

Saint Nicholas Serbian Orthodox Church

971 St. Clair Rd, Johnstown, PA 15905

Rev. Presbyter Dragan Vukovic

(814) 244-4063

The Fourth Sunday of Great Lent (03.26.2023.)

Mark 9:17-31

And one of the multitude answered and said, Master, I have brought unto thee my son, which hath a dumb spirit; And wheresoever he taketh him, he teareth him: and he foameth, and gnasheth with his teeth, and pineth away: and I spake to thy disciples that they should cast him out; and they could not. He answereth him, and saith, O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? bring him unto me. And they brought him unto him: and when he saw him, straightway the spirit tare him; and he fell on the ground, and wallowed foaming. And he asked his father, How long is it ago since this came unto him? And he said, Of a child. And oftentimes it hath cast him into the fire, and into the waters, to destroy him: but if thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us. Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth. And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief. When Jesus saw that the people came running together, he rebuked the foul spirit, saying unto him, Thou dumb and deaf spirit, I charge thee, come out of him, and enter no more into him. And the spirit cried, and rent him sore, and came out of him: and he was as one dead; insomuch that many said, He is dead. But Jesus took him by the hand, and lifted him up; and he arose. And when he was come into the house, his disciples asked him privately, Why could not we cast him out? And he said unto them, This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting. And they departed thence, and passed through Galilee; and he would not that any man should know it. For he taught his disciples, and said unto them, The Son of man is delivered into the hands of men, and they shall kill him; and after that he is killed, he shall rise the third day. (KJV)

St. John Glimacus

Matthew 4:25-5:12

And there followed Him great multitudes of people from Galilee, and from Decapolis, and from Jerusalem, and from Judaea, and from beyond Jordan. And seeing the multitudes, He went up into a mountain: and when He was set, his disciples came unto Him: And He opened His mouth,

and taught them, saying, Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God. Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you. (KJV)

The Fourth Sunday of Great Lent has arrived. This Sunday is dedicated to St. John of the Ladder. St. John's book, The Ladder of Divine Ascent details the steps necessary for spiritual growth.

Great Lent is the time the Church calls believers to focus seriously on growth in the Lord Jesus Christ. Increased prayer and fasting are integral to Great Lent.

Today's Gospel of St. Mark is a lesson in the value of prayer and fasting. The Lord Jesus Christ told His disciples explicitly that prayer and fasting were required to heal the condition of the afflicted boy that was brought to him.

Strong faith is central to healing as expressed in St. Mark's Gospel for today. Believers have the opportunity in Great Lent to increase their faith, prayer and fasting.

Taking Great Lent seriously and seeking to grow in Jesus Christ is an individual decision. God's Holy Church encourages all believers to join in the Lenten journey.

Believers are encouraged to be serious throughout Great Lent. New beginnings can take place at any time. Repentance is always possible while the mind functions and there is life in the body.

To experience the blessedness Jesus Christ describes in St. Matthew's Gospel for today, great faith, prayer and fasting are essential. Faithful participants in Great Lent reap benefits for themselves and countless others.

Joy permeates the lives of diligent participants in Great Lent. Disciplined believers come to know the joy in Christ when sin is actively battled and rejected and Jesus Christ is fully embraced.

The remaining time in Great Lent offers daily opportunities to embrace Jesus Christ and to reject sin. God's Holy Church offers daily nourishment for attentive and seeking believers.

The Holy Scriptures, the lives of the saints and martyrs and the Divine services of the Church lead the believer through Great Lent and toward the Paschal celebration.

Prayers to the Mother of God in the Church are constant throughout Great Lent as they are during the whole year. The Mother of God is ever-present to aid believers in prayer and in drawing closer to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Hunger in the soul is readily nourished as believers partake of the Precious Body and Blood of Jesus Christ during Great Lent. Believers need look nowhere but to Jesus Christ in the Church for nourishment of the soul.

The Church provides all that is necessary for individuals seeking to grow in Christ. Attentive eyes and ears will see the presence of the Lord God during the course of each day in earthly life.

Talking to God throughout the day is the way to never be separated from God. God will protect and guard the faithful believer during the journey through life.

