

CATHEDRAL OF SAINT MARKELLA

WEEKLY NEWSLETTER

With the Blessings of His Eminence, Metropolitan Demetrius

PHONE: (718) 932-1592 | FAX: (718) 255-5855 | Facebook: @saintmarkella | Instagram: @saintmarkellagoc |
Website: saintmarkellagoc.org | E-mail: saintmarkellagoc@gmail.com

Protopresbyter Fr. Theodoros Giannakopoulos • Archimandrite Fr. Epiphanius Antoniou

MARCH 16TH/MARCH 29TH – 4TH SUNDAY OF LENT: ST. JOHN OF THE LADDER

Τὸ Ἀναστάσιμον. ᾠχος πλ. δ'.

Ἐξ ὕψους κατήλθες ὁ εὖσπλαγγνος, ταφήν κατεδέξω τριήμερον, ἵνα ἡμᾶς ἐλευθερώσης τῶν παθῶν, ἡ ζωὴ καὶ ἡ Ἀνάστασις ἡμῶν, Κύριε δόξα σοι.

For the Resurrection. Plagal of 4th Tone.

Thou didst descend from on high, O Merciful One! Thou didst accept the three-day burial to free us from our sufferings! O Lord, our Life and Resurrection: glory to Thee!

Της Ἁγίας τοῦ Ναοῦ. ᾠχος πλ. α'. Τὸν Συνάναρχον Λόγον

Παρθενίαν τηρήσασα ἀδιάφθορον, ουρανίους θαλάμοις νῦν συνηρίθμισαι, του πατρός το ασελγές αποκρούσασα, τους μαστούς και κεφαλήν απετημήθης πάρ αυτού, Μαρκέλλα Χίου το κλέος, και νῦν ως μάρτυς στεφθείσα, πηγὴ θαυμάτων ἀφθονος δείκνυσαι.

For the Saint of this Temple. Plagal of 1st Tone. Let Us Worship the Word

Thy virginity thou didst preserve most incorrupt and now thou has been numbered among those who dwell in the mansions of heaven. Thou didst reject thy father's advances for which he severed thy breasts and head O Markella; the glory of Chios! And now crowned as a martyr thou wellest forth abundant miracles.

Ἀπολυτίκιον. ᾠχος πλ. δ'.

Ταῖς τῶν δακρῶν σου ῥοαῖς, τῆς ἐρήμου τὸ ἄγονον ἐγεώργησας· καὶ τοῖς ἐκ βάθους στεναγμοῖς, εἰς ἑκατόν τούς πόνους ἐκαρποφόρησας· καὶ γέγονας φωστήρ τῆ οἰκουμένη, λάμπων τοῖς θαύμασιν, Ἰωάννη, Πατὴρ ἡμῶν ὅσιε, πρέσβευε Χριστῷ τῷ Θεῷ, σωθῆναι τὰς ψυχὰς ἡμῶν.

Apolytikion. Plagal of 2nd Tone.

By a flood of tears you made the desert fertile And by your longing for God you brought forth fruits in abundance. By the radiance of miracles you illuminated the whole universe. O our holy Father John Climacus, pray to Christ our God to save our souls.

EPISTLE AND GOSPEL READINGS

Lesson from the Epistle of Saint Paul to the 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.

Fourth Sunday of Great Lent: St. John of the Ladder Gospel According to 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."

ΑΠΟΣΤΟΛΟΣ ΚΑΙ ΕΥΑΓΓΕΛΙΟΝ

Πρὸς Ἑβραίους Ἐπιστολῆς Παύλου τὸ Ἀνάγνωσμα (6:13-20)

