



St. John of the Ladder

St. Cyril of Jerusalem Orthodox Church

9000 Hwy 242, The Woodlands, TX
www.stcyril.us · (281) 298-3232

+ April 7, 2019 +
FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT
St. John of the Ladder

Repose of St. Tikhon, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia,
Enlightener of North America (+1925)



+ **Wednesday, April 10 – Great Canon with the Life of St. Mary of Egypt, 7 p.m.**
+ **Friday, April 12 - Presanctified Liturgy, 7 p.m.**

LENTEN CONFESSIONS – All Orthodox Christians should go to confession during Great Lent, if possible before Palm Sunday. There are just **two more weekends** remaining before Pascha.

DONATIONS FOR FLOWERS to decorate the Lord's tomb and for Pascha can be made now.

TREASURER'S REPORT – March income was \$9,662. Expenses were \$10,014.

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The Ladder of Divine Ascent is a sure guide to the ascetic life, written by a great man of prayer experienced in all forms of the monastic life. It teaches the seeker after salvation how to lay a sound foundation for his struggles, how to detect and war against each of the passions, how to avoid the snares laid by the demons, and how to rise from the rudimental virtues to the heights of God-like love and humility. It is held in such high esteem that it is universally read in its entirety in monasteries during the Great Fast. What is the lesson that we can take from St. John of the Ladder? First of all, our spiritual progress is both a journey and a destination, undertaken in a spirit of repentance and humility. **From the writings of St. John of the Ladder:**

+ **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 honor your patience. While a wound is still fresh and warm, it is easy to heal; but old, neglected, and festering ones are hard to cure, and require for their care much treatment, cutting, plastering and cauterization. Many from long neglect become incurable, but with God all things are possible.

+ **Do all the good you can;** do not speak evil of anyone; do not steal from anyone; do not lie to anyone; do not be arrogant towards anyone; do not hate anyone; do not be absent from the divine services; be compassionate to the needy; do not offend anyone; do not wreck another man's domestic happiness, and be content with what your own wives can give you. If you behave in this way, you will not be far from the Kingdom of Heaven.

Double Wings – Prayer and Fasting

He who prays with fasting has his wings double, and lighter than the very winds. For nothing is mightier than a man who prays sincerely. But if your body is too weak to fast continually, still it is not too weak for prayer, nor without vigor for contempt of the belly. For even if you cannot fast, you can still avoid luxurious living.

- St. John

Chrysostom

If We Confess Our Sins – Fr. Thomas Hopko

It is not enough for us to know our sins and to hate them. We must also confess them before God and man. We must acknowledge them before heaven and earth. We must expose them to the whole of creation in order to be rid of them from within our secret hearts. Confession is part of the spiritual life. Indeed, it is part of life itself. There is no authentic existence for human beings without it. And there is certainly no authentic repentance.

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us. (1 Jn. 1:8-10)

Some say that there is no need to confess sins openly and publicly. They say that people can confess directly to God. Such an idea is total nonsense. Confession to God in secret is no confession at all. It is simply the acknowledgment before the Lord that we know what He knows! Confession by definition is open and public. If it is not, it is simply not confession.

When the people were repenting in preparation for Jesus at the preaching of John the Baptist, it is written that they were baptized “*confessing their sins*” (Mk. 1:5). This does not mean that they were telling God in privacy of their hearts what He already knew. It means that they were proclaiming the evils that they had done for all to hear. And when St. James commands Christians: “*Confess your sins to one another!*” he is not advising them to be aware of their transgressions in the secrecy of their souls. He is ordering them to reveal their wickedness’s to each other so that they might be healed (James 5:16).

If confession is by definition the open and public acknowledgment of sins, why then do the Orthodox confess privately to their priests? Because the pastors have the ministry of witnessing the confession and repentance of God’s people, and of officially sealing that confession and repentance with the assurance of divine forgiveness through the prayer of absolution.

