



Sunday Bulletin March 29, 2020
Greek Orthodox Church of the
Annunciation

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**Rev. Dr. Michael Bahlatzis, Presiding Priest-
Proistamenos**

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

BRETHREN, when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore to himself, saying, "Surely I will bless you and multiply you." And thus Abraham, having patiently endured, obtained the promise. Men indeed swear by a greater than themselves, and in all their disputes an oath is final for confirmation. So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he interposed with an oath, so that through two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible that God should prove false, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to seize the hope set before us. We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner shrine behind the curtain, where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.

**Gospel Reading      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."

### ***Message from Fr. Michael....***

Dearly Beloved Faithful:

Today, on this fourth Sunday of Lent, we commemorate a great ascetic, St. John Climacus. Such great ascetics commanded the elements of the earth such as wild beasts who obeyed them. Their spirituality allowed them to endure the rigors of nature. Such individuals, through their power of prayer, could heal the sick. They had the ability to walk on water with the same ease as walking on dry land. The elements of the world were subject to them, because they lived in God. They had the power of grace to overcome the mystery of mother nature. One such ascetic was St. John of the Ladder. He was surnamed "of the Ladder" (Climacus) because he wrote an immortal work, the "Ladder of Divine Ascent." In this book, we read that by means of thirty steps, the Christian gradually ascends from earth to the highest level that he or she can attain....spiritual perfection. In his book, one virtue leads to another. As we ascend to a higher spiritual level, we may finally ascend to a height where there abides the crown of the virtues. Such a crown of virtues is called "Christian love."

During Great Lent, many monastics read Saint John's book. When reading this book, we learn how one passes from one step to the next. Anyone who wishes to save his soul for eternity should read this book and allow it to serve as a guide for divine ascent. As a Christian gradually ascends, the force of spiritual and asceticism boost him to a higher spiritual level. Our Lord Jesus Christ said: "Strive to enter in through the narrow gate." That is, the Christian ought to be an ascetic. You do not have to be a monk or nun to be an ascetic. The Christian must be willing to deny worldly things and the pleasures of earthly life. He must take pains for his soul and his life. He must direct his life on the Christian path, and clean his soul of all filth and impurity.

The struggling Christian must strive for such ascent. Failure to do so would cast him down into the abyss of Hell. Last Sunday, in the Gospel reading from St. Mark, we heard the Lord say: "He that would come after Me, let him take up his cross, deny himself, and follow Me." Brothers and sisters, we must be willing to take up our cross and follow Him. Fasting is not only meant to be observed by ascetics, monks, and priests. Fasting is to be observed by everyone who is in good health. The Church does not require of everyone, because it is not in accordance with everyone's strength. However, the Church DOES require of every Orthodox the keeping of those fasts which She has established.

Saint John Climacus has described the ladder of spiritual ascent. We must recognize that each Christian must ascend in accordance with the virtues attained from climbing this ladder. The ladder has been prepared for us by the adhering to and following the teachings of the Fathers of the church. Holding onto the ladder with both hands, I remain

Prayerfully, your humble servant in Christ,

+Fr. Michael

**Encyclical from His All Holiness Archbishop of Constantinople and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew to the pleroma of the Orthodox Church regarding the coronavirus crisis giving hope and encouragement in these critical times.**

My beloved brother hierarchs and children in the Lord, From the Phanar, from the heart of the Queen of Cities, from the City of the Great Church and of Aghia Sophia, we are communicating with each and every one of you – women, men, and children – because of the unprecedented conditions and tribulation that we are facing as a human race as a result of the global threat posed by the pandemic of the new coronavirus, called COVID-19.

The voice of the Church, of the Mother Church, cannot be silent in such times. Our words, then, take the form we have learned through the ages: through the liturgy and through instruction, with encouragement and consolation. We sincerely thank all those who struggle with self-sacrifice, even neglecting themselves and their families, including: Medical and nursing professionals at the front lines, beside our brothers and sisters who are suffering; Researchers and scientists searching for proper medication and vaccination to deliver us from this virus, but also all those actively working hard to address this pandemic.

Your contribution is invaluable. It is an offering to all of society. It is a sacrifice that deserves every honor and gratitude. All of us thank you and applaud you, not only from the windows of our homes, but everywhere and at all times. Our thoughts and our prayers are with you. In this struggle, our appointed states, governments, and appropriate health authorities have the primary responsibility for planning, confronting, and overcoming this crisis. We might describe them as Commanders on the battlefield against an invisible, but now well-known, enemy. An enemy that has turned against humanity.

The burden of the responsibility, that they bear on their shoulders, by necessity demands the cooperation of us all. Now is the time of personal and social responsibility. Therefore, our dear children, we entreat you as your spiritual father to respond faithfully and patiently to all the difficult but necessary measures proposed by our health authorities and nations. Everything is being done for our protection, for our common good, in order to contain the spread of this virus. Our liberation from this distress depends entirely on our own cooperation. Perhaps some of you have felt that these drastic measures undermine or harm our faith.

However, that which is at stake is not our faith – it is the faithful. It is not Christ – it is our Christians. It is not the divine-man – but human beings. Our faith is firmly established in the roots of our culture. Our faith is a living faith, and there is no exceptional circumstance that can limit or suppress it. What must be limited and suppressed in these extraordinary circumstances are gatherings and large congregations of people. Let us remain in our homes. Let us be careful and protect those around us. And there, from our homes, strengthened by the power of our spiritual unity, let each and every one of us pray for all humankind. We will pass through this period like a journey through the desert to reach the Promised Land, where science, by the grace of God, will overcome

this virus. We are certain that, through our prayers as well, science will indeed prevail. So it is good for us to remain united in spirit, as we continue the struggle of repentance and holiness.

