

Fourth Sunday of Great Lent —St. John Climacus

On the Fourth Sunday of the Fast, we celebrate the memory of our Holy Father John, the author of the Ladder.

In the Church services for the fourth Sunday the Holy Church offers us a great example of the life of fasting in the person of the Venerable John of the Ladder, who, "having overcome the flesh through fasting" and "by the sweat of his ascetic efforts quenched the fiery arrows of the enemy" and "renewed the strength of souls" and, "ascending to the height of virtues", "received in his soul the divine wealth of the Spirit, undefiled prayer, chastity, modesty, continuous vigil", "was deified through heavenly glory", "was revealed as a physician to those sick through sin" and was the author of the Ladder of Paradise.

According to the expression of the Holy Church, how the profoundly granted ascetic life of the Venerable John "gives us a pleasure sweeter than honey", and so his Ladder "brings to us the ever flowering fruits of his teaching, pleasing the heart with vigilant heeding: for souls are rising up the ladder from earth to heaven and abiding in glory".

The memory of Saint John the Ladder is celebrated on the 30th of March; but it is also celebrated today, perhaps because in monasteries it is customary to read The Ladder from the beginning of the Holy Fast.

Little is known about the life of St. John of the Ladder, or St. John Climacus. According to one source, he was born around the year 579; tonsured a monk prior to 599; became abbot of St. Catherine's Monastery on Mount Sinai no later than 639; and died around 649.

The Greek word "klimakos" means "ladder." The name was given to John because he wrote a popular book on asceticism, titled *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*. The book is divided into 30 chapters, or "steps on the ladder," describing the spiritual journey from sinfulness to entrance into God's Kingdom and perfection.

His 30 steps are regarded as falling into two sections; steps 1-26 mainly concern sins that must be overcome and suggestions as to how to do so; steps 27-30 speak of prayer, solitude, faith, hope and love—the virtues that are to be perfected in order to achieve communion with God.

John's work primarily was written for monastic communities, but it has proven valuable for readers outside the monastic life.

He spent 40 years in solitude near a monastery church, ate and slept little, prayed much and wrote books. His life was dedicated to unceasing prayer, full of Christian humility and love for Christ.

A Journey Through Great Lent

Very Rev. Stephen Belonick