

FOURTH SUNDAY OF THE GREAT FAST
SUNDAY OF SAINT JOHN CLIMACUS



Icon of the Ladder of Divine Ascent

Reflections on the Scripture Readings for this Weekend



On this fourth weekend of the Great Fast, we also celebrate the *Feast of the Annunciation* and truly remember *John Climacus*, one of the great Fathers of the Eastern Church. As my readers will recall, St. John was the author of the *Ladder of Divine Ascent* which I have been using as the basis for my article on the *Spirituality of the Christian East*.

The readings we hear today are taken from Paul's letter to the Hebrews and Mark's Gospel. In Hebrews Paul reminds his readers that God made a promise to mankind through the Chosen People, Israel. Paul writes this:

God, wishing to give the heirs of his promise even clearer evidence that his purpose would not change, guaranteed it by oath, so that ... we who have taken refuge in him might be strongly encouraged to seize the hope which is placed before us.

Of course the promise that God had made to Israel was that He would send a Messiah Who would free people from the bonds that kept them from the fullness of life.

Today's Gospel story, while it relates the cure of a possessed boy, truly highlights the faith of the father who brought the boy to Jesus. This faith is shown in this interaction between Jesus and the boy's father. Here is the interaction:

[The father says] If out of the kindness of your heart you can do anything to help us, please do. Jesus said, If you can? Everything is possible to a man who trusts.

The father then makes this absolutely, beautiful response to Jesus' challenge: "I do believe! Help my lack of trust!" These words are so appropriate and highlight something very important, namely that while we say we believe in God's great love for us, do we really *trust* that He will always act out of love toward us.

God has made a promise to us through Jesus. That promise is that He will be with us through all the struggles of life if only we *trust* Him to keep His word.

Perhaps the problem is that when we are confronted with life's challenges and we pray to God to be rescued from these challenges and He doesn't rescue us, our trust in Him is diminished. We must trust that God will always act in our best interest. When St. Paul asked God to rescue him from a problem he was having, God's response was not to rescue Paul but remind him that His grace was sufficient for Paul to endure the challenge and learn from it.

Understanding Our Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church



The feast of the *Annunciation* is one of the 12 major feasts of our Church. It recalls Mary's conception of Jesus. Sometimes the story is so romanticized that we fail to realize the strength and courage of Mary. In the time of Jesus, girls entered marriage at the age of 12. She was betrothed to Joseph which meant she was preparing for marriage.

Sacred tradition tells us that she was probably only a young maiden about 12 years of age. Her parents, in thanksgiving for her birth, had placed her in the finishing school that was run by the Temple in Jerusalem. It was there that she learned the Sacred Scriptures and how to be

a mother in accord with the rules of Judaism. She was well-acquainted with the history of Israel and especially the prophecies about the Messiah. While there, she found herself with child and was inspired to believe that the child would be special in Jewish history.

Angels have always been considered as *messengers of God*. The wonder of this story is that she demonstrated true *trust* in God. She knew that she didn't do anything wrong and yet she found herself in a very precarious situation. Her parents and Joseph, her betrothed, knew of her faith and trust and therefore did not denounce her before the community.

I truly believe we lessen Mary's courage and faith by insisting that she had some kind of vision wherein an angel actually announced to her that she was to be the mother of a child without being married. She trusted God and because she was a good, religious young woman, others also trusted her. The very important thing is that she willingly embraced the challenge that life presented and did not cease to believe and trust in God. She was rewarded with an amazing son, Jesus.

The entire story of how God came into the world - became incarnate - as a human is filled with persons who believed and trusted in God even though they may not have fully understood, initially, the true meaning of what life presented. Joachim, Anna, Joseph and Mary are all examples of persons who fully and completely trusted in God. They are true examples for us on how to live this earthly life. As we celebrate this feast today, let us ask them to help us develop a similar faith and trust in our God.

The Divine Liturgy and Our Worship of God

The second Prayer of the Faithful is likewise different in St. Basil's Liturgy. The words from this prayer are, in my estimation, truly powerful. Two very different phrases are significant: "O God, Who have been pleased in Your mercy and compassion to visit our lowliness" and "grant to our lips confident power of speech so that we may call down the grace of Your Holy Spirit upon the gifts that are about to be offered to You".

