

ST. JOHN CLIMACUS

*"Ascend Brothers!
Ascend Eagerly to
the Mountain of
the Lord!"*

Saint Paul the Apostle Orthodox Church

24 BURKE ROAD

FREEHOLD, NJ 07728

Fourth Sunday of the Great Fast

April 3, 2011

Father Robert E Lucas, Pastor; Subdeacon Daniel
J. Korba and Nikitas Tsokris, Cantors

Rectory 215-862-9227; Parish Center 732-780-3158

We Are A Stewardship Parish Of Time, Talent and Treasure

The mission of our parish faith community is to teach the Gospel message in the rich tradition of the Orthodox Church; to enable people to reflect the image of Jesus Christ in every day activities of life; to offer spiritual formation through changing times; and to celebrate community among Orthodox believers in our Freehold area.

We of St. Paul the Apostle Parish dedicate ourselves to maintaining the sanctity of worship and spiritual enlightenment in a family environment that reaches and involves all ages and unifies all people.

We believe in the spirit of ecumenism in which we share our faith by word and example and extend our spiritual insights to all people.

We accept the responsibility of Christian Stewardship that through generous giving we may all experience a faith communion with Christ as the Center of our lives.

We dedicate ourselves to insuring the well-being of all people so that we may truly experience the message of Christ's salutary gospel.

We are a beacon on a hill with the eyes of many upon us; that beacon is the inspired Light of Christ which must shine brightly in our lives.

It is not ourselves we preach but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts, that we in turn might make known the glory of God shining on the face of Christ. This treasure we possess in earthen vessels to make it clear that its surpassing power comes from God and not from us. We are afflicted in every way possible, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in us 2 Corinthians 4: 5 – 8.

GLAD TIDINGS

+++ The Scripture Study Class meets on Tuesdays at 11:00 AM to 1:00 PM. Please come and join us by investing time in learning our precious faith so we can better enjoy and live it! The public is invited to participate with us, so invite a friend or neighbor. In preparation for this week, please read the nineteenth to twenty-first chapters of the Book of Genesis.

+++ The fourth All Souls' Day will take place this Saturday with the Divine Liturgy celebrated at 9:00 AM followed by a Memorial service. Please join us in prayer.

+++ We acknowledge with deep gratitude the generous and kind offering this past week of gifts to the parish in the amount of \$65.00 in blessed memory of our beloved departed parishioner, +Paul Pallas. We pray the merciful Lord provide a blessed repose for the soul of +Paul and grant him Eternal Memory as we thank the generosity of these gracious souls. Any others who would like to join this exclusive list, please see Father as soon as possible.

+++ We have received this past week \$40.00 as gifts to the church from our parishioners in blessed memory of our beloved +Metropolitan Nicholas. We thank the gracious souls who made the offering and continue to pray the merciful Lord provide blessed repose to the soul of +Metropolitan Nicholas and create for him Eternal Memory!

+++ We invite all to participate in the blessed grace of this sacred season as we celebrate the Presanctified Gifts Liturgy Friday evening at 7: 30 PM. Father is preaching on persons surrounding the Cross of the Lord.

+++ The sign-up sheet for both the Web Site and Bulletin sponsors is on the bulletin board in the kitchen. Please sign up as soon as possible. Do NOT make payment until your sign-up month has arrived. This will make it easier for Father to keep track of payments. Thanks in advance to all who support the parish in this way.

+++ We offer thanks to the Blessed Trinity for inspiring generosity in the souls of our faithful and the blessing of abundant grace in our midst with the offering received this past week: Tithe Offering, \$[REDACTED]; Candles, \$[REDACTED]; Food Coupons, \$[REDACTED]; Kitchen, \$[REDACTED]; Self-Denial, \$[REDACTED]; Holyday, \$[REDACTED]; Christian Fellowship, \$[REDACTED]; Candy Sales, \$[REDACTED], for a total of \$1225.00. We express our profound gratitude to the parishioner communicants who offered their God-given treasure and labored for the sake of the Lord and the good of our parish. God bless and reward you good and faithful souls! The attendance was 41 adults and 13 children last Sunday.