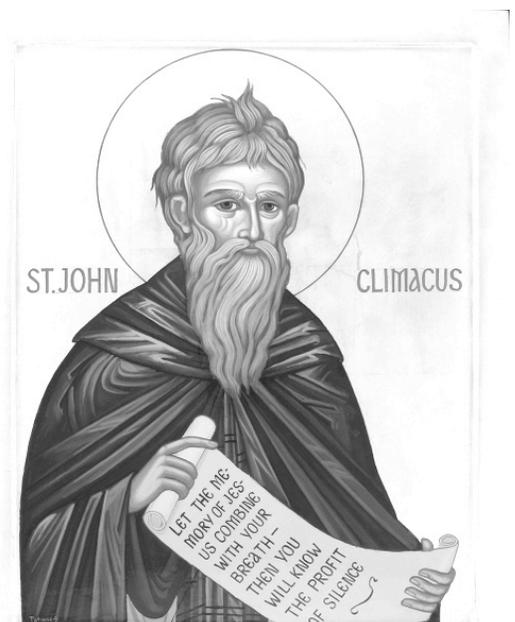
The reason why people now confess to their pastors in private is because of the weakness of the body of Christians as a whole. Confession used to be public. It was done openly in the presence of all of the members of the Church. Anyone willing to confess in this manner today is welcome to do so. But it would most likely serve only to lead others into temptation rather than to inspire prayerful compassion and sympathetic collaboration in fulfilling the Lord’s commandments. When confession is done to the priest alone, it should be understood that it is to him as if it were to all. Or, to put it another way, it is to all---God and man and the whole of creation---in the priest’s person, as the head of the church community and the sacramental presence within it of the Lord Jesus Himself.

Great Lent is a time for confession. All Christians should make their confession during this holy season. A person who fails to do so is hardly a Christian. He is certainly not Orthodox.

“Behold, my child, Christ stand here invisibly and receives your confession. Wherefore be not ashamed or afraid and conceal nothing from me, but tell without hesitation all things which you have done, and so you shall have pardon from our Lord Jesus Christ. Lo, His holy image is before us, and I am but a witness, bearing testimony before Him of the things which you have to say. But if you shall conceal anything you shall have the greater sin. Take heed, therefore, lest having come to the physician, you depart unhealed.”

March 30: Venerable John of Sinai, Author of “the Ladder”

Saint John of Sinai is honored by Holy Church as a great ascetic and author of the renowned spiritual book called *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, from which he is also called “of the Ladder.” There is almost no information about Saint John’s origins. John went to Sinai when he was sixteen, submitting to Abbot Martyrius as his instructor and



guide. After four years, Saint John was tonsured as a monk. Abbot Strategios, who was present at Saint John's tonsure, predicted that he would become a great light in the Church of Christ.

For **nineteen years** Saint John progressed in monasticism in obedience to his spiritual father. After the death of Abbot Martyrius, Saint John embarked on a solitary life, settling in a wild place called Thola, where he spent **forty years** laboring in silence, fasting, prayer, and tears of penitence.

It is not by chance that in *The Ladder* Saint John speaks about tears of repentance: "Just as fire burns and destroys the wood, so pure tears wash away every impurity, both external and internal." His holy prayer was strong and effective, as may be seen from an example from the life of the saint.

Saint John had a disciple named Moses. Once, the saint ordered his disciple to bring dung to fertilize the vegetable garden. When he had fulfilled the obedience, Moses lay down to rest under the shade of a large rock, because of the scorching heat of summer. Saint John was in his cell in a light sleep. Suddenly, a man of remarkable appearance appeared to him and awakened the holy ascetic, reproaching him, "John, why do you sleep so heedlessly, when Moses is in danger?"

Saint John immediately woke up and began to pray for his disciple. When Moses returned in the evening, Saint John asked whether any sort of misfortune had befallen him.

The monk replied, "A large rock would have fallen on me as I slept beneath it at noon, but I left that place because I thought I heard you calling me." Saint John did not tell his disciple of his vision, but gave thanks to God.

