

FC RC NPKA SAINTS PETER AND PAUL ORTHODOX CHURCH

A Parish of the Orthodox Church in America
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GLORY TO JESUS CHRIST! GLORY TO GOD FOR ALL THINGS!

March 22, 2015	Sunday of Saint John of 'The Ladder'	Divine Liturgy	9:30 am
March 25	Wednesday	Annunciation of our Most Holy Lady	Divine Liturgy 6:00 pm
March 26	Thursday	Great Canon of Saint Andrew of Crete	6:00 pm
March 27	Friday	Akathistos Hymn to the Mother of God	6:00 pm
March 28	Saturday	Praises of the Mother of God	Divine Liturgy 9:00 am
	Saturday	Great Vespers	4:00 pm
March 28	Sunday of Saint Mary of Egypt	Divine Liturgy	9:30 am

Saints of the Day: Hieromartyr Basil, Presbyter of Ancyra (362). Martyr Drosida (Drosis) of Antioch, and five virgins (104). Venerable Isaac, founder of the Dalmatian Monastery at Constantinople (383). Martyrs Callinica and Basilissa of Rome (2 c.). Saint Basil of Mangazea in Siberia (1600). Venerable Euthymius of Constantinople. Saint Paul, Bishop of Narbonne, Brittany (3 c.). New Martyr Euthymius of Mount Athos (1814). New Martyr Basil (Zelentsov) Bishop of Priluk (1930). New Martyr Schema-abbess Sophia of Kiev (1941) and her Priest Demetrius Ivanov (1934). Saint Failbhe Abbot of Iona, (d. 680). Saint Trien (Trienan) Abbot of Killelga (5th c.). Saint Darerca (5th c.)

Please remember in your prayers: Suffering Christians of Egypt, Syria, the Middle East and Ukraine. Bishop BOULOS and Bishop YOHANNA, of Aleppo. Archimandrites Athanasy, Nectarios, Pachomy. Archpriests Alvian, Eugene, Leonid, John, Jason, John, Vincent. Priests Jacobus, Leonid. Deacons Mark, Demetrios, Philip. Mothers Raphaela, Michaela, Catherine, Anna. Monk Victor, Valentina, Dimitri, Nina, Daniel, Catherine, Helen, Anna, Peter, Helen, Michael, Stephanie, Zara, Nolan, Emelie, Michael, Ed, Nettie, Maria, Michael, John, James, Nancy, Susan, Daniel, Aaron, Nicole, Ashley, Mark, Jennifer, Nina, Nadine, Michael, Anna, Gregory, Marianna, Helen, Isaiah, Jamie, Albert, Kevin, Robert, Robert, Andrew, David, Warren.

God Grant Many Years! Prayers for the health of Mitered Archpriest Vincent Saverino were offered at Liturgy and Moleben at the request of Father John Udics.

Memory Eternal. Prayers for the repose of the soul of Protopresbyter Thomas Hopko were offered at Liturgy and Litiya today at the request of Father John Udics.

Memory Eternal. Prayers for the repose of the souls of Anna Udics Mayhrich, Mary Konet Udics, John Higgins and Archpriest Eugene Vansuch were offered at Liturgy and Litiya today at the request of Father Udics.

Memory Eternal. Prayers for the repose of the souls of Anna Sokerka and Stefan Sokol were offered at Liturgy and Litiya today at the request of the "Memory Eternal Requiem Service Fund."

FOR YOUR CALENDARS:

March 26: Altar Society Bazaar prep: Make up cookie trays, bread. 8:30 am.

March 28 Saturday: Spring Bazaar 11 am.

ON THE SUNDAY OF SAINT JOHN OF "THE LADDER"

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

This Sunday, the fourth in Great Lent, the Church commemorates Saint John of the Ladder. Who was he? Saint John lived in the sixth and seventh centuries. Becoming a novice at the age of sixteen at Saint Catherine's Monastery on Mt Sinai, he later became a hermit and then the Abbot of the Monastery. There he lived in monasticism for 64 years, before he reposed at the age of eighty in the year 649. Mt Sinai was the mountain where for our sakes Moses received the Ten Commandments, where God spoke to man. In some way we can say that God also spoke to Saint John on Mt Sinai and gave him commandments for our sakes. For Saint John was a man of grace who lived in unceasing prayer and he also wrote down what he had learnt from his life in God in his book called 'The Ladder'. It is this work which has given Saint John his title 'of the Ladder'.

In this book the Saint describes in thirty chapters, or rungs, how we can raise ourselves up from our fallen, earthly states, overcoming our sinful inclinations. Thus the soul rises up to God as if on a ladder. Although the last five chapters of this book in particular are quite difficult for such people as ourselves who live in the world, the earlier chapters can be read by all, giving us great profit. However, we can say that the first rungs of this ladder are those which are most suitable for us. Like the man in today's Gospel, they are for those who cry out to God: 'Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief'. But the later chapters are for those who are able to cast out demons, as Christ did also in today's Gospel. This book, The Ladder, is in print today and can be bought by any who wish to read it with care and attention over time, taking in its precious words a little at a time.