+++ The Special offering for the beautification with flowers of our parish church for the forthcoming feasts of the Entrance of our Lord into Jerusalem, Passion Week and the glorious Resurrection will be taken NEXT Sunday, April 10. Please plan on being generous with your offering.

+++ As faithful believers, we intercede and associate ourselves in prayer with the following who have prayed and offered seven day lights for their intentions: Father Lucas, Pani Lucas, Louis Pasquino, +Paul Szmaida, Debra Szmaida, George Idromenos, Kent Pasquino, Kyle Pasquino, Bob Gorbich, Anna Zacharyczuk and Pani Buletza.

+++ We make a **PENNIES FROM HEAVEN** Canister available for our faithful to bring in pennies for our altar and its appointments. We are already in receipt of **\$1610.00** from this apostolate. Even your pennies can help and are a blessing to our parish.

+++ We thank all the good souls who made the monthly Pirohi Sale a success. We pray the good Lord continue to bless all workers with continued good health for Many & Blessed Years!.

+++ For the expansion of our much needed parochial facilities, our parish pledge support to date totals ~~\$106,815.00~~. As we thank the Lord for inspiring generosity in the hearts of our faithful, we also thank the donors for accepting the challenge of the Lord in building up His Body. We cordially invite and look forward to receiving additional and increased pledges from all our devoted parishioners.

+++ Please be certain to see **Helen Karpiak** or a member of the Parish Council if you would like to help our parish by using **Shop Rite Food Coupons** available in \$20.00 denominations. We invite **ALL** to be caring and supportive and use Grocery Coupons for food shopping as we have gratefully realized ~~\$5250.00~~ on this project to date!

+++ **The Clothing Drive is a permanent on-going project in our parish. Please bring any type of clothing and fabrics along with stuffed animals and shoes for the benefit of our parish. The bags can be left in the vestibule or on the front porch of the rectory. Please invite your friends and neighbors to assist us in disposing of unwanted clothing, shoes and fabrics.**

+++ We remind our faithful only those who are present for the entire Divine Liturgy should come forward to receive Communion. The entire Liturgy means "Amen" to "Amen."

+++ Those who have from time to time taken food home from the church in either plastic kitchen containers or on the aluminum trays, please return them as we note a number of the containers are missing and four trays are no longer around.

+++ **The Bake Sale for the coming holydays will take place on Friday and Saturday, April 15 and 16. Please secure orders for the Nut, Poppy Seed, Lekvar and Apricot rolls which now sell for \$15.00. The cookie packages are 17.00. Helping hands are needed to make it a success.**

+++ May all glory, adoration and worship be accorded our God in the Holy Trinity by all the faithful of our parish with one mind, one soul and one heart each day of the week!

LORD



TEACH
US

Perfection

From night to day we pray on and on for you, asking God to let us see you again, to fill up any little cracks there may yet be in your faith. This will result in your hearts being made strong, sinless and holy by God our Father, so that you may stand before him guiltless on that day when our Lord Jesus Christ returns with all those who belong to him 1 Thessalonians 3: 10 - 13.

For that by one offering he made forever perfect in the sight of God all those whom he is making holy Hebrews 10: 14.

Let us stop going over the same old ground again and again, always teaching those first lessons about Christ. Let us go on instead to other things and become mature in our understanding as strong ought to be Hebrews 6: 1.

And now may the God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, equip you with all you need for doing his will. May he who became the Shepherd of the sheep by an everlasting agreement between God and you, signed with his blood produce in you through the power of Christ all that is pleasing to him. To him be glory, forever and ever. Amen Hebrews 13: 20, 21.

So, let it grow and do not try to squirm out of your problems. For when your patience is finally in full bloom, that you will be ready for anything, strong in character, full and complete. But if anyone keeps looking steadily into God's law for free men, he will not only remember it but he will do what it says, and God will greatly bless him in everything he does James 1: 4, 25.

WISDOM! BE ATTENTIVE

O John our father, God-bearer, hermit of the desert and angel in the flesh; you received heavenly gifts by your fasting, vigils, and prayers. You healed the sick and those coming to you with faith. Glory be to the One Who gives you strength; glory be to Him Who crowned you; glory be to the Lord Who heals all through your intercession Troparion, Fourth Sunday of the Great Fast.

