have already seen that we need faith – even faith in the midst of doubt – in order to be healed. But Christ also tells us that this sort of spirit "can be driven out only by prayer." It is in and through prayer that we discover the power of God in our lives. It is through the sustained practice of prayer that we gradually learn to have faith. It is through prayer that we can be healed of our distorted patterns of communication, for there is a direct link between our relationship to God and our relationships to those around us. True prayer leads us to a place where God can heal us. It enables us to lay aside the various competing noises that the world and our own disordered state throws at us, so that we may be touched by the healing power of God.



Abba Theodore of Pherme asked Abba Pambo, "Give me a word." With much difficulty he said to him, "Theodore, go and have pity on all, for through pity, one finds freedom of speech before God."

From the Sayings of the Desert Fathers

A Mercy of Peace, a Sacrifice of Praise

An introduction to the Divine Liturgy (continued)

We saw last week that at the heart of the Holy Anaphora, or Offering, the most sacred part of the Divine Liturgy, is the remembrance of what Jesus Christ has done for us. In remembering, in particular, the Last Supper that Jesus Christ celebrated with His Apostles, we become participants in this Mystical Supper. United with Him, we offer back to God the gifts that He has given us, for without Him, we have nothing to offer.

Immediately after the offering of the Eucharistic Gifts to the Father, the priest prays that the Holy Spirit will come upon them, and upon all of the faithful who are gathered, and change these gifts of bread and wine into the very Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. This prayer is called the Epiklesis, which means literally, the invocation.



The Epiklesis

Send down your Holy Spirit upon us and upon these gifts here set forth,

And make this bread the precious Body of your Christ,

And what is in this Cup the precious Blood of your Christ,

Changing them by your Holy Spirit,

So that those who partake of them may obtain vigilance of soul, forgiveness of sins, communion of the Holy Spirit, fullness of the Kingdom of heaven, freedom to speak in your presence, not judgement or condemnation.

As Orthodox Christians, we believe that the Holy Spirit is “present everywhere, filling all things.” Everything in life that is positive and good is accomplished with the help of the Holy Spirit. It is through Him that Jesus Christ became incarnate of the Holy Theotokos and He is the One who came upon the Church on the day of Pentecost. “He welds together the whole institution of the Church,” as we sing at Pentecost.

Just as the Divine Liturgy makes the events of the Last Supper present for us today, so too, by calling on the Holy Spirit, it makes the events of Pentecost present to us today. As Saint Nicholas Cabasilas says of the Epiclesis: “This moment in the Mystery manifests the moment of Pentecost.” This is why we do not only pray for the Holy Spirit to come upon the Gifts on the altar, but we also pray that He will come upon us, for it is by the constant gift of His presence that the Church herself is given life.



This Mystery is a work of the descent of the Holy Spirit, because He did not descend once only and then abandon us, but He is and will be with us forever ... It is He that performs the Mysteries through the hand and tongue of the priests.

Saint Nicholas Cabasilas

The Sunday of Saint John of the Ladder

Today the Church celebrates the Sunday of Saint John Climacus, or Saint John of the Ladder. He was a monk on Mount Sinai in the seventh century, having entered the monastery at the age of sixteen. He spent twenty years in strict asceticism as a hermit, but was forced to leave his hermitage when he was chosen as abbot. He was recognised as a wise spiritual father, and his book *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* has become a classic Orthodox text that guides and encourages all those on the ascetical way.

Today the Church holds up Saint John of the Ladder in order that his example may encourage us on our ascetical path during Lent. He is given to us an example of repentance who can inspire us and remind us that Christian life involves a struggle as we seek to discipline the demands of the flesh so that we may grow in likeness to Christ.

However, our asceticism is not simply something negative. The texts of the Church remind us that our acts of bodily asceticism are only valuable if they bear fruit in an inner transformation and the softening of our hardened hearts. And the example of Saint John reminds us that it is love that motivates our asceticism. As we pray at Vespers: “This is why thou dost entreat us: Love God so that ye may live in His eternal goodwill, and let nothing be set higher than this Love.”



This icon depicts our ascent to Christ in a visual way. While the demons seek to snatch us away from the path to salvation, we are assisted by the prayers of the saints.

Do not be surprised that you fall every day; do not give up, but stand your ground courageously. And assuredly, the angel who guards you will honour your patience.

Saint John of the Ladder

What is it that the God-man gives to man which no one else is capable of giving? It is victory over death, over sin, and over the devil, Eternal Life, Eternal Truth, Eternal Justice, Eternal Virtue, Eternal Love, Eternal Joy: the entire fullness of the Godhead and of Divine Perfection. As the Apostle tells us: the God-man gives to men ‘those things which God has prepared for those who love Him, which no eye has seen, which no ear has heard, and which have not entered the heart of man’ (1 Cor. 2:9).

In fact only He, the wondrous God-man, is the ‘one thing that is needed’ (cf. Luke 10:42) by man in all his worlds and in his every life. Therefore, only the God-man is justified in asking of us that which no one else has ever dared to ask: that we love Him more than we love parents, siblings, children, friends, the earth, the angels, anyone and everyone in all the worlds, visible and invisible (Matthew 10:37-39; Luke 14:26, Romans 8 31-39).

Saint Justin Popovich