

Abba Macarius was asked, 'How should one pray?' The old man said, 'There is no need at all to make long discourses, it is enough to stretch out one's hands and say, "Lord, as You will, and as You know, have mercy." And if the conflict grows fiercer say, "Lord, help!" He knows very well what we need and He shows us His mercy.'

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Abba Zeno said, 'If a man wants God to hear his prayer quickly, then before he prays for anything else, even his own soul, when he stands and stretches out his hands towards God, he must pray with all his heart for his enemies. Through this action God will hear everything that he asks.'

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Abba Nilus said, 'Prayer is the seed of gentleness and the absence of anger.'

From the Sayings of the  
Desert Fathers



**Sunday 22 March 2015 is the  
Sunday of St John Climacus**

**Matins Gospel:** John 20:11-18

**Epistle:** Hebrews 6:13-20

**Gospel:** Mark 9:17-31

**Resurrectional Apolytikion**

From on high didst Thou descend, O Compassionate One; to burial of three days hast Thou submitted that Thou mightest free us from our passions. O our Life and Resurrection, Lord, glory be to Thee.

**Apolytikion of the Sunday of St John Climacus**

With the rivers of your tears, you have made the barren desert fertile. Through sighs of sorrow from deep within you, your labours have borne fruit a hundred-fold. By your miracles you have become a light, shining upon the world. O John, our Holy Father, pray to Christ our God, to save our souls.

### ***Readings and saints for this week:***

**Monday:** Isaiah 37:33-38:6; Genesis 13:12-18; Proverbs 14:27-15:4  
Martyr Nicon & the 199; Anatolios & Protoleon the Martyrs

**Tuesday:** Isaiah 40:18-31; Genesis 15:1-15; Proverbs 15:7-19  
Forefeast of the Annunciation; Bp. Artemon

**Wednesday:** Luke 1:39-49, 56; Hebrews 2:11-18; Luke 1:24-38  
Annunciation of the Theotokos

**Thursday:** Isaiah 42:5-16; Genesis 18:20-33; Proverbs 16:17-17:17  
Synaxis of the Archangel Gabriel; 26 Martyrs in Crimea

**Friday:** Isaiah 45:11-17; Genesis 22:1-18; Proverbs 17:17-18:5  
Matrona of Thessalonica; Paul, Bishop of Corinth

**Saturday:** Hebrews 9:1-7; Luke 1:39-49, 56  
Hilarion the New; Herodion the Apostle of the 70



# ***Evangelion***

***A Bulletin of Orthodox Christian Faith***

22 March 2015

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

## **Lord, I Believe – Help My Unbelief!**

Today, on the fourth Sunday of Great Lent, which is 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."

Once again, we are reminded that the salvation that Jesus Christ offers us involves our healing. While we may not be possessed by spirits that try to throw us into the fire, we too have 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, 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.



Who will be so presumptuous and so blind as to think that he can preserve his own faith without daily help from the Lord? This is how it is, especially in view of what the Lord Himself says: 'As a branch cannot bear fruit all by itself but must remain part of the vine, neither can you unless you remain in Me' (Jn. 15:4). 'You can do nothing without Me' (Jn. 15:5). Since He says this, since He asserts that nobody can show forth the fruits of the Spirit unless he has been inspired by God and has worked with God, it would be foolish, indeed sacrilegious, to attribute any good actions of ours to our own effort rather than to the divine grace.

Saint John Cassian

# The Feast of the Annunciation

On Wednesday, we celebrate the Feast of the Annunciation of the Most Holy Theotokos and ever-virgin Mary. This is one of the twelve great feasts of the Church's year. It commemorates the message that the Archangel Gabriel brought to the Virgin Mary that she would give birth to the Saviour of the world.



The feast of the Annunciation is both a feast of the Mother of God, and a feast of the Lord. Indeed, it shows the intimate relationship between the Theotokos and her divine Son. For, in her, God's careful work of preparation reaches its fulfillment. Since the fall of Adam and Eve, God had been preparing the way for the great event of salvation that would reverse the corruption that had entered into the world with Adam and Eve's disobedience. The Virgin Mary was the grace-filled person whom the generations had been awaiting. She was the one who would give human nature to the Word of God.

But this feast is also the beginning of all of the feasts of the Lord, for it is the beginning of our salvation. The Church's texts for this feast are full of wonder and amazement at the great mystery of the Incarnation of Christ. Through the obedience of the Mother of God, the uncontainable God, the One who rides upon the Cherubim, comes to dwell in the womb of the Virgin. He takes our nature on Himself in order to redeem us, to heal our brokenness and to lead us to the Father.

Today is the fountainhead of our salvation and the manifestation of the mystery which was from eternity. The Son of God becomes the Virgin's Son, and Gabriel announces the good tidings of grace; for this cause, let us cry to the Mother of God with him: Rejoice, thou who art full of grace, the Lord is with thee.

Apolytikion of the Feast of the Annunciation

And through the invocation, the overshadowing power of the Holy Spirit becomes a rainfall for this new cultivation. For just as all things whatsoever God made He made by the operation of the Holy Spirit, so also it is by the operation of the Spirit that these things are done which surpass nature and cannot be discerned except by faith alone. "How shall this be done to me," asked the blessed Virgin, "because I know not a man?" The Archangel Gabriel answered, "The Holy Spirit shall come upon you, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow you." And now you ask how the bread becomes the Body of Christ and the wine and water the Blood of Christ. And I tell you that the Holy Spirit comes down and works these things which are beyond description and understanding.

Saint John of Damascus

# The Sunday of St 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 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 and 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."



In this icon, which depicts Saint John's Ladder of Divine Ascent, we see a visual representation of our ascent to Christ. While the demons seek to snatch us away from the path to salvation, we are assisted by the prayers of the saints.

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Repentance is a renewal of baptism and is a contract with God for a fresh start in life. ...

Where there is real humility, all bonds are made free.

Repentance is the daughter of hope and the refusal to despair.

Saint John Climacus