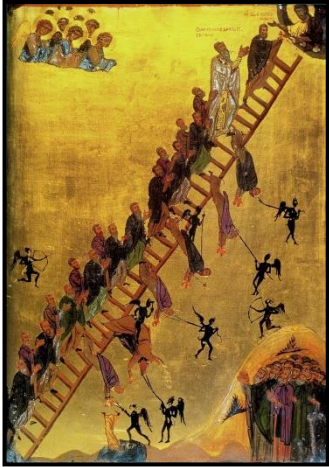


The Fourth Sunday of Lent



Icon from the collection of Saint Catherine's Mount Sinai Monastery – used with permission

On the fourth Sunday of Great Lent we commemorate St. John Climacus who wrote the *LADDER of HOLY ASCENT*.

THE LADDER begins with the rejection of worldliness, and ends with God, Who is love. As we climb the ladder of virtues while making our way toward Christ, we must remember that our focus must remain on the Person and power of our Saviour. As we advance in the spiritual life slowly, taking it one "step" at a time, we need to be in a state of constant prayer, especially the "Jesus Prayer".

It is easy to become diverted in this spiritual path of inner struggle. There is a kind of self-delusion, known as "prelest", where we are convinced that what we are doing is that which God wants for us. It is easy to think of ourselves as being "good" in the religious sense. We attend Church on Sunday; we don't do bad things to others; and we pray once in a while. Isn't it obvious that we are on our way to Heaven? **St. John assures us that we have accepted certain sinfulness as "part of nature" and refuse to do spiritual battle with them. We need to identify and correct these areas of our lives.**

Nothing is accomplished without some hard work; we need to entrust our life to God in Christ. We need the Divine Grace of the Holy Spirit through Christ in order to become one with the Father. The acquisition of the Holy Spirit is a life-long struggle. Our commitment to this process is made firm during the Great Fast and is the reason of the Great Fast in the first instance. It is now that we look at our purposes for being here and our responsibilities as Christians with the eyes faith and trust in God.

Adapted from: <http://www.glasgoworthodox.org/sundays-lent-st-john-climacus-hold-tight/>

The Jesus Prayer



The Jesus Prayer is the briefest meditation in the Eastern Church's tradition. This prayer centers on the Holy Name itself. It may be said in its entirety: "*Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me, a sinner*"; it may be changed to "us sinners" or to other persons named, or it may be shortened. The power lies in the name of Jesus; thus "Jesus" alone, may fulfill the whole need of the one who prays.

The Jesus Prayer can be used for worship and petition; as intercession, invocation, adoration, and as thanksgiving. It is a means of communion with God and with all those who pray. "Prayer of the heart" is when the Jesus Prayer is sunk so deeply in our hearts that it moves on its own. The fact that we can train our hearts to go on praying even when we sleep, keeps us uninterruptedly within the community of prayer.

We can work on saying this prayer with each breath: *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God*, as we breathe in, *have mercy on me, a sinner*, as we breathe out. We can say this aloud, silently with the words on our lips, or silently in our hearts. This prayer should be repeated quietly, unhurriedly, thoughtfully. Each thought should be concentrated on Jesus, forgetting all else, both joys and sorrows. Any stray thought, however good or pious, can become an obstacle. St. John of the Ladder counsels that the mind should be locked into the words of the prayer and should be forced back each time it departs from it. The Jesus Prayer is a signpost along the spiritual journey, a journey that all of us must take.