Ἀδελφοί, τῷ Ἀβραάμ ἐπαγγειλάμενος ὁ θεός, ἐπεὶ κατ' οὐδενὸς εἶχεν μείζονος ὁμόσαι, ὥμοσεν καθ' ἑαυτοῦ, λέγων, Ἥ μὴν εὐλογῶν εὐλογήσω σε, καὶ πληθύνων πληθυνῶ σε. Καὶ οὕτως μακροθυμήσας ἐπέτυχεν τῆς ἐπαγγελίας. Ἄνθρωποι μὲν γὰρ κατὰ τοῦ μείζονος ὁμνύουσιν, καὶ πάσης αὐτοῖς ἀντιλογίας πέρας εἰς βεβαίωσιν ὁ ὄρκος. Ἐν ᾧ περισσότερο βουλόμενος ὁ θεὸς ἐπιδειξάτω τοῖς κληρονόμοις τῆς ἐπαγγελίας τὸ ἀμετάθετον τῆς βουλῆς αὐτοῦ, ἐμεσίτευσεν ὄρκῳ, ἵνα διὰ δύο πραγμάτων ἀμεταθέτων, ἐν οἷς ἀδύνατον ψεύσασθαι θεόν, ἰσχυρὰν παράκλησιν ἔχωμεν οἱ καταφυγόντες κρατῆσαι τῆς προκειμένης ἐλπίδος· ἦν ὡς ἄγκυραν ἔχομεν τῆς ψυχῆς ἀσφαλῆ τε καὶ βεβαίαν, καὶ εἰσερχομένην εἰς τὸ ἐσώτερον τοῦ καταπετάσματος· ὅπου πρόδρομος ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν εἰσηλθεν Ἰησοῦς, κατὰ τὴν τάξιν Μελχισεδέκ ἀρχιερεὺς γενόμενος εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα.

Τέταρτη Κυριακὴ τῶν Νηστειῶν: Αγίου Ἰωάννου τῆς Κλίμακας Ἐκ τοῦ Κατὰ Μάρκον Αγίου Εὐαγγελίου τὸ Ἀνάγνωσμα (9:17-31)

Τῷ καιρῷ ἐκείνῳ, ἄνθρωπός τις προσῆλθε τῷ Ἰησοῦ λέγων, διδάσκαλε, ἤνεγκα τὸν υἱόν μου πρὸς σε, ἔχοντα πνεῦμα ἄλαλον. καὶ ὅπου ἂν αὐτὸν καταλάβῃ, ῥήσσει αὐτόν, καὶ ἀφρίζει καὶ τρίζει τοὺς ὀδόντας αὐτοῦ, καὶ ξηραίνεται· καὶ εἶπον τοῖς μαθηταῖς σου ἵνα αὐτὸ ἐκβάλωσι, καὶ οὐκ ἴσχυσαν. ὁ δὲ ἀποκριθεὶς αὐτῷ λέγει· ὦ γενεὰ ἄπιστος, ἕως πότε πρὸς ὑμᾶς ἔσομαι; ἕως πότε ἀνέξομαι ὑμῶν; φέρετε αὐτὸν πρὸς με. καὶ ἤνεγκαν αὐτὸν πρὸς αὐτόν. καὶ ἰδὼν αὐτὸν εὐθέως τὸ πνεῦμα ἐσπάραξεν αὐτόν, καὶ πεσὼν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἐκυλίετο ἀφρίζων. καὶ ἐπηρώτησε τὸν πατέρα αὐτοῦ· πόσος χρόνος ἐστὶν ὡς τοῦτο γέγονεν αὐτῷ; ὁ δὲ εἶπε· παιδιόθεν. καὶ πολλάκις αὐτὸν καὶ εἰς πῦρ ἔβαλε καὶ εἰς ὕδατα, ἵνα ἀπολέσῃ αὐτόν· ἀλλ' εἴ τι δύνασαι, βοήθησον ἡμῖν σπλαγχνισθεὶς ἐφ' ἡμᾶς. ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν αὐτῷ τὸ εἰ δύνασαι πιστεῦσαι, πάντα δυνατὰ τῷ πιστεύοντι. καὶ εὐθέως κράξας ὁ πατὴρ τοῦ παιδίου μετὰ δακρῶν ἔλεγε· πιστεύω, κύριε· βοήθει μου τῇ ἀπιστίᾳ. ἰδὼν δὲ ὁ Ἰησοῦς ὅτι ἐπισυντρέχει ὄχλος, ἐπετίμησε τῷ πνεύματι τῷ ἀκαθάρτῳ λέγων αὐτῷ· τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἄλαλον καὶ κωφόν, ἐγὼ σοὶ ἐπιτάσσω, ἐξελθε ἐξ αὐτοῦ καὶ μηκέτι εἰσέλθῃς εἰς αὐτόν. καὶ κράξαν καὶ πολλὰ σπαράξαν αὐτὸν ἐξῆλθε, καὶ ἐγένετο ὡσεὶ νεκρός, ὥστε πολλοὺς λέγειν ὅτι ἀπέθανεν. ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς κρατήσας αὐτὸν τῆς χειρὸς ἤγειρεν αὐτόν, καὶ ἀνέστη. Καὶ εἰσελθόντα αὐτὸν εἰς οἶκον οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ ἐπηρώτων αὐτόν κατ' ἰδίαν, ὅτι ἡμεῖς οὐκ ἠδυνήθημεν ἐκβαλεῖν αὐτό. καὶ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς· τοῦτο τὸ γένος ἐν οὐδενὶ δύναται ἐξελεθεῖν εἰ μὴ ἐν προσευχῇ καὶ νηστείᾳ. Καὶ ἐκεῖθεν ἐξελθόντες παρεπορεύοντο διὰ τῆς Γαλιλαίας, καὶ οὐκ ἠθέλεν ἵνα τις γνῶ· ἐδίδασκε γὰρ τοὺς μαθητὰς αὐτοῦ καὶ ἔλεγεν αὐτοῖς ὅτι ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου παραδίδοται εἰς χεῖρας ἀνθρώπων, καὶ ἀποκτενοῦσιν αὐτόν, καὶ ἀποκτανθεὶς τῇ τρίτῃ ἡμέρᾳ ἀναστήσεται.

