

Saint Nicholas Serbian Orthodox Church
971 St. Clair Rd, Johnstown, PA 15905
Rev. Presbyterian Dragan Vukovic
(814) 244-4063

The Fourth Sunday of Great Lent
(03.30.2025.)

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)**

God's Holy Church has arrived at the Fourth Sunday of Great Lent. This is the Sunday commemorating St. John Climacus. St. John's book the Ladder of Divine Ascent reveals steps of spiritual growth of benefit to believers.

Reading the Ladder of Divine Ascent is a good practice for believers each year. Even if a believer decides not to read the book, it is a good practice to assess whether spiritual growth is taking place during the Lenten journey.

Great Lent exists in the Church each year for believers to grow in Jesus Christ. Prayer, fasting and almsgiving facilitate growth in Christ. Lenten church services encourage repentance and focus attention on the soul's condition.

Believers serious about the Lenten journey will be honest about personal sinfulness. Serious believers will repent during Great Lent and benefit from Confession and Communion. Serious believers value unity with Jesus Christ.

St. Mark's Gospel for today verifies the value of strong faith, prayer and fasting to address personal afflictions. Jesus Christ's power to heal personal afflictions is verified in St. Mark's Gospel for today.

St. Matthew's Gospel for today references the Beatitudes which are part of the Divine Liturgy throughout the year. Jesus's proclamation of the Beatitudes highlights their importance in understanding daily life.

The Church embraces the value of the Beatitudes and deems them important enough to be consistently be a part of the Divine Liturgy. The Beatitudes offer believers a perspective for living in ways pleasing to Jesus Christ.

Believers commit the full self to Jesus Christ at Baptism. This commitment necessitates renewal throughout life. Sin becomes a part of each believer's life all too often. Sins need confessed and forgiven.

Beginning anew in Jesus Christ is possible through the Holy Mysteries in the Church. The burden of sins will weigh on the believer and will impede healthy personal functioning.

Being united with Jesus Christ brings personal peace and joy. The Church is where the love of Jesus Christ abounds. Believers find in the Church the way to the Heavenly Kingdom and eternal life.

Jesus Christ defeated death. He rose from the grave after having been crucified. He will come again to judge the living and the dead. Believers do well to make good use of each Great Lent to prepare for Christ's return and final judgment.

The remaining days of Great Lent offer believers the opportunities to grow in Christ. Each moment is to be taken seriously as the time to fully unite with Jesus Christ. Repentance and adherence to the ways of Jesus Christ bring peace and joy.

May each believer view the remaining days of Great Lent as the period to seriously invest in care of the soul. Now is the time to resolutely reject sin affecting personal life. Today is the day to fully embrace and follow Jesus Christ.

The Fourth Sunday of Great Lent. St. John Glimacus. St. Alexius, Man of God. March 17/30, 2025. Hidden Valley, Pennsylvania. Father Rodney Torbic

THE GOSPEL OF THE CROSS AND SALVATION OF THE SOUL Mark 8:34–9:1

St. Nikolai (Velimirovic)

Great is the power of Truth, and nothing in the world can overcome this power.

Great is the healing power of Truth, and there is no suffering, no infirmity in the world for which Truth is not the medicine.

When a sick person is suffering and weak, he seeks a doctor who will give him medicine to alleviate his suffering and weakness. No one seeks a doctor who would give him only the sweetest medicines, but everyone seeks a doctor who knows the surest means, regardless of whether the medicine be sweet, bitter, or tasteless. And the more bitter the medicine a doctor prescribes to the patient, and the more difficult the treatment, the more, it seems, the sick trust that doctor.

Why then do people not endure bitter medicine from the hand of God? Why do they seek and expect only sweets from His hand? Because they do not feel the seriousness of their sinful illness and thus suppose that they can be healed from sweet things alone.

Oh, if only people would ask themselves, “Why are all medicines against physical illness so bitter?”

The Holy Spirit would answer them in order to be a metaphor and image of spiritual illnesses.

Because just as bodily illnesses are a metaphor and image of spiritual illnesses, so also are bodily medicines a metaphor and image of spiritual medicines.

Aren't illnesses of the spirit, those main illnesses, the root-cause illnesses, much more serious than bodily illnesses? How then could medicine for the spirit not be more bitter than medicine for the body?

