

GREAT LENT

Fourth Sunday - Saint John Climacus

(of the Ladder)



“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.”

Saint John Climacus (+649)

Lent is a time of reflection and renewal as we engage deeply with our spiritual paths. This time is not just about following tradition, but it's about working toward personal transformation. This Fourth Sunday of Lent, the Gospel of Mark 9:17-31 and the wisdom of Saint John Climacus (=of the ladder) give us lessons for life. Let's go deeper and see what they teach us about handling challenges, growing spiritually, and becoming the best version of ourselves.

Gospel Reflection: Healing Through Faith

In this moving story from the Gospel of Mark, we encounter a father who seeks healing for his son, who has been troubled by a serious condition since childhood. This story isn't simply about physical healing; it explores themes of parental love, a community's doubt, and the incredible power of faith to transform lives. The father's heartfelt plea, "I believe; help my unbelief," strikes at the core of what it means to have faith. We all live with this same struggle: we have belief and doubt at the same time. This coexistence of belief and doubt is why we need divine guidance on our spiritual paths.

Gospel Reflection: Healing Through Faith

This Sunday, we reflect on an influential spiritual text, "The Ladder of Divine Ascent," by Saint John Climacus. This text is read in monasteries during Lent, and in the nineteenth century, it was read everywhere - even ranking second in popularity only to the Bible! Saint John uses the metaphor of a ladder to describe our spiritual journey, with each step representing a step closer to holiness. Even though it was written long ago, the guidance on how we can control our emotions, thoughts, and hearts still works today. It reminds us that spiritual growth requires patience, humility, and overcoming challenges— just like cautiously climbing a ladder one step at a time. Missteps can make us fall, reminding us to pay attention. During Lent, Saint John's insights can help us focus more on prayer and fasting. This will bring us closer to God.



Ancient Wisdom for Your Life

The teachings of the Gospel and Saint John Climacus are still relevant today. They can show us how to handle the challenges, stresses, and drama of modern life with grace and faith. They help us understand that challenges aren't always bad—they're a chance to become stronger and wiser. Through their guidance, we learn that it is important to take care of our inner selves, build up our spiritual strength, and create a deeper connection to our beliefs.

Lent: A Time for Reflection and Growth

Lent reminds us that it is important to reflect on our lives. It's a time to stop bad habits and grow closer to God through prayer, fasting, and focusing on what's important. This sacred time is like those big life changes that make you rethink everything – Lent is our chance to think about our own direction and purpose.



Practical Application: Putting Your Beliefs into Action

This tradition is not just about remembering events from long ago. It's about making the power and promise of the Cross real in our lives today. Remember how the Israelites in the wilderness found refreshment through Moses (Exodus 16:1-36)? That's what the Cross is doing for us during Lent. It also reminds us that we are not alone in the hard parts of life. No matter what happens, no matter what people say or think, no matter how we feel, Christ is with us, leading us to the spiritual Jerusalem of His Resurrection.

Conclusion: Continuing the Journey

As we progress through Lent, let the father's prayer, "I believe; help my unbelief," and the example of St. John's ladder guide us. These two stories show us that strengthening our faith and getting closer to God is filled with challenges and moments of divine grace. By sticking to our spiritual journey, even when it's difficult, we open ourselves up to amazing possibilities – feeling less alone, finding new strength, and letting our beliefs change us for the better.

Troparion — Tone 1:

Dweller of the desert and angel in the body, / you were shown to be a wonderworker, our God-bearing Father John. / You received heavenly gifts through fasting, vigil, and prayer: / healing the sick and the souls of those drawn to you by faith. / Glory to Him who gave you strength. / Glory to Him who granted you a crown. / Glory to Him Who, through you, grants healing to all.

Discussion Questions:

1. The Gospel story of the father's plea for his son shows us that it's normal to have strong beliefs, but also experience doubt at the same time. Has there been a time when you experienced feelings of belief mixed with doubt? How did you handle those feelings?
2. Think of "The Ladder of Divine Ascent" as a way of talking about becoming a better version of yourself- whether that means spiritually or just in your everyday life. What are some key steps in your own journey? How can you tackle those challenges?
3. Lent prompts us to embrace practices like prayer and fasting. These practices can be tough, but they're meant to help us grow closer to God. Beyond their spiritual significance, do you think prayer and fasting can also help you in other areas of your life? Are there other routines or disciplines that might help you grow in the same way?
4. Life throws a lot at us today – social media pressure, gossip, and dealing with stress and anxiety of school. How can ancient wisdom from Christ and Saint John Climacus help?
5. Discuss the role of renewal in Lent. Can you think of a time when you felt a positive shift or a spiritual boost in your life? What caused this change, and how has it influenced your journey?

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