SAINTS OF THE WEEK

Monday, March 30th

St. Alexis the Man of God (411)

St. Patrick Enlightener of Ireland (451)

Tuesday, March 31st

St. Cyril Archbishop of Jerusalem (386)

St. Edward the Martyr, King of England (978)

Wednesday, April 1st

Martyrs Chrysanthus and Daria and those with them (283)

Martyr Alcmund Prince of Northumbria

Thursday, April 2nd

The Holy Fathers who were slain at the Monastery of St. Savva (796)

St. Cuthbert Bishop of Lindisfarne (687)

Friday, April 3rd

St. James the Confessor Bishop of the Studion (8th c.)

St. Serapion Bishop of Thmuis in Lower Egypt (358)

Saturday, April 4th

Hieromartyr Basil Presbyter of Ancyra (362)

St. Isaac founder of the Dalmatian Monastery at Constantinople (383)

St. Paul Bishop of Narbonne (3rd c.)



THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF GREAT LENT: ST. JOHN OF THE LADDER

St. John of the Ladder (“Climacus” in Greek) was born in Palestine in about the year 523. At the age of 16 he accepted the ascetical life in St. Catherine’s Monastery on Mt. Sinai and was tonsured as a monk three or four years later. After 19 years of life-in-common, at the age of 35 he isolated himself from the world and lived as a hermit for 40 years in a Monastery Skete called Thola, about 10 kilometers into the desert.

While living an ascetical life he is reported to have received the gift of tears and the grace of continual prayer. Fellow monks in large numbers began to seek him out for spiritual guidance. When criticized for making a mockery of his hermitage by entertaining so many people there, he decided to keep total silence. After a year or so of this, those who had criticized him pleaded with him to resume guiding others.

Experienced both in the solitary life of the hermit and in the communal life of cenobitic monasticism, he was appointed Abbot of the Monastery of Mt. Sinai. The day he was made Abbot, the Prophet Moses was seen giving commands to those who served at the table. He reposed in peace in 603. Parts of his Relics are to be found in the Monasteries of Agathonos (Lamia) and Turliane (Mykonos island), both in Greece.

St. John wrote a book containing 30 homilies. Each homily deals with one virtue and progressing from those that deal with holy and righteous activity (in Greek *praxis*), unto those that deal with divine vision (in Greek *theoria*), they raise a man up as though by means of steps unto the height of Heaven. So the book is called “*The Ladder of Divine Ascent*”, and the Saint is known as “*Climacus*” (climax means ladder in Greek).