People take care and are very much concerned for their bodies, and when the body gets sick, they spare no labor, nor time, nor wealth, only to restore their bodies to health. For them no doctor asks too much, no sanatorium is too far away, no medicine is too bitter—especially when they also feel that physical death is nigh. Oh! if only people would take such care and concern for their souls! If only they just as zealously sought medicine and a doctor for their souls!

It is painful to walk across thorns with bare feet. But if a barefoot man is dying of thirst, and across the thorns there is a source of water, then won't the barefoot man more willingly step upon the thorns, wound and bloody the soles of his feet, just to reach water rather than die of thirst on the soft grass, without walking across the thorns?

“We can't take such bitter medicine!” say many who are paralyzed by sin. That is why the man-loving Doctor of mankind Himself first took the bitter, extremely bitter medicine, even though He was healthy—to show the sick that it's not impossible. Oh! it's ever so much harder for a healthy person to taste and swallow medicine for a sickness than it is for a sick person! Nevertheless, He took it, so that the mortally ill would also take it.

“It's impossible for us to walk barefoot across thorns, no matter how thirsty we are or how abundant and pure the source of water is on the other side!” again says the person paralyzed by sin. That is why the man-loving Lord Himself walked barefoot across the thorny field and calls to the thirsty from the other side to come to the source of living water.

“It's possible,” He proclaims, “I myself walked across sharp thorns and flattened them with My own feet. So, come!”

“If the cross is medicine, it is impossible for us to take that medicine! And if the cross is the way, it's impossible for us to walk along that way!” Thus says the person sick with sin. That is why the man-loving Lord took the extremely heavy cross upon Himself, and shows that it is possible.

In today's Gospel reading, the Lord offers the carrying of the cross, that bitter medicine, to all who want to be saved from death.

The Lord said, *Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.* The Lord does not chase people to the cross before Himself, but calls them to follow after Him, the CrossBearer. For, before pronouncing this call, he foretold His own suffering, namely: *And he began to teach them, that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again* (Mk. 8:31). He came in order to be the Way. He came in order to be the Firstborn in suffering and Firstborn in glory. He came to show that all that people thought was impossible is possible—and He makes it possible.

He does not force people or push them, but offers and counsels. *Whosoever.* People have fallen sick with sin by their own free will, and by their own free will they should get treatment and be healed of sin. He doesn't hide the fact that the medicine is bitter, very bitter; He makes it easier

for people to receive it by receiving it first Himself, although He is healthy. And He shows its brilliant effect.

Deny yourself. The first man, Adam, also denied himself when he fell into sin, but he denied his real and true self. When the Lord now requires that people deny themselves, He is requiring that they deny their false self. To put it more simply: Adam denied the Truth and cleaved to a lie; now the Lord requires from Adam's descendants that they deny the lie and again cleave to the Truth from which they had fallen. We can conclude from this that *deny yourself* means, deny your illusory non-existence, which has been forced upon you in place of your existence that is from God. Deny your fleshliness, which has displaced spirituality in you, and the passions that have displaced virtue in you; and the slavish fear that has darkened the image of God's child in you; and the blasphemous murmuring that has killed the spirit of obedience to God in you. Deny your evil thoughts, evil desires, and evil deeds. Deny the pagan worship of nature in your body. In a word, deny all that you consider *yourself*, because in fact it is not you but the devil, and sin, and corruption, deception, and death. Oh, deny the evil habits that have become *second* nature to you. Precisely, deny this second nature, for this is not the nature that God created, but a heaped up and ossified deception and self-deception in you—the personification of the falsehood that lives under your name, just as you live under its name.