On this Sunday in previous years I have chosen to read extracts from some of the early chapters of Saint John's Ladder. Today I would simply like to relate to you just one saying of Saint John, a simple saying which I know has changed lives and saved people from their sins. Here is his saying:

Saint John related that monastic life was similar to a number of stones being shaken together in a jar. At first the stones were sharp and hard, with rough, cutting edges. However as the jar was shaken, so the stones became smoother and rounder, like the pebbles one can find on the seashore.

Although Saint John spoke of monastic life in this saying, it can be applied to any sort of community, in a family, at home, at work, at school, at the docks, in the office and also in our parish churches. By this saying Saint John was indicating that our salvation comes through others. In whatever position God places us, we can find salvation through the difficulties or even friction that we encounter with others. This does not mean that we should go looking for, still less creating, difficulties. God will only allow us the difficulties which we are capable of coping with through His Grace and which we encounter naturally in the course of our everyday lives. The next time that we encounter difficulties in any aspect of our lives where we are with others, let us consider this saying of Saint John, let us think of the rough, sharp stones in the jar, wearing each other into rounded, smooth and even beautiful pebbles. For those rough, angular stones which are worked into smooth and well-rounded pebbles are ourselves, providing only that we persevere in patience in the life in Christ.

Holy Father John, pray to God for us!

Archpriest John Breck: LENTEN ASCETICISM

In a remarkable little book entitled *Body of Death and of Glory*, the French Orthodox theologian and historian, Olivier Clément speaks of the fundamental reason for Christian asceticism.

“Asceticism can only be understood in the perspective of the resurrected, liturgical body. Asceticism signifies the effort to strip away our masks, those neurotic identities that usurp our personal vocation. It is an effort based not on will-power, but on a ceaseless abandonment of oneself to grace.... Asceticism is the struggle, the self-abandonment of openness and faith, which allows the Spirit to transform the anonymous body of our species into a body of ‘language’ that expresses both the person and communion among persons. Thanks to this ascetic struggle, we are gradually transformed from an acquisitive body, that treats the world as its prey, into a *body of celebration*, that unites itself to the ecclesial liturgy and thereby to the cosmic liturgy.”

The aim of the Church’s ascetic practices is to effect this change, a radical transformation of the person, from a body of death to a glorified body, a body of celebration.

Caught up in a raging battle between his desire for God and the “law of sin” that holds him captive, the apostle Paul cries out, “Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” (Rom 7:24) He answers the question with a doxology: “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!”

God has prepared us, created and blessed us, “for glory” (Rom 9:23). “You have died,” Paul tells the Colossians, “and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ appears—He who is your life—then you also will appear with Him in glory!” (Col 3:3-4). Caught up in a world of sin, dwelling in a “body of sin” subject to death and corruption, we are nevertheless called, “destined,” to participate fully in the glory of the Risen Christ. Through ascetic practice, as through eucharistic communion, that participation becomes a present reality, one that little by little transforms our body of death into a true body of celebration.

This is the perspective that makes sense out of our lenten asceticism. Against this perspective there is the subtle and powerful temptation to turn the “great fast” into an end in itself. We adopt lenten practices of bodily prostrations because of their physical benefit; we abstain from meat and maybe dairy products in order to purge the body of toxins, or to lose weight, or to be able to say “we did it.”

This popular distortion of the reason for lenten discipline goes hand in hand with an obsessive need to “do it right,” exemplified by a close examination of every carton we purchase in the grocery store, to be sure it contains not a trace of meat or dairy. We pride ourselves on our ability to sacrifice some pleasure (movies, alcohol, sex, ice cream), at least during the first and fifth weeks of Great Lent. Yet the Old Adam remains very much alive. Our sacrifice all too seldom translates into self-giving love. We still harbor the same old grudges, still neglect the anonymous undesirables in our neighborhoods, and still take vengeance when the opportunity arises. In Saint Basil’s words, we abstain from meat yet devour our brother!

The true aim of all ascetic practice is to allow grace to work within us. It is to allow the Holy Spirit to transform our acquisitive self, our “body of death,” into a “body of celebration.” As Clément points out, that transformation requires that we unite ourselves to the “ecclesial liturgy,” the ongoing worship of the Church. And this in turn unites us with the “cosmic liturgy,” the eternal worship of all those who have passed into the Communion of Saints.

If we abstain from certain foods, increase and deepen our personal and corporate prayer, devote more time and attention to Scripture and the writings of the Holy Fathers, and intentionally share with others the riches with which God has blessed us, it is for only one purpose: to allow the Holy Spirit to work this transformation within us, from a body of death to a body of glory.

Furthermore, and most importantly, these lenten practices, that we glibly and pridefully refer to as “sacrifices,” can gradually become every day actions that mark our entire life.

Lenten asceticism, in other words, is not something exceptional we assume because of tradition (“we always did it that way”) or because of obligation (we feel guilty if we don’t). Lenten asceticism is an invitation, a call to something greater, more beautiful and more fulfilling than anything our ordinary experience can offer. It is an appeal, made by God Himself, to recognize that He alone is the object of every true desire, every authentic longing we can know.

Insofar as we heed this appeal, we discover that each day of our life can truly be viewed and lived in the “joyful sorrow” of the Lenten spring. We find, to our astonishment and our delight, that every gesture and every attitude can be shaped by a profound anticipation, a profound longing, for the transformation of our lowly body into the glorious Body of Jesus Christ (Phil 3:21).