First, the fact that God became incarnate for the sake of our salvation is clearly stressed. Second, that God has, through Jesus, given us the ability to call down the Holy Spirit on our gifts if we truly believe. And last, it is through God's Spirit - His power - that the gifts are transformed and that Christ is truly in our presence. This clearly speaks to how God operates in time. God the Creator has an idea, His Wisdom and Word makes that idea real - names that idea - and then His Energy - His Spirit - brings the spoken word into existence. It is each of the Persons of the Trinity, by their loving cooperation, that bring and sustain all things in existence.

While the beginning dialogue between the celebrant and the faithful at the beginning of the Anaphora is the same as that in the Liturgy of John Chrysostom, the first priestly prayer is different. I shared some ideas from this prayer in a previous issue.

One interesting point in both Liturgies is the fact that neither John



nor Basil, when indicating that God is praised by angels, lists nine choirs. Sacred Tradition lists nine choirs in groups of three:

- Seraphim, Cherubim, Thrones;
- Dominations, Principalities, Powers;
- Virtues, Archangels and Angels.

In the versions we use, John only lists four categories of angels and Basil eight. Neither Father mentions Virtues. I shall, in a subsequent issue of the Bulletin, list each of the Choirs and a brief description of the function and role of each choir.

In both Liturgies, we exclaim that what we do, when we celebrate the Liturgy, we do together with the angels of heaven. We declare that we celebrate "with these blessed powers" and cry out with them declaring God to be "holy, indeed most holy."

The holiness of God is the most difficult of all God's attributes to explain, partly because it is one of His essential attributes that is not shared, inherently, by man. We are created in God's image, and we can share many of His attributes, to a much lesser extent. I shall address God's holiness and the choirs of angels in the future.



St. Michael's Parish News

A Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church in Dearborn Michigan

churchWIDE
RUMMAGE
SALE

COMING THIS FALL

Start cleaning out your cupboards and storage spaces for a major fall fund-raiser. Remember We will not be including (1) clothing or shoes in our sale, (2) items that are not clean and in working order, and (3) books. Thank You!



SPIRITUAL ACTS

This week, take time to read from the New Testament. In particular, read the very last days of Jesus' life as a real preparation to enter into the

Great and Holy Week.

PREPARING FOR HOLY WEEK

FLOWERS: If you donated for a Floral Memorial for Easter, make sure I have the names

SCHEDULE: Pick up a Great and Holy Week Schedule. They are in the Vestibule.

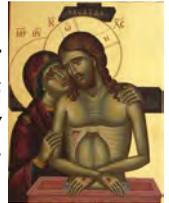
I would extend a big **THANK YOU** to Len, Janet and John who presented information about our Eparchial Synod last week during our SOUP LUNCH. What they presented is a world-wide initiative of our own Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church. You will be hearing more about this in the near future.



A heart without dreams is like a bird without feathers.

CALLED TO HOLINESS

I ended this article in the last issue of the Bulletin by asking: *What is the purpose of earthly life?* I don't know whether this stimulated any of my readers to answer this question. It truly is one of the most important questions that we can ask. As we work to find an answer to this question, we find that it helps us make more sense out of the events of life.



So why do you think that God brought all things, including you and me, into existence? Is all of creation merely some kind of cosmic accident?

As I look around at our universe I find that there is an intelligent design to all things. There is too much order and design in creation to believe that it is all *due just to chance*.

