



Sunday of St. John Climacus

The Reading is from Mark 9:17-31

At that time, a man came to Jesus kneeling and saying: "Teacher, I brought my son to you, for he has a dumb spirit; and wherever 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, and they were not able." And he answered them, "O faithless generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him to me."

And they brought the boy to him; and when the spirit saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth. And Jesus asked his father, "How long has he had this?" And he said, "From childhood. And it has often cast him into the fire and into the water, to destroy him; but if you can do anything, have pity on us and help us."

And Jesus said to him, "If you can! All things are possible to him who believes." Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, "I believe; help my unbelief!" And when Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, "You dumb and deaf spirit, I command you, come out of him, and never enter him again." And 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 arose.

And when he had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately, "Why could we not cast it out?" And he said to them, "This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer and fasting." They went on from there and passed through Galilee. And he would not have any one 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, after three days he will rise."

On March 30 and on the Fourth Sunday of Holy Lent the Orthodox Church commemorates our Righteous Father John Climacus. He is called Climacus due to his authorship of the great spiritual work *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*.

“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?**”

Except taken from the book: The Ladder of Divine Ascent, By: St. John Climacus.

Resurrectional Apolytikion. Mode 3.

Let the heavens sing for joy, and let everything on earth be glad. For with His Arm the Lord has worked power. He trampled death under foot by means of death; and He became the firstborn from the dead. From the maw of Hades He delivered us; and He granted the world His great mercy. [SD]

For the Devout Man. Mode pl. 4.

With the rivers of your tears you made the barren desert bloom; and with your sighs from deep within, you made your labors bear their fruits a hundredfold; and you became a star, illuminating the world by your miracles, O John, our devout father. Intercede with Christ our God, for the salvation of our souls.

Kontakion. Mode pl. 4. Automelon.

O Champion General, I your City now inscribe to you Triumphant anthems as the tokens of my gratitude, Being rescued from the terrors, O Theotokos. Inasmuch as you have power unassailable, From all kinds of perils free me, so that unto you I may cry aloud: Rejoice, O unwedded Bride.

Discussion

This 4th Sunday of Great Lent we remember St. John Climacus who wrote a book about a ladder reaching to heaven. It is a symbolic image which serves to remind us as Christians that we are on a sojourn. All of Great Lent is a journey, prayer and fasting and charity and repentance are the ways we move along this journey toward our destination: the Kingdom of God.

We are given situations in which we can speak up for what is true and right or what makes for peace, and instead we allow the dumb spirit to come upon us and we remain silent in the moment when our voice might make difference. We could speak up for those who cannot defend themselves, for the oppressed, for the weak and vulnerable, for victims, but instead we become possessed with that demonic silence.

Speech and hearing as gifts from God to be used to uplift, edify, build up others. We can use hearing and speech as forms of charity, love, mercy, generosity.

Dumb spirit – causes us to be silent when we should speak up

Deaf spirit – causes us to fail to hear the cries for mercy of others. It is a deafness that causes a hardening of the heart.

For the self denial of Lenten fasting isn't praised in today's Gospel lesson as a means for us to attain salvation for our own souls, but rather as a means to drive out evil spirits from the world. We aren't fasting for our own selfish interests – to gain our own salvation; we are fasting to help liberate our fellow humans from demonic influence. Fasting in this sense is not about "ME". It is about God's love for the world, and that some of God's Kingdom goals only can be accomplished through intense prayer and fasting.

Christ speaks of His crucifixion. He goes willingly.

Let us do so as well. Fight the good fight!