What does it mean to *take up your cross*? It means voluntarily accepting from the hands of Providence every healing bitterness that is offered to you. If great catastrophes occur, be obedient like Noah. If sacrifices are demanded of you, offer them with the same faith in God with which Abraham wanted to offer his son as a sacrifice. If you lose your property, your children unexpectedly die, or a fierce illness besets you, endure it all with the patience of Job, not distancing your heart from God. If your friends abandon you or enemies surround you, endure it all without murmuring, with hope in God's speedy help, as did the apostles. If they lead you to execution for Christ's sake, be grateful to God for such an honor, which thousands of Christian martyrs had. We must also know that in requiring our crucifixion on the cross, the Lord only requires the crucifixion of the old man—that is, the man comprised of evil habits and servitude to sin. For by his crucifixion the old, bestial man is mortified and a new, Godlike, immortal man comes to life. As the apostle says, *our old man is crucified with him*, and then immediately explains why he is crucified: *that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin* (Rom. 6:6). The cross is heavy for the old, fleshly man, heavy for *the flesh with the affections and lusts* (Gal. 5:24), but not heavy for the spiritual man. *For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God* (1 Cor. 1:18). Therefore do we glory in the Cross of Christ; and we glory in our own cross for Christ's sake. The Lord requires not that we take His Cross, but *our own* cross. His cross is extremely heavy. He was crucified on the Cross not for His own sins, but for ours, and that is why His Cross is so heavy. We are crucified for our own sins, and therefore our cross is lighter. And when we suffer the most, we should not say that our sufferings are too great and beyond our measure. The Lord lives, and He knows the measure of our suffering, and He does not allow us to suffer beyond our strength. The measure of our suffering is determined and counted to no less degree than the measure between night and day and the movement of the stars. If our suffering increases and our

cross becomes heavier, the power of God grows, as the apostle says: *For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ* (2 Cor. 1:5).

First of all, our great consolation is that the Lord calls us to follow Him. *And follow Me*, the Lord says. Why does He call those who have taken up their cross to this? Firstly, so that they would not fall and be broken under the weight of the cross. Such is the pitiful weakness of human nature—for even the strongest person, even the lightest cross is heavy if he tries to carry it without heavenly help. Just look at what despair the unbelievers fall into at the slightest blow! How they rebel against heaven and earth because of a needle! How they helplessly bend from one side to the other, searching for support and protection in the emptiness of this world, although they consider the whole world to be nothing but desperate emptiness, unable to give them support or protection! Therefore, the Lord calls us to follow after Him. For, only by following Him can we carry our cross. In Him we find strength, courage, and consolation. He will be light on a dark path for us, health in sickness, a friend in loneliness, joy in sorrow, and riches in poverty. People leave the light on all night for a sick man. And during the night of this life, we need the undying light of Christ, Who will ease our pain and support our hope in the dawn.

Another reason why the Lord requires us to follow after Him is just as important as the first one, and has to do with the aim of voluntary denial of ourselves and the carrying of our cross. Many have superficially denied themselves in order to rise up in this world. Many have taken on innumerable labors and feats, only so that people would admire them and glorify them. Many have done so and still do so, mainly in pagan societies, in order to gain through certain sorcerous, magical powers, to wield power over people by such means, to harm some and benefit others. And all of this is from empty personal vanity and self-interest. Such self-denial is not self-denial but self-aggrandizement. And such a cross leads not to resurrection and salvation, but to total destruction and giving oneself to the devil's hands. But the one who follows after Christ with his cross is free of all pride and self-interest. Just as the sick man takes bitter medicine not to show that he is capable of swallowing such bitter medicine, but in order to be healed, so the true Christian denies himself, that is, disdains his sick nature, takes up his cross as bitter but salvific medicine and follows after Christ, his Doctor and Savior—not for the sake of human praise and glory, but in order to save his soul from deadly madness in this world, and from the worm and fire in the next world.

For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it. These are sharp and unequivocal words! They are a flame for those who wish to scorch the old man to the root, and along with the root! The Lord Jesus Christ came not in order to correct the world, but to change it and birth it anew, to cast old iron into the fire and pour it out as new. He is not a fixer but a co-Creator; he does not patch things up but weaves them. Whoever wants to preserve an old, wormy tree will lose it. He can labor over this tree on the outside as much as he likes—water it, rub it, fence it around, or watch after it, but the worms eat the tree away from within, and it will inevitably rot and die. Whoever chops down a wormy tree and throws it into the fire together with the worms, and then redirects his attention to the young sprouts and guards them from worms, is the one who saves the tree. Whoever wants to preserve his old Adamic soul, eaten away by sins and rotting from them, will lose it; for God will

