

Dear ones: “*This kind can only be cast out by prayer and fasting,*” the Lord says to His disciples, humiliated when they were unable to deliver a young man from his demonic oppressors. They lacked spiritual power, the Friend of their (and our) souls told them, because they did not push themselves to acquire Grace. At some point, the same apostles mentioned above learned their lesson and came to Christ to tell Him so. But He answered: “*Do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you; but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.*” Our focus as Christians is on Our Lord and His Kingdom, not on something secondary.



St. John of the Ladder, commemorated today, learned by experience that spiritual effort changes us, makes more room in us for Christ and His grace. His *troparion* mentions this specifically: “*Through fasting, vigils and prayer, thou didst receive heavenly gifts.*” We don’t pray though long services in order to placate some Monster in the Sky. We don’t fast because cheeseburgers are bad. We do these things in order to make us able to receive heavenly gifts. And we won’t get them sitting on our hands.

We Americans live in a society which constantly seduces us to demand instant gratification. Is it any wonder that we as a society have problems with the most basic impulse control? As our wills atrophy through disuse, our ability to resist pleasurable but dangerous behaviors and substances fades away, too. It’s a strange kind of downwardly-mobile evolution. We might have started off as creatures with a backbone, but we devolve into becoming spineless jellyfish, drifting wherever the tide leads us.

Here we see how the Orthodox spiritual tradition offers us something bracing and life-giving. God doesn’t need our fasting and prayer, our self-discipline. But we do! Saying “fasting and prayer is for monks” is not that different from saying “exercise is just for Olympic athletes”. Maybe none of us will win a gold medal or have our icon painted. But whether we are spiritual or physical couch potatoes, we can make a beginning, with God’s help. And the help of those like St. John Climacus! By their prayers, may our Lord Jesus Christ strengthen our wills and unite them to His. Fr. M

Announcements

Services this week: This week is the last big ascetic push before Holy Week itself. Those who neglected or were unable to come to the Great Canon during the first week get a second chance this Wednesday night. Likewise, there will be a Presanctified Liturgy this week on Wednesday. The Saturday Liturgy is in honor of the Mother of God this week, but prayers for the reposed will be made as usual. Finally, this Saturday night we will read the deeply moving life of St. Mary of Egypt together with Vespers. Remember: Lent doesn’t really “happen” on Sunday mornings.

Namesdays this week: Saturday is the feast of the martyrs Chrysanthus and Daria, the latter being the nice old-fashioned pagan girl St. Chrysanthus’ folks found for him to turn him away from the new religious cult he’d gotten mixed up with. He, of course, introduced her to Christ, and the rest is sacred history. Earlier in the week, on Thursday we celebrate the “real” feast of St. Patrick, a great celebration for all sons and daughters of Erin, as well as the feast of St. Alexis the Man of God. To Hieromonk Alexii and priest Patrick, Matushka Darya, Patricia and all others implicated: **Many years! Beannachtaí na Féile Pádraig ort!**

Does this sound like you? A priest I know writes: “Most Sundays, someone will say to me that they are ashamed because when they come to confession, they seem to confess the same sins week after week. They wonder if it will ever change. Because of persistent sins, despondency sets in. They say, “It seems like I take one step forward and two steps back. Surely God is tired of me and very displeased with me.” Oh, I understand how they feel. At times, I hear the same voice: “you can’t get a leopard to change his spots.” In my case, it might be more appropriate to say: “you can’t teach an old dog new tricks.” I have come to the conviction that God is pleased with me.” Why? Read: <http://www.pravmir.com/i-am-climbing-st-johns-ladder/>

Prayer Requests

The living: Archbp. Alipy; Archpt. Anastasy, Alexander; hieromonk Alexii & community; Priests Parthenius, Philip, John, Deacon Alexander & Anna; Emmanuel & Katherine; Vera; Vsevolod & Elena; Matthew, Vadim; William; Denise; Charlie Theodore; Tommie Jo; Matthew, Tatiana; Elena; Katherine; Natalia; Anastasia; John; those serving in the armed forces, those whom the Lord wishes to bring to this community, all those suffering for the name of Christ.



