



SAINT ANTHONY ORTHODOX CHURCH

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FOURTH SUNDAY OF GREAT LENT

28 March 2020

TONE 8/ Eothinon 8— St. John Climacus (author of "The Ladder"). Hieromartyr Mark, Bishop of Arethusa, Martyr Cyril the Deacon, of Heliopolis, and others who suffered under Julian the Apostate (ca. 364). Ven. John, Anchorite, of Egypt (4th c.). St. Eustathius the Confessor, Bishop of Bithynia (9th c.).

FIRST ANTIPHON

The light of Thy Face, O Lord, is marked upon us. Thou hast given a sign to those that fear Thee, so that they may flee from the bow! (R.:) Through the intercessions of the Theotokos, O Savior, save us! Thou hast ascended on high, Thou hast led captivity captive; Thou hast given an inheritance to those that fear Thy Name, O Lord. (R.:) Glory... Now and ever... (R.:)

SECOND ANTIPHON

All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God; let us worship at His footstool! (R.:) Save us, O Son of God, Who art risen from the dead, as we chant to Thee, "Alleluia"! God, our King before the ages, has worked salvation in the midst of the earth. I will be exalted among the heathen; I will be exalted in the earth. (R.:) Glory... Now and ever... (Only begotten Son and Word of God ...)

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, as we 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 OF 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 ANTHONY THE GREAT (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 FOR SUNDAYS IN GREAT LENT (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 is 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 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."**

As the Lord 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, ***into the inner chamber behind the curtain***, and who has done 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: the outer chamber or "holy place" and, behind it, the inner chamber or "holy of holies" (similar to our altar room). The inner chamber was separated from the outer one 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 there briefly, to offer 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 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, 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

From the Holy Gospel according to 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."

"All things can be done for the one who believes," the Lord tells the desperate father who had asked him to heal his child. "I believe, O Lord; help my unbelief!" replies the man. Is he a believer? Does he have undivided and unshakable faith in God, or is he simply giving God a try ("Who knows? Let's hope it works! What have I got to lose?"). We can ask this question about ourselves as well.

Indeed, what about us? In Liturgy we proclaim our faith loudly: "*I believe* in One God, the Father Almighty..." So, *we do believe*. But because we have faith, we ask God to grant us increase in faith; we also pray for each other, and we ask the saints to pray with us and for us—because we know that our faith requires healing. Faith is not a static "thing" that you either do or do not "have." It is, rather, a dynamic reality—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, caught between hope and doubt. It journeys with us all along our life of faith. Faith is a gift of God that we accept *gradually* and that we continually "metabolize." 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, one rung at the time on the ladder of divine ascent.

THE LADDER OF DIVINE ASCENT



Genesis 28:11-17 *When he came upon a certain place, Jacob stopped there for the night ... Taking a stone at the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place. Then he had a dream: a stairway rested on the ground, with its top reaching to the heavens; and God's angels were going up and down on it. And there was the Lord standing beside him and saying: I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac I will never leave you until I have done what I promised you. When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he said, "Truly, the Lord is in this place and I did not know it! ... How awesome this place is! This is nothing else but the house of God, the gateway to heaven!"*

Saint John of "The Ladder": *Become aware of God, in whose presence you are. Then take a formula of prayer and recite it with perfect attention both to the words you are saying and to the Person to whom you are saying them. ~ 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. ~ Humility is the only virtue that no devil can imitate. If pride made demons out of angels, there is no doubt that humility could make angels out of demons.*



REMEMBER IN YOUR PRAYERS

LIVING: Dollie; Don (Dollie's brother); Ann (Wilson), recovering after her new surgery; Nyal, Jean's son-in-law (motorcycle accident); Joseph Totin; Ion, Marius & Katherine (Stan); Serbanescu and Becker families; Gabriel; Karen (Jane Best's daughter); Charitini; Stella & Dimitrios; Christine (Abraham); Dollie; Venetia; Maura; Ann; Ed, Peter, John, Jonathan and Joanna; Andrei; Kent, Bob, David (relatives of Jean); Stelian; Diane; Maura (Andronic); Susannah; Ed Sr (Totin).

DEPARTED: Frank (Seba's brother); Kurt (Melinda's father); Jackie (Rose Totin's mother); Maria (Stella Lyras' sister); Sula; Kurt (Diane's son); Viorica; Norma; Miltiades; Tim (Becker); Silviu; Ross (Chrissi's friend); Richard Johns; Viorica; Bishop Antoun; Vito (DiPento); Jim and Marion (Raimondi); Stephanie (Yazge); Job; George (Georgiades); Abie (Abraham); Bill (Thomas); Marta.