I believe that the call to holiness is a call to embrace wholeheartedly the belief that there is an intelligent being - God - who has brought all things, including human beings, into existence. By saying this does not exclude the possibility

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A PRAYER A DAY FOR THE GREAT FAST

This year the prayers are based, in part, on the Matins Services of the Great Fast

SUNDAY, MARCH 26th

O holy father John Climacus, today the Church commemorates your life and commitment to follow Jesus. Truly you have carried on your lips the praises of the Lord and, with great wisdom, have studied the words of Holy Scripture so that you might teach us how to become people who strive to imitate Christ. You have, because of your efforts, gained the riches of grace and become blessed. By your *Sacred Ladder*, father John, you have shown me how to take up the cross life has presented me and, like Jesus, to carry it without complaint. You have shown me how to imitate Christ and to follow in His steps. I humbly ask you, father John, to ask God, on my behalf, to grant me the courage to climb your *Ladder* for greater union with God. AMEN

MONDAY, MARCH 27th

O Heavenly Father, having passed beyond the middle point of this holy season of the Great Fast, grant me the strength and courage to forward to the part that still remains with joy. Help me to anoint my soul with the oil of almsgiving. Help me to perform acts of kindness and mercy so that I may be counted worthy to venerate the divine Passion of Christ our God, and to attain His dread and Holy Resurrection. O God, continue to strengthen my efforts at changing my heart and mind. Help me to learn from the passion, death and Resurrection of Your Son, Jesus, so that I might grow in His likeness. Grant me to truly desire to imitate His way of living. I ask this of You, who I call Father, Son and Holy Spirit. AMEN

TUESDAY, MARCH 28th

O Trinity uncreated and without beginning, O undivided Unity, help me to change my life so that I might grow in my likeness of Jesus, my Savior. Help me to understand that I am Your creation and that You have given me this life as an opportunity to grow in my hope and trust in You. Help me to strive to be Your child. Help me to shun all desires for the things of this world and focus on gaining the fullness of life by imitating You, O Jesus, the only-begotten of the Father. Help me to truly understand that You have given me life so that I might come to know, love and serve You and, therefore, experience the fullness of life. I ask this of You, who I call Father, Son and Holy Spirit. AMEN

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 29th

O God, for me You are the Fountain of Life and the Destroyer of death. I cry out to You from the depths of my heart: I have failed to always live like Your child. For this I beg Your forgiveness and pledge to forgive others. Help me to understand that You have given me life to grow in my likeness of Jesus and, therefore, become more deeply united to You, my God. Help me to understand, O merciful Creator, that You have brought me into this world in order to give me many opportunities to spiritually grow and truly become Your child, like Jesus. Help me to offer my very life back to You in thanksgiving for this wondrous gift of life. I ask this of You, who I call Father, Son and Holy Spirit. AMEN

A PRAYER A DAY FOR THE GREAT FAST

This year the prayers are based, in part, on the Matins Services of the Great Fast

THURSDAY, MARCH 30th

Almighty God, allow Your divinely-shining lights, Your saints and eyewitnesses of the Savior, to illuminate me in the darkness of this life so that I may walk honestly as in the day. Help me to drive out, with the torch of abstinence, the passions of the night and behold the splendor of Christ's Passion and glorious Resurrection. Awaken my soul so that it may consider the actions which I have done and beg Your forgiveness. Set before my eyes my deeds, let the drops of my tears fall so that I might choose to life like Jesus. With boldness let me tell Christ of my deeds and thought and, so justified, I might, together with Christ, offer praise to my Creator and God. I ask this of You, who I call Father, Son and Holy Spirit. AMEN

FRIDAY, MARCH 31st

O Creator, You brought salvation to humankind through Your Son Jesus so that I might be saved. He voluntarily embraced crucifixion upon the Cross so that I might have an example of how to embrace life's challenges. His act of forgiving those who crucified Him shines as a brilliant example of how to approach life's challenges. Help me to learn how to live as He did. He did not flee from the challenges life gave Him but, with simple resolve and trust in You, embraced the experiences with which life confronted Him. Help me to truly believe that the challenges of life can, if I willingly embrace them as Jesus did, bring me to the fullness of life and deeper union with You. I ask this of You, who I call Father, Son and Holy Spirit. AMEN