O John, our leader and father; the Lord has placed you on high as a true guiding star lighting the ends of the earth with the truth of your virtue Kontakion, Fourth Sunday of the Great Fast.

Let the faithful exult in glory; let them sing for joy and take their rest Prokimenon, Fourth Sunday of the Great Fast.

Having heard the Gospel of the Lord, O venerable Father John, you left this world, counting as nothing the riches and glory that it offered. Then you cried out to everyone: Love the Lord and you shall find eternal favor, for nothing is preferable to His love. And when He shall come in glory, you will find repose with all the saints. Through their prayers, O Christ, grant great mercy to our souls Vesper Hymn, Fourth Sunday of the Great Fast.

We now behold a new mother, greater than the wonders of old. For who has ever known a mother to bear a child without the help of man? Who has known a mother to hold within her arms the Source of all creation? It was God's own will to be born in this manner, and you, O most pure Virgin, carried Him as an infant in your arms. Because of this, you can approach God with the boldness of a mother. Therefore, we venerate you and ask you to always beseech Him to have mercy on us and save our souls Vesper Hymn, Fourth Sunday of the Great Fast.

Traversing the path of this life, I have been sorely wounded by the thievery of passions; lift me up, O Christ, I beseech You. My soul has been stripped by thieves; they have left me half dead along the path, wounded by the blows of my sins; now deign to heal me, O Lord. By my passions, O Christ our Saviour, I have been stripped of Your commandments; sensual pleasures have struck me down; pour out the oil of Your love upon me Matins Hymn, Fourth Sunday of the Great Fast.

Fourth Sunday of the Great Fast

*I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.
The life that I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God,
who loved me and gave himself for me.*
Galatians 2: 20.

St. Paul makes plain for us in the epistle lesson a decisive truth for all believers. He assures us, "...we who have sought refuge in holding fast the hope set before us. This hope we have, as a sure and firm anchor of the soul, reaching even behind the veil where our forerunner Jesus has entered for us, having become a high priest forever..." Hebrews 6: 18, 19.

Undoubtedly, the father and hopeful man of the afflicted son in today's gospel narrative grasps on the inspired and uplifting as well as encouraging hope received from the promises made to Abraham. He comes to the Lord for fulfillment and completion. He and the son have endured so severely. He approaches the disciples, but they are unable to rescue him. Unknowingly he has been carrying his own cross faithfully; he has been crucified in his own life. He has thought about his circumstances and so he sees the only solution is to approach the Lord.

Studying, contemplating and praying about the crucifixion accounts in the gospel has become a way for believers to keep vigilance over their souls during times of fearful destruction. We do not exercise a blind sort of faith because we hope in the Lord that good will be worked out of the worst of our circumstances. We choose to trust that eventually something new and remarkable will be built by our Creator God out of the destruction of our lives.

Just as it was obviously for the stricken father and son, so it can become for us a litany of introspection and meditation as well as profound and soul-changing learning:

Crucifixion means being betrayed by people who are trusted, being abandoned by those most counted on and loved. This is what it was like for you, Lord Jesus. Help me, like you, to submit to the meaning of this pain.

Crucifixion means being pinioned to pain that lasts long enough to do the work of God only this kind of suffering is able to do.

This is what it was like for you, Lord Jesus. Help me, like you, to submit to the meaning of this pain.

Crucifixion means feeling a silence on the part of our heavenly Father that makes it seem as though He is not present, as though, indeed, He has abandoned us.

Crucifixion means being stripped of all those things we hold dear and from which we gain our identity, being stripped to the point of humiliating nakedness.

This was what it was like for you, Lord Jesus. Help me, like you, to submit to the meaning of this pain.

Crucifixion means enduring a period of bruising, beating and battering, to which we bow with our own silence and acceptance in our own guilt.

This was the way it was like for you, Lord Jesus. Help me, like you, to submit to the meaning of this pain.

Crucifixion means entering into a profound aloneness; people can stand beside us, but they cannot truly experience our degradation and suffering.