The Ladder of Divine Ascent is so greatly esteemed by the Orthodox Christian Church that its author, St. John, is celebrated twice a year, on the 30th of March (the day of his repose) and the Fourth Sunday of Great Lent. Each monastic community of the Orthodox Church reads “*The Ladder*” during each day of Great Lent, in their common dining hall (or refectory), during the daily meal. This is a period of strict fasting, struggle, prostration, and extensive prayers, when only one meal is eaten in the day and that after 3 pm, and water is only consumed between 3 and 6 pm.

The book, by means of thirty steps, calls us to the spiritual life; it inspires, instructs, speeds the reader towards the “*things on high*”, and points out the dangers and pitfalls. Each step describes the origin of a certain virtue or passion and the path it can take in us.

The Ladder does not offer us a formula to accomplish salvation, for “*the life you have is hidden with Christ in God*” (Col. 3:3), but “*Let us try to learn Divine truth more by toil and sweat than by mere word, for at the time of our departure it is not words but deeds that will have to be shown*” (Step 26:36).

ΤΕΤΑΡΤΗ ΚΥΡΙΑΚΗ ΤΩΝ ΝΗΣΤΕΙΩΝ: ΑΓΙΟΥ ΙΩΑΝΝΟΥ ΤΗΣ ΚΛΙΜΑΚΑΣ

Ο Άγιος Ιωάννης της Κλίμακας γεννήθηκε πιθανότατα το 523 μ.Χ. στη Συρία. Ήταν γιος πλούσιας και ευσεβούς οικογένειας. Σε νεαρή ηλικία, παρακολούθησε ανώτερο κύκλο μορφώσεως, ώστε να διακρίνεται ανάμεσα στους συνομήλικούς του. Εκείνος όμως, ενδιαφερόταν περισσότερο για την προσευχή, τις θεολογικές μελέτες, την συγγραφική εργασία και την άσκηση. Πήγε στο Όρος Σινά, κοντά στον φημισμένο αναχωρητή Μαρτύριο, ο οποίος καθοδήγησε πνευματικά τον νεαρό Ιωάννη. Μετά από τέσσερα χρόνια άσκησης, εκάρη μοναχός ενώ η φήμη των αρετών και της σοφίας του είχε ευρύτερα διαδοθεί. Γι' αυτό πολλοί μοναχοί και λαϊκοί, αλλά και αξιωματούχοι έρχονταν στη Μονή για να ζητήσουν τη συμβουλή του. Είχε και το χάρισμα της θαυματουργίας. Λόγω της διαβίωσής του στην Ιερά Μονή Σινά ονομάζεται και Σιναΐτης. Μετά το θάνατο του ηγούμενου της Μονής και κατόπιν απαιτήσεως των αδελφών δέχθηκε να γίνει Ηγούμενος της ιεράς Μονής Σινά για μερικά χρόνια. Η νοσταλγία, όμως, της ερημικής ζωής, έκανε τον Ιωάννη να αποσυρθεί πάλι στην έρημο και να αφοσιωθεί πάλι στις μελέτες του. Εκοιμήθη εν ειρήνη περί το 606 μ.Χ. και άφησε δύο σπουδαιότατα συγγράμματα, την «Κλίμακα» και τον «Λόγον προς τον Ποιμένα».