Thank God for the presence of Great Lent each year. Thank God for the Holy Gospel. Thank God for the wisdom of St. John of the Ladder. Today is the day to be grateful and to seek growth in Jesus Christ.

**The Fourth Sunday of Great Lent. St. John Glimacus. March 13/26, 2023.
Hidden Valley, Pennsylvania. Father Rodney Torbic**

HOMILY ON THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF GREAT LENT. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF FASTING IN THE STRUGGLE AGAINST FALLEN SPIRITS

The Lord said to His Apostles about the evil spirits, *This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting* (Mk. 9:29). Here is a new aspect of fasting! Fasting is acceptable to God when it is preceded by the great virtue of mercy; fasting prepares a reward in heaven when it is foreign to hypocrisy and vainglory; fasting works when it is joined with another great virtue—prayer. How does it work? It not only tames the passions in the human body, but it enters into battle with the spirits of evil, and conquers them.

How can fasting, which is actually a bodily *podvig* [ascetical labor], work or cooperate with prayer in a war against spirits? Why do the bodiless spirits submit to the power that fasting has over them?

The reason fasting works against the evil spirits lies in its powerful influence upon our own spirits. When the body is tamed by fasting, it brings freedom, strength, sobriety, purity, and refinement to the human soul. Our spirit can withstand its unseen enemies only when it is in such a state. *But as for me*, said the God-inspired David, *When they (the demons) troubled me, I put on sackcloth. And I humbled my soul with fasting, and my prayer shall return to my bosom* (Ps. 34:13). Fasting gives the mind sobriety, while prayer is the weapon the mind uses to drive away the invisible adversary. Fasting humbles the soul, and frees it from the callousness and inflatedness brought on by satiety; while the prayer of one who fasts becomes especially strong. Such prayer is not just external, but comes from the very soul, from the depths of the heart. Fasting directs and carries prayer to God.

The dark and evil spirits committed two serious crimes: [\[1\]](#) the first crime caused their expulsion from the hosts of holy angels; the second crime was the cause of their irrevocable banishment. They lifted their heels against God in heaven. Their chief, blinded by conceit, wanted to become equal to God. For their crime they were cast out of heaven to the earth below, and there they began to envy the blessedness of newly-created man. Then they committed a new crime: seducing man, and luring him into his fall. This latter crime of the fallen angels finally decided their lot—they impressed themselves into evil by it; God's grace entirely departed from them because of it;

they were given over to their own selves, to their own evil, and to their own sin that they had conceived and borne in themselves, and which they allowed to penetrate their nature. Now, a good thought or feeling will never come to an outcast angel. He is entirely submerged in evil, desires evil, and invents evil. Scorched with an unquenchable thirst for evil, he seeks to be sated with evil, but cannot. All the evil he does or can perform seems to him little next to the evil that he imagines and which his insufferable thirst for evil seeks. Created as a light-bearing angel, he was cast down lower than all the beasts of the earth for his crimes. *Because thou hast done this murder of a man, said God in His wrath to satan when He caught him at the scene of the crime in paradise, near the man and woman whom he had caused to fall, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life* (Gen. 3:14). A bodiless spirit is condemned to thoughts and feelings that are only earthly and passionate; his life and treasure is in them. A spirit, he has lost the ability to do anything spiritual—he is completely engrossed in fleshly works. A spirit who lives a mental life is demoted from the hosts of spirits to a fleshly state, and he takes a place lower in rank than all cattle and beasts of the earth. Cattle and beasts act according to the laws of their nature, while the fallen spirit, who is mingled into the nature of cattle and beasts, is mingled into a nature that is foreign to his own, and humiliating. He neither wants nor is able to act correctly in this nature—he continually abuses this nature.

This sinful materiality of the fallen angel makes him subject to the effect of fasting, which frees our spirit from the flesh's reign. When the fallen angel approaches a person who is fasting, he does not see the material domination that he needs and desires; he cannot stir up the blood that has been beneficently cooled by fasting; he cannot arouse the flesh that is not inclined to play, for it has been restrained by fasting; the mind and heart are not obedient to him, for they have felt an especial spiritual vigor due to fasting. Seeing this resistance, the proud, fallen spirit departs, because he cannot endure being resisted or contradicted. He loves unhesitating agreement and submission. Despite the fact that he crawls upon his belly, despite the fact that he eats only dust, the thought of being like God has not left him, and he looks for people to worship him.