SATURDAY, APRIL 1st

O Mother of God, I offer you hymns of praise as I contemplate your total commitment to doing the will of God. You courageously accepted life's challenges and, by your humble consent, became the vessel by which our God came into our world in the Person of Jesus. By your loving care and guidance, you helped Jesus embrace the life given Him, which revealed to humankind not only the purpose of earthly life but also how to achieve the fullness of life and enter into a deeper union with God. As you guided Jesus to come to a deeper understanding of His role in the history of humankind, so help me to understand how to be like Him. I ask this of you, for I see you as the Mother of God and my heavenly mother. AMEN

SUNDAY, APRIL 2nd

The threefold Light of Your Godhead shines with a single radiance from the one Nature in three Persons: Father without beginning; Word of the Father, sharing the same Nature; and consubstantial Spirit, reigning with the Father and the Son. I praise You, my God, and ask You to help me complete my preparation for the celebration of Your Death and Resurrection. Help me to endure to the end of this Great Fast and to open my heart and mind to understand, through the coming events that I will celebrate with the Church, Your love for me. O You who searches the depths of my heart, who has foreseen all things concerning me fore I came into existence, be with me these last days. I ask this of You Who I call Father, Son and Holy Spirit. AMEN

Schedule of Services

Sunday, March 26 - Fourth Weekend of the Great Fast - Tone 4
Parochial Celebration of the Feast of the Annunciation
10:00 AM - Special Intention

Fifth Week of the Great Fast - Tone 5

Monday, March 27 - Matrona, Venerable
No Liturgy Scheduled

Tuesday, March 28 - Hilary & Stephen, Venerables
No Liturgy Scheduled

Wednesday, March 29 - Mark, Cyril & Others, Martyrs
No Liturgy Scheduled

Thursday, March 30 - John Climacus, Venerable
No Liturgy Scheduled

Friday, March 31 - Hypatius, Bishop
7:00 PM - Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts

Saturday, April 1 - Mary of Egypt
No Liturgy Scheduled

Sunday, April 2 - Fifth Weekend of the Great Fast - Tone 5
10:00 AM - Walter Kizel; Bob & Corinne Boyko

St. Michael the Archangel
Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church
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Dearborn, MI 48126

Rev. Wayne J. Ruchgy, Ph.D.
Pastor

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LITURGY SCHEDULE

Sundays @ 10:00 AM
Ukrainian & English

Weekdays @ 8:00 AM
English

SACRAMENTS

Penance
By Appointment

Baptism & Matrimony
*In most instances membership
required for six months*

Funerals
*Membership of an immediate
family member required*

Parish Life Council

Bob & Corinne Boyko
734.451.1893

John & Janet Dicky
313.563.5509

Daria Drobny
313.791-0292

Robert Krokosky
248.431.9554

Leo & Mary LaDouceur
313.278.7378

Gordon Malaniak
734.564.9817

Leonard Mier
313.584-6795

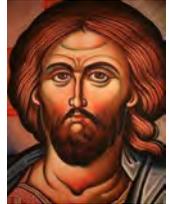
Greg & Esther Petrovich
734.453-4354

Rafic Vawter
313.624.9867

(Continued from page 5 - Called to Holiness)

of an evolutionary process that was created and is controlled by an intelligent being. I believe that being is God as we know Him to be through the dogmas of the Church. I say this because I also believe that the God I believe in is Three-Persons-In-One. If I believe that Jesus is fully God and fully Man, then I have to believe that God is Trinity.

When I think about God's incarnation as a human being, I see a evolutionary process unfolding. He could only come into earthly time when humankind was ready to accept the idea of God as Three-In-One. At the time of Jesus, portions of humankind had come to an understanding of monotheism - One God. This had to be established before humankind could come to accept God as Triune in substance and nature. I would call my readers to take time during the Great Fast to think about these things.