This is what it was like for you, Lord, Jesus. Help me, like you, to submit to the meaning of this pain.

Crucifixion means undergoing a gathering of the powers of darkness against us, and in our frailty being unsure of the ultimate outcome.

This was what it was like for you, Lord Jesus. Help me, like you, to submit to the meaning of this pain.

What do we do with all these worries and concerns?

Like the father, we literally take these concerns to the cross. Certainly it was in the hope of God's goodness and mercy that today's man approaches the Lord and submits his need to the will of God. Next time we are pre-occupied with a health or financial concern, take the spiritual trip to the hill at Golgotha. Invest a few more moments looking at a piece of the passion. Run your thumb over the tip of the spear. Balance a spike in the palm of your hand. Read the wooden sign written in your own language above his head. And as you do, touch the velvet dirt, moist and still warm with the blood of God.

Blood He bled for you.

The spear He took for you.

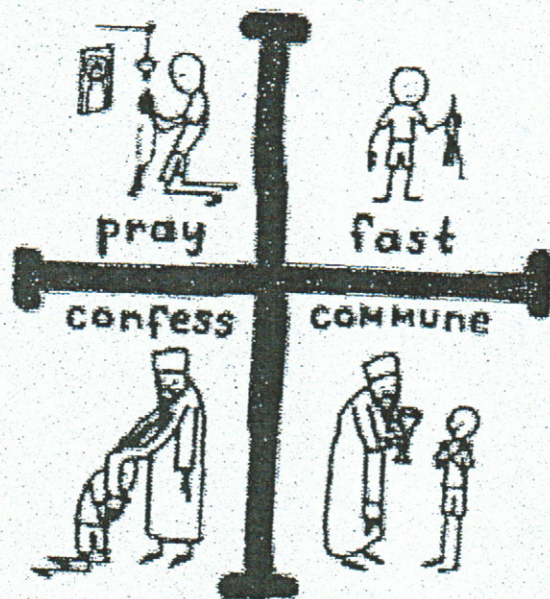
The nails He felt for you.

The sign He left for you.

He did all this for you. Knowing this, knowing all He did for you there, don't you think He will look out for your needs here and now?

Curing Our Blindness

Christ encounters the same problems day after day. In a nutshell, the Pharisees and those like them, are blinded by self-righteousness. Instead of trusting in God's mercy, they place their trust in their own perfection and uprightness. Maybe we also prefer things to be black or white: that Pharisees are always arrogant and tax collectors are all lovable scoundrels. But no, Jesus says it is all about different attitudes toward God. Some are self-assured they can do no wrong; others are so ashamed of wrongdoing, they cannot raise their heads, but simply hope for and rely on God's mercy. Truth is we all need desperately our heavenly Father and that every thing we have comes from him as a pure gift of love. Arrogance causes us to be ignorant of this truth. Instead of seeing the reality of the sinner we are, we look down on those who are not as correct, as polite, as smart or as "good" as we think we are. Frankly, we must all wonder how God can stand us when we are being that way! Self-righteousness is the worst kind of sin because it blinds us to the fact that everything is a gift. There is one way to cure our blindness and that is to allow ourselves to become one in being with our Creator. To be aware of God in this way is called contemplation which is both a way to pray and a way of life. Prayer ought to be very simple because it is centered on the presence of God, God's will and God's love. True contemplation allows us to get ride of our false self and begin to experience our selves as belonging to God at the deepest level, along with the rest of creation. It is a humbling and exhilarating reality, far removed from any false arrogance.



ORTHODOXIA

Cowbird Families

*You wife shall be a fruitful vine by the sides of your house; your children like olive plants
around your table*

Psalms 128: 3.

The image we all have of the cowbird is he and she out in the meadow alongside some cattle looking for something to eat, but not for their offspring – they let other birds attend to that – because they wish to satisfy themselves. He is strutting around her, ruffling his feathers and showing off his pretty colors, gurgling some kind of noise, but not singing.

While visiting relatives in the country and helping mow their lawn, a young observant man tells of a mother cowbird peer into a bush. Suddenly a song sparrow emerges and chases the cowbird completely out of sight, then comes back and sits on the bush to sing its song of victory.