Η «Κλίμακα» περιλαμβάνει τριάντα λόγους περί αρετής, όπου ο καθένας λόγος περιλαμβάνει και μια αρετή, ξεκινώντας από τις πιο πρακτικές και ανεβαίνοντας σαν σκαλοπάτια κατέληξε στις θεωρητικά υψηλές. Στη πνευματική ζωή έχουμε βαθμίδες χαμηλές και υψηλές, καταστάσεις κατώτερες και ανώτερες. Γι' αυτό και το σύγγραμμα ονομάζεται Κλίμακα των αρετών. Στο έργο του αυτό ο συγγραφέας παρουσιάζει συστηματικά τις ιδέες του για την κοινοβιακή κυρίως, αλλά και για την ερημική ζωή, ταξινομώντας αυτές κατά τρόπο που δείχνει πορεία προς την ηθική τελείωση. Είναι γραμμένο σε κομψή ελληνική γλώσσα, καλοδουλεμένη με χάρη και μελωδικότητα. Έχει διαύγεια, γλαφυρότητα, παραστατικότητα και παρουσιάζει πλούτο εκφράσεως, καλαισθησία και ευγένεια. Στη διακόσμηση του λόγου με εικόνες και παρομοιώσεις ο ιερός συγγραφέας είναι απαράμιλλος. Πάσης φύσεως σχήματα λόγου αναδύονται καθώς και ωραίες και επιτυχημένες προσωποποιήσεις. Από την αρχή της Μεγάλης Τεσσαρακοστής το σύγγραμμά του διαβάζεται σε όλα τα ορθόδοξα μοναστήρια. Επειδή είναι παγκόσμιο κειμήλιο αναλύσεως όλων των παθών και των αρετών, η Εκκλησία τιμά ιδιαίτερα σε αυτή τη πνευματική περίοδο τον συγγραφέα άγιο Ιωάννη της Κλίμακας και το προτείνει για ανάγνωσμα. Η μνήμη του εορτάζεται στις 30 Μαρτίου και την Δ΄ Κυριακή των Νηστειών της Μεγάλης Τεσσαρακοστής.

HOMILY ON THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF GREAT LENT: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF FASTING IN THE STRUGGLE AGAINST FALLEN SPIRITS

By St. Ignatius Brinchaninov

The Lord said to His Apostles about the evil spirits, "*This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting*" (Mark. 9:29). Here is a new aspect of fasting! Fasting is acceptable to God when it is preceded by the great virtue of mercy; fasting prepares a reward in heaven when it is foreign to hypocrisy and vainglory; fasting works when it is joined with another great virtue – prayer. **How does it work?** It not only tames the passions in the human body, but it enters into battle with the spirits of evil, and conquers them. How can fasting, which is actually a bodily *podvig* [ascetical labor], work or cooperate with prayer in a war against spirits? Why do the bodiless spirits submit to the power that fasting has over them? The reason fasting works against the evil spirits lies in its powerful influence upon our own spirits. When the body is tamed by fasting, it brings freedom, strength, sobriety, purity, and refinement to the human soul. Our spirit can withstand its unseen enemies only when it is in such a state.

"But as for me", said the God-inspired David, *"When they (the demons) troubled me, I put on sackcloth. And I humbled my soul with fasting, and my prayer shall return to my bosom"* (Psalm 34:13).

Fasting gives the mind sobriety, while prayer is the weapon the mind uses to drive away the invisible adversary. Fasting humbles the soul, and frees it from the callousness and inflatedness brought on by satiety; while the prayer of one who fasts becomes especially strong. Such prayer is not just external, but comes from the very soul, from the depths of the heart. Fasting directs and carries prayer to God. The dark and evil spirits committed two serious crimes: the first crime caused their expulsion from the hosts of holy angels; the second crime was the cause of their irrevocable banishment. They lifted their heels against God in heaven. Their chief, blinded by conceit, wanted to become equal to God. For their crime they were cast out of heaven to the earth below, and there they began to envy the blessedness of newly-created man. Then they committed a new crime: seducing man, and luring him into his fall. This latter crime of the fallen angels finally decided their lot - they impressed themselves into evil by it; God's grace entirely departed from them because of it; they were given over to their own selves, to their own evil, and to their own sin that they had conceived and borne in themselves, and which they allowed to penetrate their nature. Now, a good thought or feeling will never come to an outcast angel. He is entirely submerged in evil, desires evil, and invents evil. Scorched with an unquenchable thirst for evil, he seeks to be sated with evil, but cannot. All the evil he does or can perform seems to him little next to the evil that he imagines and which his insufferable thirst for evil seeks. Created as a light-bearing angel, he was cast down lower than all the beasts of the earth for his crimes. "*Because thou hast done this murder of a man, said God in His wrath to Satan when He caught him at the scene of the crime in paradise, near the man and woman whom he had caused to fall, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life* (Gen. 3:14). A bodiless spirit is condemned to thoughts and feelings that are only earthly and passionate; his life and treasure is in them. A spirit, he has lost the ability to do anything spiritual - he is completely engrossed in fleshly works. A spirit who lives a mental life is demoted from the hosts of spirits to a fleshly state, and he takes a place lower in rank than all cattle and beasts of the earth. Cattle and beasts act according to the laws of their nature, while the fallen spirit, who is mingled into the nature of cattle and beasts, is mingled into a nature that is foreign to his own, and humiliating. He neither wants nor is able to act correctly in this nature - he continually abuses this nature.