not allow such a soul to appear before His face; and a consciousness that does not appear before the face of God is just like one not that does not exist. Whoever loses his old soul saves his new soul, being *born of the Spirit* (Jn. 3:6) and is wed to Christ. It is the soul that makes up our life, and therefore in some translations of Holy Scripture it says, “whoever wishes to save his own life will lose it”; and, “whoever loses his life for the sake of Me and the Gospels, saves it.” The explanation of both is the same. For whoever wishes to save his mortal life come what may loses both lives—the mortal and the immortal. He loses the mortal because no matter how long he manages to extend his life on earth, in the end it will be taken by death. And he loses immortal life because he did not labor or even try to receive it. The one who labored to acquire immortal life in Christ will receive and preserve it in eternity, even if he has lost this temporary, mortal life. A person can lose his temporary and mortal life for the sake of Christ and His Holy Gospel, when it is necessary for him to offer it as a sacrifice by accepting a martyr’s death for Christ and His Gospel; or when he despises his own life as sinful and unworthy, and strives with his whole heart, soul, and strength towards Christ, giving himself wholly in service to Him, sacrificing everything to Him, and hoping in Him for everything. Someone can lose his soul—that is, his life—or end his life in suicide, or sacrifice it for some unrighteous cause, or lose it in a fight or discord. There is no promise that such a person will save his soul, that is, his life. For as it is written, *whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel’s, the same shall save it*. Only Christ and the Gospel are incomparably greater than our souls. This is the greatest treasure of all time and in eternity, and every person should sacrifice everything without wavering for the sake of this good which cannot be taken away from him. But why does the Lord add, *and the Gospel*? Isn’t it enough just to say, *for My sake*? No, it’s not enough. The Lord says, *for My sake and the Gospel’s*, in order to widen the reason for death for ourselves and for God, and through this to increase also the number of the saved. Thus, he is saved who loses his life for the sake of the living and immortal Christ. But he is also saved who loses his life for the sake of Christ’s work in the world and His holy teaching. Finally, he also is saved who loses his life for the sake of one commandment of Christ alone, or one word of His alone. The Lord is the Lawgiver of life; whoever has sacrificed himself for the sake of the Lawgiver has sacrificed himself for the sake of His law; and on the contrary, whoever has sacrificed himself for the sake of His law has sacrificed himself for His sake. By equating Himself with His work and teaching, the Lord has spread the possibility of the salvation of many.

For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? These words go a long way to explain the previous ones. From them we see that the Lord values the human soul more than the whole world. Also from them we see which soul a person should lose in order to save his soul—the damaged soul, wallowing in this world, burdened with the world, enslaved to the world. A person loses that false soul and saves his true soul; he denies his false life and acquires his true life.

What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world, which is slated for destruction, but harms his own soul, which is predestined for immortality? The world is approaching its finale, and at the end, it will be cast off like old and tattered clothing. True souls, Christ-loving souls, will then fly to the Kingdom of immortal youth. The end of the world is the beginning of a new life of the soul. So, what good is the whole world to a person if he will soon be forced to part with the whole

world, and if the whole world will be forced in the not-so-distant future to part with its existence and disappear, like a dream at awakening? How will that helpless corpse help him? And what *ransom* will he give for his soul? Even if the whole world were that man's property, God would not accept in it exchange for his soul. But in fact, the world does not belong to man but to God; God created it and gave it to man for temporary use for the sake of yet another good, which is higher and more precious than the world. God's main gift to man is a comely soul. And God will require this main gift back from man at the appointed time. There is nothing a man can give back to God in place of his soul. The soul is king, and everything else is a slave. God will not accept a slave in place of the king, nor take the temporary in place of the immortal. Oh, what ransom will the sinner give for his soul? While a person is still in his body in this world, he entertains himself with many precious things of the world. But when he departs from the body, he sees (alas, it could be too late!) that nothing precious exists but God and the soul. Then the thought of any kind of ransom or trade for his soul cannot even occur to him. Oh, how terrible will be the soul's position when all the threads that bound it to the world and God are broken; and when, sorely naked, utterly impoverished, it finds itself in the spiritual world! Whom can it call upon for help? Whose name will it recall? The hem of whose garment will it clutch as it falls into the bottomless abyss—eternally falling into the endless depths? Blessed is he who cleaved to Christ in this world, whose habit it was to call out His name night and day, inseparably from his breath and heartbeat. As he stands over the abyss, he will know Whom to call for help. He will know Whose name to remember. He will know Whose garment to reach for. Truly, he will be beyond danger, under the protection of His beloved Lord.