We see our neighbors suffering from the consequences of the virus, while others have already fallen and departed from among us. Our Church hopes and prays for the healing of the sick, for the souls of the departed, and for courage and strength to the families of the afflicted.

This trial, too, shall pass. The clouds will clear, and the Sun of Righteousness will eliminate the deadly effect of the virus. But our lives will have changed forever. This trial is an opportunity for us to change for the better. In the direction of establishing love and solidarity.

Beloved children in the Lord, may the blessing of the Lord, through the intercessions of the All-Holy Mother of God, accompany us in our journey, transform our voluntary isolation into genuine communion, and become our prayer and destination to appreciate the meaning of this, so that we may return to that which is true, to that which is pleasing to God!

Have courage! And may God be with us!

Bartholomew  
+Archbishop of Constantinople and Ecumenical Patriarch

## Wisdom of the Fathers

Seest thou how He now proceeds to lay beforehand in them the foundation of His doctrine about fasting? ... See, at any rate, how many blessings spring from them both. For he that is praying as he ought, and fasting, hath not many wants, and he that hath not many wants, cannot be covetous; ...

### **St. John Chrysostom**

Homily 57 on Matthew 17,4,5. B#54, pp.355,356., 4th Century

... he that is not covetous, will be also more disposed for almsgiving. He that fasts is light, and winged, and prays with wakefulness, and quenches his wicked lusts, and propitiates God, and humbles his soul when lifted up. Therefore even the apostles were almost always fasting.

### **St. John Chrysostom**

Homily 57 on Matthew 17,4,5. B#54, pp.355,356., 4th Century

## **Eustathios the Confessor, Bishop of Bithynia**

### **The Holy Martyrs Jonas and Barachesium**

As for the holy Martyrs Jonas and Barachesium, they were monks from Persia who lived in the reign of Sapor II, King of Persia from 325 to 379. These Saints found nine Christians in prison suffering for their faith, and comforted them, encouraging them to stand fast till the end, which they did, and received the crown of martyrdom. Because of this, Saints Jonas and Barachesium also were seized, and commanded to worship the fire, the sun, and the water. When they refused, Jonas, among other tortures, had his hands and feet cut off, was crushed in a device that broke his bones, and was sawn asunder. Barachesium was dragged naked over thorns, his whole body was pierced with sharp reeds and then broken in the same device employed upon Jonas, and when boiling pitch was poured down his throat, he gave up his soul into the hands of God.

### **Sunday of St. John Climacus**



The memory of this Saint is celebrated on March 30, where his biography may be found. He is celebrated today because his book, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, is a sure guide to the ascetic life, written by a great man of prayer experienced in all forms of the monastic polity; it teaches the seeker after salvation how to lay a sound foundation for his struggles, how to detect and war against each of the passions, how to avoid the snares laid by the demons, and how to rise from the rudimental virtues to the heights of Godlike love and humility. It is held in such high esteem that it is universally read in its entirety in monasteries during the Great Fast.

**FATHER MICHAEL REQUESTS...**that we, as a faithful community keep the following individuals in our prayers: John Gianakos, Maria Lambrinos, Steve Anastos, Lilly Kashou, Angelo Romas, and Suzanne Vaishnani, daughter of Ted Simon. Please notify Fr. Michael if you have anyone else who should be included for special prayers. May they be under the grace and tender watch of our Lord.

## **2020 Holy Week Schedule for Greek Orthodox Church of the Annunciation**

### **Saturday of Lazarus, April 11**

Orthros 9 am Divine Liturgy 10 am  
at Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church in Binghamton

This will be followed by the making of crosses from palms afterwards at the Greek Orthodox Church of the Annunciation in Vestal at 12 noon

### **Palm Sunday, April 12**

Orthros 9:00 am Divine Liturgy 10:00 am

### **Palm Sunday evening, April 12**

Service of the Nymphios/Bridegroom matins 6:00 pm

### **Holy Monday, April 13**

Service of the Bridegroom matins 7:30 pm

### **Holy Tuesday, April 14**

Service of the Bridegroom matins and Hymn of Kassiani 7:00 pm

### **Holy Wednesday evening, April 15**

Service of the Sacrament of Holy Unction 6:30 pm

### **Holy Thursday morning, April 16**

Vesperal Liturgy of St. Basil the Great 9:30 am

### **Holy Thursday evening, April 16**

Service of the Holy Passions of our Lord and the 12 Gospels 6:00 pm

### **Holy Friday morning, April 17**

Service of the Royal Hours 9:00 am

All are invited to assist in the flower decoration of the Epitaphios at the conclusion of this service. Fr. Michael will provide written excuses for school absences for those children who spend the day at the church.

Camp Annunciation Holy Friday program begins with decorating the Epitaphios followed by a light Lenten lunch at 12 noon. All are encouraged to bring and share a dish to pass that conforms with the fast of Holy Friday. A JOY/HOPE meeting will be at 1 pm. All adults and children are invited to attend.

**Holy Friday afternoon, April 17**

Service of Great Vespers of the Apokathelosis  
The unnailing of our Lord from the cross 3 pm

**Holy Friday evening, April 17**

Service of the Lamentations matins 6:30 pm

**Holy Saturday morning, April 18**

Vesperal Liturgy of St. Basil the Great  
The First Resurrection of our Lord raising Adam and Eve from the dead  
10 am

**Holy Saturday night, April 18**

Matins of the Pascha 11:00 pm

'O Come and Receive Ye the Light...' 11:45 pm

Reading of the Gospel of the Resurrection of our Lord 12 am midnight  
followed by the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom

**Easter Sunday (Pascha), April 19**

Vespers service of Agape (The Gospel will be read in multiple languages.  
Please see Fr. Michael if you are interested in reading the Gospel in ANY  
other language besides Greek and English). 11 am