

young man is due both to their own negligence concerning prayerful asceticism, as well as to the father's little belief. The effort of the disciples to cure the young man betrays self confidence and unforgivable familiarity, since they're not proceeding with their faith in the divine almightiness, prevailing, but with trust in their own selves, prevailing. So for this reason, Holy God restraining the gift which He had given them, allows them to become a laughingstock and for them to think correctly and to be guided to more fasting and prayer. The father of the young man does not bring him with a good dispositioned conviction and trust, but with hesitation and reservation. While only when he is guided to pray, strongly asking the strengthening of his faith, does he receive an answer, and gain what is longed for.

Brethren, faith can never be separated from prayer and asceticism, otherwise they cannot benefit. Spiritual life means a systematic edification on the foundation of faith, with asceticism in prayer, something which denotes the Orthodox ethos, brings forth salvation and characterizes holiness!

Archimandrite I. N

**SUNDAY, APRIL 10, 2016 SUNDAY OF ST. JOHN CLIMACUS** *Terence and his Companions beheaded at Carthage, Gregory V, the Holy Martyr and Patriarch of Constantinople, Holy Father Theona, Archbishop of Thessalonica, 150 and more Righteous Martyr Fathers of the Sacred Monastery of Pantocrator Daou Pentelis*

**tone of the week:** *Fourth Tone*

**EOCHINON** *First Eochinon*

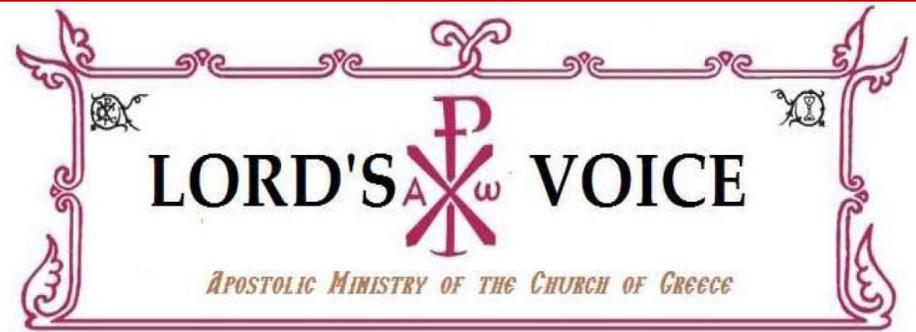
**EPISTLE:** *St. Paul's Letter to the Hebrews 6:13-20*

**GOSPEL:** *Mark 9:17-31*

**NEXT SUNDAY, APRIL 17, 2016 SUNDAY OF ST. MARY OF EGYPT,** *Symeon the Holy Martyr and Bishop of Persia, Makarios, Bishop of Corinth, Agapetos of Rome*

**EPISTLE:** *St. Paul's Letter to the Hebrews 9:11-14*

**GOSPEL:** *Mark 10:32-45*



64<sup>TH</sup> YEAR

APRIL 10, 2016

PAMPHLET # 15 (3280)

## WITH PRAYERFUL ASCETISM IN FAITH

Today's Sunday is important, since our Church is coming to show forth the superior figure in the choir of her Saints, Saint John, Abbot of Sinai Monastery and author of the ascetical book which is familiar, titled the "Ladder". Furthermore, due to the importance of the book, the title also defines the author, who is documented in the hagiological lists, as Saint John of the Ladder. So for this reason, also today, the person of the Saint is essentially projected so much, as also the book, while because the Church not only wants to point it out as a necessary reading for each Christian, but simultaneously she desires to underline the fact of asceticism as a necessary element of spiritual life. Thus she strengthens us in our struggling journey toward Pascha, since the more Great Lent proceeds, it is human for some people to become fainthearted and to need support.

### With a asceticism as a starting point

In order to show forth how important asceticism is in our journey toward God the Father, and its value in preserving an essential relationship with Him, the Church selects today's gospel passage, where Christ Himself speaks to us about prayer and fasting, as weapons which, when they are combined, bring about the important victory against the demons.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO 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."

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The reference, of course, occurs on account of the weakness of the disciples to cast out the demon from an unfortunate young man, whose father, subsequently is forced to bring him before the Lord. Strange! The disciples were the same ones who had performed so many miracles, especially when Christ separated them into groups of two and sent them throughout Judea, we would say, on a training apostolic journey. Then,

but also subsequently, how did they manage to do the miracles, elsewhere and now they are failing? The Lord's disposition is clearcut, to cultivate the spirit of humble-mindedness in his disciples, so that they realize that the power that they possessed, was not their own, but "a perfect gift from above".

Not, however, only this. Christ wants to stress to His own people, to those who were familiar as his disciples, to those who had been distinguished for their good disposition and spirituality, that they are not allowed to be complacent, that they constantly ought to be struggling for spiritual progress, since being static, denotes spiritual pathogenesis. And as a delicate spiritual work, worthy to accompany the Christian in the totality of his life, but also as safety in spiritual dangers, our Christ suggests the combination of fasting and prayer, virtues which from then on makeup the basis of that which we call the asceticism of Orthodoxy. It is not by chance that whoever is numbered in the angel-like monastic ranks, are called to dedicate their life to reach, with the use of ascetical fights and mainly fasting, into a prayerful condition, as a presupposition of sanctification and theosis.

### The strengthening of faith

And something else occurs in today's passage which is indicative of the benefit from ascesis and prayer. Christ gets frustrated and says a harsh phrase against the disbelief of that generation. And not only this, but also indirectly, yet clearly, he scolds the father of the possessed youth, who after he first complained about the weakness of the disciples to cure his child, subsequently he expresses doubts even about the power of Christ with the characteristic phrase "if you are able", in other words, if you are able to do something.

Christ to this hypothetical saying, answers with another hypothetical saying: "if you are able to believe", in other words, if you are also able to believe! In order for that father to recover from his problematic behavior and to shout "I believe, O Lord, help me to be delivered from my weak belief and You make up the deficiency of my faith". And this prayerful confession is, what, in the end helped the child and allowed the Lord to do the miracle.

Let's pay attention to the fact that in the whole passage ascesis,