

that God owes them. Both are outside the truth. It is not any salaried work. "The kingdom of God is not a reward for works, but the grace of the Master prepared for faithful servants" (St. Mark the Hermit). Therefore according to the wise saying of St. Gregory Palamas, "let us guard in ourselves the Grace of God undiminished, wholly tending ourselves together in obedience, and by works, offering ourselves to God, fulfilling the holy commandments also by works, because He also gave himself for us."

Those of us who honor the Saints and Ascetics of our Church must also honor their way of life. Let us pray for this and let us strive for this.

Archim. F. A

**SUNDAY, APRIL 14, 2024 SUNDAY OF ST. JOHN**

**CLIMACUS**, *Aristarchus, Podens, Trophimus the Apostles of 70. Thomais the Martyr of Alexandria, Ardalion the Actor and Martyr, Demetrius the New Martyr of Arkadia.*

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

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

**TONE OF THE WEEK:** *Third Tone*

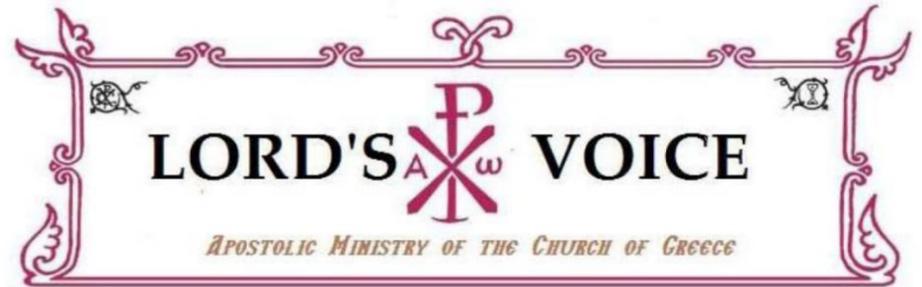
**EOTHINON** *Eleventh Eothinon*

**SUNDAY, APRIL 21, 2024 SUNDAY OF ST. MARY OF EGYPT**

, *The Holy Hieromartyr Januarius and Those With Him, Our Holy Father Maximian, Patriarch of Constantinople, Theodore the Holy Martyr & his mother Philippa of Perge, Alexandra the Martyr, Anastasios the Monk of Sinai, Beuno, Abbot of Clynnog*

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

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



72<sup>ST</sup> YEAR APRIL 14 2024 PAMPHLET # 15 (3698)

## THE ASCETIC LIFE

For today's secularized man, the projection of a Holy ascetic is a problem. How can the ascetical figure of St. John, the author of the Ladder, speak, who with tears, fasting, and spiritual ascesis acquired and preserved the Grace of God? In Orthodox teaching, the ascetical life is none other than the surpassing of individualism, the effort in Grace for us to apply the commandments of God, to live the life of Jesus of Christ.

### The Orthodox ascetical ethos

The objection of today's people that an ascetic cannot speak to man is not right, for two main reasons: First, because in the Orthodox Patristic teaching, there is no difference between the monastic and the worldly way of life, nor between unmarried and married people, but between people who have the Holy Spirit and people who don't have it. Secondly, because the way of life, as described by Holy Scripture and as the saints experience it, is ascetical. The orders "strive to enter through the narrow gate", "the Kingdom of God is taken by force and the forceful seize it", "deaden your members upon the earth", have absolute and

## THE SUNDAY GOSPEL (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."

universal force, while they refer to all of us, regardless of our place of residence and our way of life. Because, just as the salvation that

Christ completed is offered to all the baptized "in the name of the life-giving and thearchic Trinity", so also the path of salvation is common to all of us.

### **An end or a means?**

Because perfection is not a human work and cannot be developed and acquired only by the efforts of man's natural capabilities, but it is a gift of the Holy Spirit, therefore asceticism in and of itself, is never an end, but only a means to obtain God's gift.

Asceticism in Orthodoxy is not a sterile duty, a faithful observance of a rigid formality, a regular propriety, a hypocritical pious appearance. Asceticism is love. Asceticism is humility. Asceticism means obedience to the Church.

It is a fact that the people of our time are unable to understand the meaning of asceticism in our lives. Even in the monastic life, phenomena are observed which reveal the basic deviation of the latest spiritual decline: the departure from the ascetical ethos.

That is why the Church very wisely over time also projects the contests of Her Saints and appoints ways of asceticism that train people's wills and convert them from the worst to the better and they strengthen us in preserving our self-awareness.

Observance of Christ's commandments is the seal and fulfillment of our effort. Without our whole-hearted response to the will of God and the fulfillment of His gospel commandments, it is impossible to cleanse ourselves from the defilement of sin and to achieve our sanctification in Christ. Some people, while not keeping the commandments, think that they believe correctly. Some again, who keep them, await the Kingdom of God as a salary