When he later returned several weeks later, he looked into the bush and found five baby birds in the nest. One was obviously much larger than the others. He felt bad for the poor little sparrow and its added responsibility, wishing he could spare it the risk of losing its own babies.

He knew cowbirds always lay their eggs stealthily in nests of birds smaller than themselves. Bird parents feed the mouth that reaches the highest, supposing it to be the hungriest. The cowbird baby in the sparrow's nest gets most, if not all, of the food.

The cowbird was created this way by our heavenly Father, but to man our Creator says, "Be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth" Genesis 1: 28. "I will therefore that the younger women marry, bear children, guide the house, give no occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully" 1 Timothy 5: 14.

Like cowbirds, some today pursue the practice of selfishness, irresponsibility and unwillingness to share their home, their blessings with children. Children are a blessing to the home. "Happy the man who has his quiver full (of children) Psalms 127: 5.

A Healthy Fear Of Danger

Finally my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might
Ephesians 6: 10.

The man now realizes he should have heeded the many warnings as his arm is slowly but surely and irrevocably being drawn in and mangled beyond repair in the corn picker mechanism. Pain shoots through every nerve in his arm as he hangs on for dear life. Somehow the pain of not heeding the many warnings he has heard and read about this machine hurts even more than he could have realized how foolish the idea was. In a single moment of disregard for the machine's omnipotent danger he became trapped and helpless.

Finally his screams of pain and desperation are heard and help arrives. The now seriously wounded man has quickly developed a appreciation for all those "caution" labels on the picker. After picking many acres of corn or shooting a gun hundreds of times, we can very easily lose respect for the danger involved.

The same is true for the Christian. Everything seems to be going very well for us. We are delighted and self-satisfied with ourselves. And in such circumstances, we tend to relax and let our guard down. Parents and youth alike may start to question principles in God's Word. It may be just a small "caution" sign we reclassify.

When we begin to leave the principles of God's revelation to us, we are prime targets for some kind of catastrophe. At first we simply bend the law but in time we see that since it has no radical response to our own interpretation, we break it all together.

In a moment, our feet, our hands, eyes and our mind are somewhere they should not be. *Snap!* We are caught in a web with a grip that does not want to let loose. We may need to ask for assistance to get free if we are given that blessing. It all happened because we failed to respect the "caution" signs around us. We need a healthy respect for all the principles of God's Word. Let us take heed of the "take heeds" in the Word of God.

HOW THE "LADDER OF DIVINE ASCENT" CAME TO BE WRITTEN

Our Holy Orthodox Church remembers ST. JOHN CLIMACUS every year on the 4th Sunday of the Great Fast. The life of this 6th century saint is a "blueprint" for how we ought to live during the Lenten season, for prayer, fasting, silence, solitude and penitence defined his existence.

Little is known about the early years of St. John. We do know that from the time he was 16, he spent his days either in monasteries or in seclusion in the wilderness - once for a period of 40 years - striving to perfect the ways of an ascetic. St. John Climacus may well have been a saint known only to God if he had not been selected to serve as the Abbot of a Sinai monastery at the age of 75. It was during the four years that Climacus governed this monastic community that he, at the request of a fellow abbot of the Raithu monastery wrote a book entitled the "Ladder of Divine Ascent." Originally meant to set down a means for monks to be aware of everything necessary for their own salvation, the writing soon became a guide for ANY Christian wishing to make that symbolic "climb" to a higher level of spiritual perfection. Much of the book is a collection of John's own thoughts that had been developed through his personal journey through life. The 30 steps of John's ladder correspond to the 30 hidden earthly years of Christ's life prior to His public ministry. The steps of the "ladder" proceed gradually on this quest for perfection, with the summit being reached only after a long and difficult struggle. We are warned that many will stumble along the way, falling into eternal damnation. May we be thankful for the wise teachings left for us by St. John Climacus in his invaluable spiritual work. Indeed, as his kontakion proclaims, this humble saint has offered to us his teachings as "fruits of everlasting freshness."

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