

SAINT ANTHONY ORTHODOX CHURCH



Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese

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FOURTH SUNDAY OF GREAT LENT

(Sunday of St. John Klimakos, author of "The Ladder")

22 March 2015

TONE 8—St. John Klimakos, the author of "The Ladder"; Martyr Drosida, daughter of Emperor Trajan (1st-2nd c.); Hieromartyr Basil of Ancyra (362-363); Ven. Isaac, Founder of the Dalmatian Monastery at Constantinople (4th c.); Monk Martyr Euthymius of Prodromou (Mt. Athos—1814).

FIRST ANTIPHON

The Lord is King, He is clothed with majesty; the Lord is clothed with strength and hath girt Himself! He established the world which shall not be shaken! (R.:) Through the intercessions of the Theotokos, O Savior, save us! Who can utter the mighty acts of the Lord? Who can cause all his praises to be heard? Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom He hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy. (R.:) Glory... Now and ever... (R.:)

SECOND ANTIPHON

Let them praise the Lord for His mercies, and for His wonderful works to the children of men. (R.:) Save us, O Son of God, Who art risen from the dead, as we chant to Thee, "Alleluia"! Let them exalt Him in the congregation of the people, and praise Him in the seat of the elders. (R.:) The eyes of the Lord are upon those that fear Him, upon those that hope in His mercy, to hear the groaning of the prisoners, to loose the sons of the slain. (R.:) Glory... Now and ever... (Only begotten Son ...)

AT THE LITTLE ENTRANCE

*Come, let us worship and fall down before Christ!
Save us, O Son of God, Who art risen from the dead, who sing to Thee: "Alleluia"!*

TROPARION OF THE RESURRECTION (Tone 8): From the heights Thou didst descend, O compassionate One; and Thou didst submit to the three-day burial, that Thou might deliver us from passion; Thou art our life and our Resurrection, O Lord, glory to Thee!

TROPARION FOR ST. JOHN OF THE LADDER (Tone 8): The barren wilderness thou didst make fertile with the streams of thy tears; and by thy deep sighing thou hast given fruit through thy struggles a hundredfold. Accordingly, thou hast become a star for the universe, sparkling with miracles. Therefore, O righteous Father John, intercede with Christ God to save our souls.

TROPARION OF SAINT ANTHONY THE GREAT (Tone 4, Russian): Like the zealous Elijah thou didst become, and followed John the Baptist in his upright ways. A dweller in the wilderness, thou didst steady the world by prayer. O Father Anthony, intercede with Christ our God for our souls' salvation.

KONTAKION OF THE ANNUNCIATION (Tone 8): To thee, the Champion Leader, do I offer thanks of victory, O Theotokos, thou who hast delivered me from terror; but as thou that hast that power invincible, O Theotokos, thou alone can set me free: from all forms of danger free me and deliver me, that I may cry unto thee: "Rejoice, O Bride without Bridegroom."

TODAY'S APOSTLE READING

The Lord will give strength to His people; the Lord will bless His people with peace.

The Reading from the Epistle to the Hebrews

(Heb 6:13-20) **BRETHREN:** when God made a promise to Abraham, since he has 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 changeable 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 chamber 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.

When the Lord revealed Himself to Abraham and called him to a journey of faith, the patriarch chose to abandon the worship of idols and follow the Lord; he left behind land and possessions and the comfort of "life as we know it," risking everything because he trusted the word of God. And what promises did God make? "Go to a land that I will show you" (but he did not tell him where exactly); and "you will have many offspring" (when Abraham and Sarah were old and sterile). In short: impossible promises. Yet Abraham believed; and, as we hear today, **"after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise."**

Today's Epistle reading reminds us of God's faithfulness: as He promised to Abraham, so He promises to us—not a physical land and many children, but that we would also enter into the Resurrection and inherit the "new earth" that God has in store for us. And how can we know that this promise will be fulfilled? Because God has himself humbly taken on our flesh, become man, and made a covenant with us in his blood. He, the blameless lamb of God, sacrificed for the life of the world and its salvation; He, our High Priest, who has made a way through death for us, and has entered into the presence of God on our behalf.

We hear that the Lord *has entered into the inner chamber behind the curtain*, and that He did so *on our behalf* and *as our forerunner*. "High priest," "inner chamber," and "curtain" are terms

dealing with the great Temple in Jerusalem; a first-century Jew or Christian would have used this vocabulary on a daily basis. Like our churches, the Temple had two rooms: a larger one—the outer chamber or “holy place”— and a smaller one behind it—the inner chamber or “holy of holies” (similar to our altar room). The inner chamber was separated from the outer chamber through a heavy curtain (similar to our iconostasis). It is important to know that the inner chamber was strictly out of bounds. Only once a year, on the Day of Reconciliation (Day of Atonement, “Yom Kippur”), did the High Priest enter briefly into the inner chamber to bring a sacrifice on behalf of the entire people.

This structure of the Temple had deep symbolic meaning. The inner chamber, or “holy of holies,” represented the Presence of God, inaccessible to fallen humanity. However, at the time of Christ’s death on the cross, the curtain guarding the entrance to the inner chamber was torn from top to bottom. This is, finally, the point by today’s Epistle reading: we now have access to God (symbolically, we have gained admission into the inner chamber) because Jesus our high priest has entered into the presence of God *on our behalf*. Our faith in Christ is full of hope, since He is also our *forerunner*; that is, He is the first in a long line of followers: as his humanity is (risen from death, that is, liberated from the Fall), so shall we also be.