This sinful materiality of the fallen angel makes him subject to the effect of fasting, which frees our spirit from the flesh's reign.

When the fallen angel approaches a person who is fasting, *he does not see the material domination* that he needs and desires; he cannot stir up the blood that has been beneficently cooled by fasting; he cannot arouse the flesh that is not inclined to play, for it has been restrained by fasting; the mind and heart are not obedient to him, for they have felt an especial spiritual vigor due to fasting.

Seeing this resistance, the proud, fallen spirit departs, *because he cannot endure being resisted or contradicted*. He loves unhesitating agreement and submission. Despite the fact that he crawls upon his belly, despite the fact that he eats only dust, the thought of being like God has not left him, and he looks for people to worship him. He audaciously showed the Son of God *all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time*, and promised to give him all *power* over them and *the glory of them*, demanding to be worshipped in return (Luke 4:5-7). Even now, he does not cease to present to those who follow the Son of God all the beauty of the world, painting it in their dreams with the most tempting features and colors in order to extract worship of himself by whatever trick. *Resist the devil, and he will flee from you*, said the Apostle James (James. 4:7); and another Apostle said, *Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked* (Ephesians. 6:16). Let us raise our eyes to eternity through the power of faith, to the unspeakable blessedness that awaits the righteous in eternity; likewise let us observe the equally unspeakable torments that await the serpent's unrepentant and stubborn followers. We can have such contemplation when the body is put in order and maintained within the order of fasting; when with the pure prayer that is only obtainable through fasting, we cleave to the Lord, and become of *one spirit* (1 Cor. 6:17) with Him. "The serpent crawls continually upon the ground as he was sentenced to do from on High," says St. John Chrysostom. "If you wish be to safe from his poisonous bite, let your mind and heart be always *above* the earth." Then you will be able to resist him, and that proud serpent who cannot endure resistance will flee from you. Where are the people who are possessed by evil spirits? Where are those people whom he would tear and torment, like he tore and tormented the youth mentioned today in the Gospels? Apparently there aren't any, or they are very rare - thus reasons the person who sees everything superficially, and brings his life as a sacrifice to distractions and sinful pleasures. But the holy fathers saw things differently. They say, "From the moment they caused man to be exiled from paradise and separated from God through disobedience, the devil and the demons received the freedom to mentally stir any person's rational nature, both day and night." Very similar to those torments and tearing of the Gospel youth's body by the evil spirit are the sufferings of the soul that willfully submits itself to the influence of the evil spirit, and who accepts as truth that murderous lie which the devil ceaselessly shows to us in order to make us perish, hiding it behind a façade of truth to more easily deceive us, and to succeed in his wickedness. *Be sober, be vigilant*, the Apostle Peter warns us, *because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist steadfast in the faith* (1 Pet. 5:8-9).

What does the fallen angel use against us? **Mostly sinful thoughts and fantasies.** He runs from those who resist him, but he sways, torments, and destroys those who do not recognize him, who enter into conversation with him, and entrust themselves to him. He himself crawls on his belly and is incapable of spiritual thought. He vividly depicts this transitory world with all its allurements and pleasures; meanwhile he enters into conversation with the soul about how it can make its pipe dreams come true. He offers us earthly glory, he offers us riches, he offers us satiety, and delight in fleshly impurities. As St. Basil the Great expresses it, the devil not only received a feeling for fleshly impurities, but since he was created as a bodiless spirit, he gave birth to them. He presents all this as a fantasy, but he also provides illicit ways to realize these illicit dreams. He casts us into sorrow, depression, and despair. In a word - he tirelessly works to obtain our destruction in seemingly decent as well as indecent ways: by obvious sin, by sin hidden behind a good façade, and by waiving the bait of pleasure in front of us.

This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith, says St. John the Theologian (1 John 5:4). Faith is our weapon of victory over the world; it is also our weapon of victory over the fallen angels.