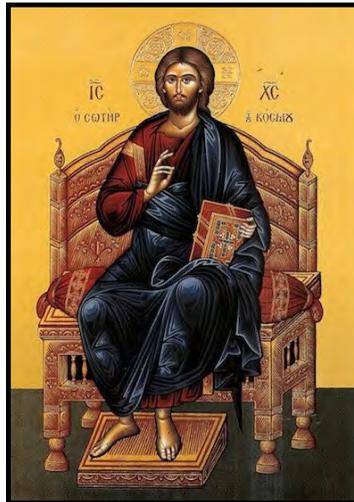


<http://www.stmichaelarchangel.org> - and - [Facebook.com/stmichaelugccdbn](https://www.facebook.com/stmichaelugccdbn)

Gaining a Deeper Understanding of the New Testament

It is my intent, in sharing thoughts about the Gospel of Mark, that my readers will begin to have a new and inspired understanding of the Gospels. They are not meant to present history in a strict sense but are historical in that they present the life and death of Jesus. They are apologetic documents, that is documents that are meant to inspire belief in Jesus. They are documents which grew out of the oral tradition of the followers of Jesus and which became formulated as a part of Christian worship.

Mark is given to the repetition of certain key words or phrases if we pay close attention to his gospel. For example, he uses some form of the verb “release” to indicate both the forgiveness of sin and the healing of a disease. In chapter 1 he says that John the Baptizer was “proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the *release* of sins (1:4). Later in the same chapter, when Jesus cures Simon’s mother-in-law, Mark says, “the fever *released* her (1:31). In chapter 2, when Mark describes Jesus’ healing the paralytic, he notes that Jesus said, “Child, your sins are *released*” (2:5). The word is not translated this way because it is not idiomatic English, but the literal meaning conveys two aspects of Mark’s interpretation of



Jesus. First, it suggests an equation between healing and forgiveness. Second, it indicates Mark’s view that Jesus continually sets people free. At the end of chapter 7, when Mark shows Jesus engaged in a healing action that summarizes much of what has gone before, he calls attention to the important of the episode by quoting Jesus in Aramaic: *Ephphata!* - that is *Be opened* or, literally, *Be released* (7:33).

In chapter 15, Mark returns to the theme, using it in an ironic way as part of the speech of Pilate. As Pilate strives to please the crowd, he keeps asking them which prisoner he should *release* to them (15:9, 11) until he finally *releases* Barabbas (15:15). When Jesus dies, however, Mark says he *released* his last breath (15:37), thus implying that in dying, Jesus himself is set free.

So we see that Mark, and also the other Gospel writers, write their gospels in a manner that was meant to influence others to believe in Jesus and his teachings. In proclaiming Jesus as Savior and Lord, they used every literary means to convince others that Jesus’ teachings were such that they filled people who followed him with the fullness of life. Remember, that when the gospels were first written, there was not a vision of him being God.

Learning Our Faith From the Greek Fathers of the Church



In the last issue I began sharing with my readers Athanasius' response to the contentions of Arius whose beliefs, eventually, were branded as a heretical. I also started sharing Athanasius' idea about the relationship between the Father and the son and answering the question of what the Son partakes in his relationship with the Father.

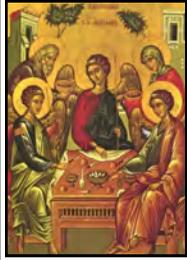
Athanasius professes that since this partaking or sharing takes place only between the Father and the Son, it must be a sharing of "the substance of the Father," as difficult as this may be to conceive or understand. Any other kind of sharing or partaking would be external and also, by

definition outside of the filial relationship of the Son to the Father. The Son, Athanasius argues, needs no other intermediary to communicate the Father to Him. The unique status he possesses as Son in itself entails an immediate, timeless, eternal sharing, partaking and communion of identical substance.

Indeed, Athanasius believes, the eternal reality of God as Father demands that his Son also be eternally in relationship with him, a relationship predicated on the common substance and relationship shared. If this were not eternal and substantial, the reality of God as Father would be an imperfect one, one requiring further addition, that of the Son in time. As Athanasius puts it, "To beget in time is characteristic of man: for man's nature is incomplete; God's offspring is eternal, for his nature is always perfect."

While I know that this is a difficult idea to understand, hopefully my readers are following the arguments of Athanasius against Arius to understand our Christian idea about God and about Jesus. An *eternal* Father, in short, demands an *eternal* Son. Was, Athanasius asks, God ever without his Word? How could he be? "Was he, who is light, without radiance?...God is, eternally; then since the Father always is, his brightness exists eternally."