Saint John ate the food which is permitted by the monastic rule, but only in moderation. He did not sleep very much, only enough to keep up his strength, so that he would not ruin his mind by unceasing vigil. "I do not fast excessively," he said of himself, "nor do I give myself over to intense all-night vigil, nor lay upon the ground, but I restrain myself..., and the Lord soon saved me."

The following example of Saint John's humility is noteworthy. Gifted with discernment, and attaining wisdom through spiritual experience, he lovingly received all who came to him and guided them to salvation. One day some envious monks reproached him for being too talkative, and so Saint John kept silence for a whole year. The monks realized their error, and they went to the ascetic and begged him not to deprive them of the spiritual profit of his conversation.

Concealing his ascetic deeds from others, Saint John sometimes withdrew into a cave, but reports of his holiness spread far beyond the vicinity. Visitors from all walks of life came to him, desiring to hear his words of edification and salvation. **After forty years of solitary asceticism, he was chosen as abbot of Sinai when he was seventy-five.** Saint John governed the holy monastery for four years. Toward the end of his life, the Lord granted him the gifts of clairvoyance and wonderworking.

The Ladder is a book of instruction for monks who wished to attain spiritual perfection. It is truly a ladder leading from earthly things to the Holy of Holies...." Its thirty steps of spiritual perfection correspond to the thirty years of the Lord's age. When we have completed these thirty steps, we will find ourselves with the righteous and will not stumble. *The Ladder* begins with renunciation of the world, and ends with God, Who is love (1 John 4:8).

Although the book was written for monks, any Christian living in the world will find it an unerring guide for ascending to God, and a support in the spiritual life. For instance, here are some words from the twenty-second step of *The Ladder*, which deals with various forms of the sin of

vainglory (that is, worrying about what people think about us, “showing off”). Saint John writes:

“When I fast, I am vainglorious; and when I permit myself food in order to conceal my fasting from others I am again vainglorious about my prudence. When I dress in fine clothing, I am vanquished by vanity, and if I put on drab clothing, again I am overcome by vanity. If I speak, vainglory defeats me. If I wish to keep silence, I am again given over to it. Wherever this thorn comes up, it stands with its points upright.

A vain person seems to honor God, but strives to please men rather than God.

People of lofty spirit bear insult peacefully and willingly, but **only the holy and righteous may hear praise without harm.** (*Praise is more dangerous for us spiritually than insults!!*)

When you hear that your neighbor or friend has slandered you behind your back, or even to your face, praise and love him.

Whoever is proud of his natural gifts, intelligence, learning, skill in reading, clear enunciation, and other similar qualities, which are acquired without much labor, will never obtain supernatural gifts. Whoever is not faithful in small things (Luke 16:10), is also unfaithful in large things, and is vainglorious.

Five ways of overcoming vainglory: (1) It often happens that **God Himself** humbles the vainglorious, sending a sudden misfortune. (2) If **prayer** does not destroy a proud thought, (3) we bring to mind the **departure of the soul** from this life. (4) And if this does not help, let us fear the **shame which follows dishonor.** “For whoever humbles himself shall be exalted, and whoever exalts himself shall be humbled” (Luke 14:11). (5) When those who praise us, or rather seduce us, start to praise us, **let us recall our many sins,** then we shall find that we are not worthy of what they say or do to honor us.”

In *The Ladder* Saint John describes the ascent toward spiritual perfection, which is essential for anyone who wishes to save his soul. It is a written account of his thoughts, based on the collected wisdom of many wise ascetics, and on his own spiritual experience. The book is a great help on the path to truth and virtue.

The steps of *The Ladder* proceed **gradually** from strength to strength on the path of perfection. The summit is not reached suddenly, but gradually, as the Savior says: “The Kingdom of Heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force” (Mt. 11:12). Saint John is commemorated both on March 30 and on the fourth Sunday of Great Lent.