He audaciously showed the Son of God *all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time*, and promised to give him all *power over them and the glory of them*, demanding to be worshipped in return (Lk. 4:5-7). Even now, he does not cease to present to those who follow the Son of God all the beauty of the world, painting it in their dreams with the most tempting features and colors in order to extract worship of himself by whatever trick. *Resist the devil, and he will flee from you*, said the Apostle James (Js. 4:7); and another Apostle said, *Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked* (Eph. 6:16). Let us raise our eyes to eternity through the power of faith, to the unspeakable blessedness that awaits the righteous in eternity; likewise let us observe the equally unspeakable torments that await the serpent's unrepentant and stubborn followers. We can have such contemplation when the body is put in order and maintained within the order of fasting; when with the pure prayer that is only obtainable through fasting, we cleave to the Lord, and become of *one spirit* (1 Cor. 6:17) with Him. "The serpent crawls continually upon the ground as he was sentenced to do from on High," says St. John Chrysostom. "If you wish be to safe from his poisonous bite, let your mind and

heart be always above the earth.”^[2] Then you will be able to resist him, and that proud serpent who cannot endure resistance will flee from you.

Where are the people who are possessed by evil spirits? Where are those people whom he would tear and torment, like he tore and tormented the youth mentioned today in the Gospels? Apparently there aren't any, or they are very rare—thus reasons the person who sees everything superficially, and brings his life as a sacrifice to distractions and sinful pleasures. But the holy fathers saw things differently. They say, “From the moment they caused man to be exiled from paradise and separated from God through disobedience, the devil and the demons received the freedom to mentally stir any person's rational nature, both day and night.”^[3] Very similar to those torments and tearing of the Gospel youth's body by the evil spirit are the sufferings of the soul that willfully submits itself to the influence of the evil spirit, and who accepts as truth that murderous lie which the devil ceaselessly shows to us in order to make us perish, hiding it behind a façade of truth to more easily deceive us, and to succeed in his wickedness. *Be sober, be vigilant*, the Apostle Peter warns us, *because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist steadfast in the faith* (1 Pet. 5:8–9). What does the fallen angel use against us? Mostly sinful thoughts and fantasies. He runs from those who resist him, but he sways, torments, and destroys those who do not recognize him, who enter into conversation with him, and entrust themselves to him. He himself crawls on his belly and is incapable of spiritual thought. He vividly depicts this transitory world with all its allurements and pleasures; meanwhile he enters into conversation with the soul about how it can make its pipe dreams come true. He offers us earthly glory, he offers us riches, he offers us satiety, and delight in fleshly impurities. As St. Basil the Great expresses it, the devil not only received a feeling for fleshly impurities, but since he was created as a bodiless spirit, he gave birth to them.^[4] He presents all this as a fantasy, but he also provides illicit ways to realize these illicit dreams. He casts us into sorrow, depression, and despair. In a word—he tirelessly works to obtain our destruction in seemingly decent as well as indecent ways: by obvious sin, by sin hidden behind a good façade, and by waiving the bait of pleasure in front of us.

This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith, says St. John the Theologian (1 Jn. 5:4). Faith is our weapon of victory over the world; it is also our weapon of victory over the fallen angels. Who has looked with the eye of faith to the eternity proclaimed by God's Word and not cooled to the world's quickly-passing beauty? What true disciple of our Lord Jesus Christ will want to trample upon His all-holy commandments for the sake of sinful pleasure, which seems alluring before it is tasted, but is vile and murderous after tasting? What power over the disciple of Christ has the enchanting picture of earthly benefits and pleasures, or even the horrifying picture of earthly calamities, which the evil spirits draw in order to bring the viewer to depression and despair, when magnificent pictures of eternity are impressed upon his soul through the power of God's Word, before which all earthly scenes are pale and insignificant? When St. John the Theologian proclaims that *the victory that overcometh the world is our faith*, he salutes the true children of Christ who have overcome the world on their victory over the fallen angel and his minions: *I write unto you, young men*, he says, *because ye have overcome the wicked one* (1 Jn. 2:13). Here “young men” is what he calls Christians who are renewed by Divine grace. When a servant of Christ shows courage and constancy in his struggle against the evil spirits as he should,

then Divine grace descends into his soul and grants him victory, and his *youth shall be renewed as the eagle's* (Ps. 102:5)—youth which never ages, with which he was adorned by the Creator when he was created, and which he exchanged for incurable agedness at his voluntary fall. *Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever* (1 Jn. 2:15–17).