Who has looked with the eye of faith to the eternity proclaimed by God's Word and not cooled to the world's quickly-passing beauty?

What true disciple of our Lord Jesus Christ will want to trample upon His all-holy commandments for the sake of sinful pleasure, which seems alluring before it is tasted, but is vile and murderous after tasting? What power over the disciple of Christ has the enchanting picture of earthly benefits and pleasures, or even the horrifying picture of earthly calamities, which the evil spirits draw in order to bring the viewer to depression and despair, when magnificent pictures of eternity are impressed upon his soul through the power of God's Word, before which all earthly scenes are pale and insignificant?

When St. John the Theologian proclaims that *the victory that overcometh the world is our faith*, he salutes the true children of Christ who have overcome the world on their victory over the fallen angel and his minions: *I write unto you, young men*, he says, *because ye have overcome the wicked one* (1 John. 2:13). Here "young men" is what he calls Christians who are renewed by Divine grace. When a servant of Christ shows courage and constancy in his struggle against the evil spirits as he should, then Divine grace descends into his soul and grants him victory, and his *youth shall be renewed as the eagle's* (Ps. 102:5) - youth which never ages, with which he was adorned by the Creator when he was created, and which he exchanged for incurable agedness at his voluntary fall. *Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever* (1 John. 2:15-17).

Beloved brethren! Why shouldn't we also be victors over the world and over its prince? People *like us* have overcome them, people clothed in flesh and human weakness. Not only valiant men have been victorious over them, but also frail elders, weak women, and little children; they won, and left us no excuse for losing if we give ourselves up to them. The same world with all its allurements was before them, the same invisible serpents crawled around them, applying every effort to taunt out their souls and make them to live in the dust. The hearts and thoughts of the conquerors were raised up!

Guarding their bodies with fasting, they tamed them and stopped the impulse for earthly pleasures in them! Through fasting, they gave their spirit the opportunity to abide in ceaseless sobriety and vigilance, and the opportunity to unsleepingly heed and watch out for the multifarious snares of the devil! By lightening their bodies - and even their very spirits - with fasting, they gave the spirit the opportunity to cleave to the Lord with pure and constant prayer, to receive Divine aide, to enliven their faith from hearing (cf. Rom. 10:17), from hearing to make their faith substance (cf. Heb. 11:1) and spiritual strength - and by this strength to obtain decisive victory over the world and the evil spirits.

St. John the Theologian calls such faith *the confidence that we have in God*, and he teaches us from his own holy experience that it is attained through prayer that is heard [by God]. The righteous see the invisible God through such faith, as the Apostle Paul said. Naturally, the world hides from view at the sight of God! The transitory world becomes as if non-existent, and the prince of the world has no support in his warfare. *Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist steadfast in the faith* (1 Pet. 5:8-9), *taking the shield of faith* (Eph. 6:16) - faith that is active, living, grace-filled. Only the ascetical laborer of Christ is capable of such faith. He has prepared himself for warfare with the evil spirits by forgiving his neighbors' sins - that is, through mercy and humility - and has entered the fight bearing the weapon of fasting and prayer. Amen.



ANNOUNCEMENTS

- Construction continues on the entryway of the Cathedral. To donate to the Entryway Fund, please see the inside of the Newsletter or speak to someone at the pangari.
- Services during Great Lent will be live streamed at the following times:
 - Presanctified Liturgy every Wednesday at 7 PM and Friday at 7 AM
 - Salutation to the Theotokos every Friday at 6 PM
 - Divine Liturgy every Saturday at 7:30 AM and Sunday at 8AM
- This year's Greek Independence Day Parade has been postponed. We will keep you informed of the date change.
- As we start the Lenten season, we know that Holy Week and Pascha will soon be here and we are reminded of the many needs of our Cathedral. Please help as much as you are able to offset the cost of the flowers needed for the Epitaphio of our Lord.

ENTRYWAY FUND DONATIONS

Please mark next to the item you would like to donate:

- | | |
|--|----------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Column | \$10,000 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Steps | \$3,000 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Platform (5 SF) | \$1,500 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other Donation | _____ |

To donate- tear off this slip from the Newsletter and give it to a member of the office.

Please make checks payable to
"Cathedral of Saint Markella"