As I read the arguments of the Fathers about Jesus, I realize that the belief in Jesus as God Incarnate demands, requires that God be Three-In-One and not just one Person. What an amazing truth!



THE EASTERN HERALD

СХІДНИЙ ВІСНИК

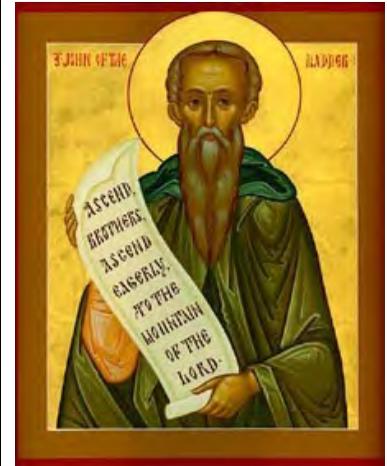
The Weekly Newsletter of Very Reverend Canon Wayne J. Ruchgy, Ph.D.
Vol. 63 No 13 Fourth Weekend of the Great Fast March 25-26, 2017

The Spirituality of the Christian East

The last element of the last step on the *Ladder of Divine Ascent* is LOVE. St. Paul states that of the three virtues - faith, hope and love - love is the greatest (1 Corinthians 13:13). As I have shared, John clearly states that prayer is the greatest activity of the spiritual life because it is, by definition, a relationship with God. Love is the same relationship to an even greater and more intimate degree. This is why John states that love is greater than prayer.

But we are told not only that love is the greatest virtue of all, but that “God IS love (1 John 4:8). Why is this so? Because God is Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit - three Persons in an eternal relationship of love, oneness and unity. Love is relational and everlasting. Its fulfillment is a perfect harmony and union of persons. Thus the only one who truly is love by nature, who is love in His very essence, is God the Trinity.

The claim that “God is love” is unique to Christianity. Other monotheists believe that one God means one person - and there can be no true love without more than one person. Polytheists believe there are many distinct divine natures - and there can be no true love without a union of persons. God can be love only if He is Trinity, and therefore only Trinitarians can truly profess that “God is love.” This is truly something that should be thought about. The concept of God as Triune - that is three persons in one God - expresses the fact that God is truly love for it is love that brings the three



Persons into the unity of One God.

Again, think about this concept. The Fathers of the Church were able to fathom the mystery of God as Three-In-One mainly because they believed that Jesus was truly God as well as truly man. This concept of God as Three Persons being bonded by love is critical in our true understanding of God. Then, when you add to this that Jesus is also man, it binds us to God.

Wisdom from St. John Climacus

“To admire the labors of the saints is good; to emulate them wins salvation; but to wish suddenly to imitate their life in every point is unreasonable and impossible.”

“A servant of the Lord is he who in body stands before men, but in mind knocks at Heaven with prayer.”

“To judge others is a shameless arrogation of the Divine prerogative; to condemn is the ruin of one’s soul.”

“In all your undertakings and in every way of life, whether you are living in obedience, or are not submitting your work to anyone, whether in outward or in spiritual matters, let it be your rule and practice to ask yourself: Am I really doing this in accordance with God’s will?”

“The Christian is one who imitates Christ in thought, word and deed, as far as is possible for human beings, believing rightly and blamelessly in the Holy Trinity.”

“Let your prayer be completely simple. For both the publican and the prodigal son were reconciled to God by a single phrase.”

“Do not say, after spending a long time in prayer, that nothing has been gained; for you have already gained something. And what higher good is there than to cling to the Lord and persevere in unceasing union with Him?”

“Some people with a hot temper do not worry about it and ignore the remedies that would heal them. They forget, unfortunately, what is written: ‘Surely anger kills the fool, and jealousy slays the simple,’ (Job 5:2).”

“A charitable and sensible mind takes careful note of whatever virtues it sees in anyone. But a fool looks for faults and defects. And of such it is said: ‘They have searched out iniquity and expired in the search.’ Do not condemn, even if you see with your eyes, for they are often deceived”

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