Although we are still journeying as mortals through the Valley of Death, we have before us the risen Christ who calls us to lay hold of the hope set before us. Faith in Christ is full of hope, since He is also our forerunner; that is, He is the first in a long line of followers: as He is—risen from death, that is, liberated from the Fall into mortality—so shall we also be. Will we believe? Let us learn from our father Abraham.

TODAY’S GOSPEL READING

The Reading from the Gospel according to Saint Mark

(Mk 9:17-30) Someone from the crowd answered him, "Teacher, I brought you my son; he has a spirit that makes him unable to speak; and whenever 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, but they could not do so." He answered them, "You faithless generation, how much longer must I be among you? How much longer must I put up with you? Bring him to me!" And they brought the boy to him. When the spirit saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth. Jesus asked the father, "How long has this been happening to him?" And he said, "From childhood. It has often cast him into the fire and into the water, to destroy him; but if you are able to do anything, have pity on us and help us." Jesus said to him, "If you are able! - All things can be done for the one who believes." Immediately the father of the child, cried out, "I believe; help my unbelief!" When Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, "You spirit that keeps this boy from speaking and hearing, I command you, come out of him, and never enter him again!" 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 was able to stand. When he had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately, "Why could we not cast it out?" He said to them "This kind can come out only through prayer." They went on from there and passed through Galilee. He did not want anyone to 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, he will rise on the third day.”

The fact that we are reading this Gospel text about prayer and fasting, now that we have just passed the midpoint of our Lenten journey is not accidental. The Church has evidently found it useful to remind us of the importance of the discipline of fasting and prayer. We are also, to the best of our abilities, participating in this fundamental Christian exercise.

But today's reading also makes an appeal to an even more basic practice: faith. **“All things can be done for the one who believes,”** the Lord tells the desperate father; **“I believe, O Lord, help my unbelief!”** replies the man. Is this man a believer or an unbeliever? Does he have undivided and unshakable faith in God, or is he simply giving God a try (“Who knows? Let's hope it works!”). We can ask this question about ourselves as well.

The fact is that faith is not a static, fixed thing that you either have or you don't. It is more dynamic than that, it is a process—the process of our spiritual reshaping into children of God. **“I believe, O Lord, help my unbelief!”** is not only the cry of that desperate parent, wavering between hope and doubt. It journeys with us all along our life of faith. Faith is a gift of God that we gradually accept and that our being continually “metabolizes.” As such faith is always imperfect and always striving for greater depth. And we don't “have faith” in the sense of “possessing” it as one would possess an object. Rather, faith is an attitude of entrusting ourselves to God, so as to allow God to work in us, and change us from glory to glory.

This, in fact, is what our Lenten journey is all about: growing in the experience of God, growing in faith. **I believe, O Lord, help my unbelief!**

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Today: the Becker family (Timothy, Caroline/ Anna, Luke, Samuel, and Hosanna/Perpetua) enters Orthodoxy through anointing with Holy Chrism. May the Lord keep all of us in the fulness of the Church, giving thanks with humility and ever ascending the ladder of virtues!

Memorial service for Metropolitan Philip who fell asleep in the Lord one year ago, and for Father Thomas Hopko, an eminent teacher and pastor of the Church, who reposed on Wednesday. If you can, do attend the funeral at Holy Transfiguration Monastery, Ellwood City, on Monday, 10 am.

- **Wednesday, 3/25, 6 PM:** Vespers Liturgy (Feast of the Annunciation) [Sts Peter & Paul]
- **Wednesday, 4/1, 6 PM:** Liturgy of Presanctified Gifts [St. Anthony's]

Remember in your prayers

LIVING: Seba, Lisa, and Sam (Michaels), Norma, Bill and Ann, George (Georgiades), Christine (Abraham), Jim, Tony, Samantha, Luke (relatives of Dollie's), Norma, Victoria (Frank's mother), Richard (Johns), Bill, Ed, Peter, Georgia and Scot, Sam, Karen (Joanna's mother), Diane, Sula, Dollie, Dolores (Bingham), Karyn, Ignatius and Amy, John, Jonathan and Joanna, Andrei and Nyoka, Benjamin, John, Janet, Craig, Christy (relatives of Jean); Yvonne (Ben's mother); Josephine, Timothy, Olga, Wesley, Christina and Dustin (relatives of John and Julie Smolen); Diane.

Ron, catechumen; Shea & Katie – seeking for the true faith.

DEPARTED: Metropolitan Philip and priest Thomas (Hopko); Rick, Phyllis (Seba's husband and sister), Angeliki, Joe and David Sipos; Bill (Georgia's father-in-law), Glenn (Jean's grandson); Stella, Edmund (Ed's uncle), Richard, Dolores Patricia (Thompson), Leatrice (Totin), Ed (Joanna's grandfather), Joseph (Rose's father), Fred (Dollie's uncle), Bob (Diane's father), Michael, Gabriel, Hilda (Chris Abraham's mother), Alfred.

My Muslim Neighbor:



A CONQUEROR AND A CITIZEN IN A CHRISTIAN LAND

Sunday, March 29, 2015, 12:30 PM

Father Damaskinos Issa

A native of Homs, Syria, Father Damaskinos is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in Theology at Duquesne University.

The presentation will be followed by Q & A.

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