Beloved brethren! Why shouldn't we also be victors over the world and over its prince? People like us have overcome them, people clothed in flesh and human weakness. Not only valiant men have been victorious over them, but also frail elders, weak women, and little children; they won, and left us no excuse for losing if we give ourselves up to them. The same world with all its allurements was before them, the same invisible serpents crawled around them, applying every effort to taunt out their souls and make them to live in the dust. The hearts and thoughts of the conquerors were raised up! Guarding their bodies with fasting, they tamed them and stopped the impulse for earthly pleasures in them! Through fasting, they gave their spirit the opportunity to abide in ceaseless sobriety and vigilance, and the opportunity to unsleepingly heed and watch out for the multifarious snares of the devil! By lightening their bodies—and even their very spirits—with fasting, they gave the spirit the opportunity to cleave to the Lord with pure and constant prayer, to receive Divine aid, to enliven their faith from hearing (cf. Rom. 10:17), from hearing to make their faith substance (cf. Heb. 11:1) and spiritual strength—and by this strength to obtain decisive victory over the world and the evil spirits. St. John the Theologian calls such faith *the confidence that we have in God*, and he teaches us from his own holy experience that it is attained through prayer that is heard [by God].^[5] The righteous as if see the invisible God through such faith, as the Apostle Paul said.^[6] Naturally, the world hides from view at the sight of God! The transitory world becomes as if non-existent, and the prince of the world has no support in his warfare. *Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist steadfast in the faith* (1 Pet. 5:8–9), *taking the shield of faith* (Eph. 6:16)—faith that is active, living, grace-filled. Only the ascetical laborer of Christ is capable of such faith. He has prepared himself for warfare with the evil spirits by forgiving his neighbors' sins—that is, through mercy and humility—and has entered the fight bearing the weapon of fasting and prayer. Amen.

St. Ignatius (Brianchaninov)

Services this Week

- ❖ **Thursday (March 30th) Venerable Father Alexius, Man of God - 09:30 AM - Divine Liturgy**
- ❖ **5th SUNDAY OF THE LENT (April 2nd) - St. Mary of Egypt - 10:00 AM - Divine Liturgy**

Donations March 19, 2023

Offering - \$ 1,580.00 Candles - \$48.00 Dues \$150

Building Fund

In memory of Tom Luy from Ann (Raich) Luy - \$1,000

Large Candles

In Memory of Charles Bulich from Olga Bulich
In Memory of Mildred Tumbas from Milica Knepp
In Memory of Vinny Czubak from Jeannette Czubak
In Memory of Mike & Mildred Tumbas from Kathleen McDowell
In Memory of Damenja & Lazo Gjurich from Diane and Dan Tomak
In Memory of Amelia & Joseph Kondas from Richard Kondas

**Fish Fries have started and run through
Friday, April 7, 2023
Please see Donna or Suzette for the work schedule!**

VESPERS TODAY!!! 5:00 PM

CHOIR NEWS

The choir will be selling homemade posno soup and pogaca throughout Lent every Sunday for \$10 (Quart of soup & a pogaca) Bowls of soup are also available following Divine Liturgy for a donation.

KOLO NEWS

Nut, Apricot, Poppyseed & Lekvar Rolls
You may place your order on the form located in the church hall (by the red box) or by talking to Donna Zimmerman

UPCOMING EVENTS

Fish Fries – Every Friday Until April 7th

Sunday, March 26th – Lenten Vespers
We will be hosting vespers beginning at 5:00 PM

Sunday, April 9th – Palm Sunday

Sunday, April 16th – PASCHA!

Sunday, May 21st – Anniversary Celebration

Polka-Fest June 2-4, 2023

Band of Brothers – July 13-15 & 19-22, 2023

Taste of Serbia – August 12, 2023

Slavic Fest – September 15-16, 2023