The reposed: Archpriest Theodore; Hrmk. Seraphim; priests Matthew, Ignatius; Protoden. Nicholai; reader Stamatios; monk Joseph; Alexis; Julia; Xenia; Daria; Gabriel; Gabriel; Dmitrios; Travis; John; Norine; Sara; Dmitri; Elizabeth; Catherine; Juliana, Anna; Denise; Timothy; Marijo; John; Ann; Nicholai; Alexandra; Tatiana; Stephen; Vladimir; child Xenia; Nina; Anatoly, Galina; Michael; Jackie; Scott; John; Claudia; Peter; Tamara; Vera; David; those killed in war.



Thine own of Thine own we offer unto Thee!

Wine: Nonna health & salvation of family members
 Oil: Fr. Michael repose of soul of reader Stamatios
 Prospora: Matushka Darya health, salvation, & healing of Julia
 (Suggested donations for wine, oil and prospora offerings are \$10.00 each.)

**“Until we have found harmony with God,
we will be divided and broken within ourselves;
until we have found harmony with God,
we will be divided one from another.”**

If we ask ourselves how far we are from God, and cannot measure the distance between us because our experience of being close to Him is so small, let us ask ourselves *“How far am I from the people who surround me? How little love, how little loyalty, how little gift of self, how little rejoicing in my neighbor is there in me? How much is there of judgment, of indifference, of coldness, of forgetfulness?”* And then we will be able to say, *“If I am like that, it means that I am not God-centered, that God is not the King reigning supreme in my heart and mind and my whole being and life.”* And when we think of ourselves and see ourselves divided between the call of God, the desires of our fallen humanity and the beguilement of evil, then we can again say *“How far I am”*. And until we have found harmony with God, we will be divided and broken within ourselves; until we have found harmony with God, we will be divided one from another.

This is why St John Climacus calls us to give absolute centrality to the way in which we relate to God; because everything else will depend upon it. He is like the key of harmony that allows a tune to be read and sing; He is, as another writer says, the thin string that keeps together flowers, which otherwise would fall apart – even flowers, even virtue, even beauty, even truth fall apart, if there is not that wonderful love, exultation and joy which is given only by our communion with God, because He is love, He is life, He is truth, He is joy and light and exultation.

Let us therefore turn to repentance in the sense in which St John Climacus sees it: not an empty bewailing of our past, not a useless, barren regret at our not being what we wish we were, but a cry to God, *“Come, Lord, and come soon!”* And if we cry with all our heart, all our mind, all our need, then God will come, then we will find ourselves in communion with the living God and all things will become beauty; we will have entered into the Kingdom of God.

from a sermon on the Sunday of St. John Climacus by Metropolitan Anthony (Bloom) of Sourozh. Read the whole sermon here: <http://www.pravmir.com/let-us-turn-to-repentance-in-the-sense-in-which-st-john-climacus-sees-it/>

OUR LIFE IN CHRIST

VOL. 18, #11

“FROM THIS DAY, FROM THIS HOUR, FROM THIS VERY MINUTE,
LET US STRIVE TO LOVE GOD ABOVE ALL, AND FULFILL HIS HOLY WILL.”

ST. HERMAN OF ALASKA

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SUNDAY OF ST. JOHN OF THE LADDER

4th SUNDAY OF LENT

Sunday, March 13*/26: 10:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy
→ 1:00 P.M. Unction Service

MONDAY, TUESDAY,

March 14*/27 – 15*/28: 6:00 P.M. Vespers

ST. PATRICK, ENLIGHTENER OF THE IRISH,

ST. ALEXIS THE MAN OF GOD,

THURSDAY OF THE GREAT CANON

Wednesday, March 16*/29: 10:00 a.m. Liturgy of Presanctified Gifts
Wednesday, March 16*/29: 6:00 P.M. Compline w/ Great Canon
Thursday, March 17*/30: 6:00 P.M. Vespers

LAUDATIONS OF THE THEOTOKOS/ПОХВАЛА ПРЕС. БОГОРОДИЦЫ

MARTYRS CHRYSANTHUS & DARIA

Friday, March 18*/31: 6:00 P.M. Vespers w/ Akathist
Sat., March 19*/April 1: 10:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy

SUNDAY OF ST. MARY OF EGYPT

5th SUNDAY OF LENT

Sat., March 19*/April 1: 6:00 P.M. Vespers, Life of St. Mary of Egypt
Sunday, March 20*/April 2: 10:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy

*church calendar date

LORD JESUS CHRIST, SON OF GOD, HAVE MERCY ON ME, A SINNER.