But this supreme horror is reserved for those who in this life did not fear sin. The Lord says, *Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.* Hear this, all ye faithful, and do not count too much upon God's mercy. Truly, God's mercy will pour out upon unrepentant blasphemers only in this life, but at the Last Judgment, this mercy will be changed to righteous judgment. Hear this—with each passing day, unavoidable death approaches; hear it and tremble, heart and soul. It is not our enemy who pronounced these words, but our Greatest Friend. The same lips that forgave enemies from the Cross also uttered these terrible but righteous words. Whoever is ashamed of Christ in this world, of him will Christ be ashamed at the end of the world. Whoever is ashamed of Christ before sinners, of him will Christ be ashamed before the holy angels. In what will you glory, O man, if you will be ashamed of Christ? If you are ashamed of life, it means that you will glory in death! Are you ashamed of the truth? It means that you will glory in lies! Of mercy? That means you will glory in rancor! Truth, righteousness? That means you will glory in untruth, unrighteousness! Suffering on the Cross? That means you will glory in idolatrous abomination! Immortality? That means you will glory in the corruption of death and the stench of the grave! And finally, before whom will you be ashamed of Christ? Before someone who is better than Christ? No, because there is no one better than Christ. It means that you will be ashamed of Christ before those who are worse than Christ. Shall a son be ashamed of his father before a bear, or a daughter of her mother before a fox? So why then would you be ashamed of the All-Good One before the evil one, of the All-Pure One before the impure, of the Almighty before the

insignificant, of the Most Wise before the dull? Why be ashamed of the magnificent Lord before a sinful and adulterous generation? Could it be because this generation continually flashes before your eyes, while the Lord is unseen? But yet a little while and the Lord will appear in glory, on the clouds of a multitude of angels, and this generation will disappear from before His feet, like dust from a strong wind. Truly, then you will be ashamed not of the Lord of glory but of your own self, but your shame will bring you no benefit. It is better to be ashamed [of yourself] now, while shame can still help you; all is ashamed before Christ, and not Christ before all. Why does the Lord say, *Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words?* “Whosoever shall be ashamed of Me” means, “Whoever doubts My divinity and My divine incarnation of the Most Pure Virgin, of My sufferings on the Cross, and My Resurrection; and whoever is ashamed of My poverty in the world, My love for sinners.” *Whosoever shall be ashamed...of My words* means, “Whoever doubts the Gospel or renounces My teaching; or corrupts My teaching and through heresy brings confusion and discord to the assembly of the faithful; or proudly places himself higher than My revelation and tries to replace it with some foreign teaching of his own; or intentionally keeps silent about My words or hides them before the strong and powerful of this world, ashamed of Me and fearing for himself.” Christ’s words are a life-creating testament to the world, as were His sufferings, His Body, and His Blood. The Lord does not separate his words from Himself and does not render them less significance than His own Person. His words are inseparable from Him. His words have power, just as His Person does. Therefore, He said to His disciples, *Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you* (Jn. 15:3). With His words He cleansed souls, healed the sick, cast out demons, and raised the dead. His word is creative, purifying, life-creating. And is this any wonder, if in the Gospel it says, *And the Word was God* (Jn. 1:1)?

The Lord calls this generation *adulterous* in the broader sense of the word, like the ancient prophets who called worship of other gods, adultery (Ezek. 23:37). Whoever forgets his wife and goes after a strange woman commits adultery. But whoever forgets the living God and worships the created world also commits adultery. Whoever abandons faith in the Lord and trusts in men, whoever abandons love of God and transfers it to people or things, commits adultery. In a word, all sins, which cause your soul to distance itself from God and join itself with someone or something outside of God can be called by one common name—adultery; for they all have the quality of marital infidelity. Thus, whoever is ashamed of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Bridegroom of the human soul, before such an adulterous generation, is truly like a bride who is ashamed of her bridegroom before depraved people. The Lord does not just say, “in this sinful generation,” *but adulterous and sinful generation*. Why? In order to particularly rebuke adultery. By adultery here is meant all the most serious, poisonous and deadly sins, which turn most of all a person away from following Christ, from self-denial, from the cross, and rebirth.

But look at how amazingly today’s Gospel reading ends: And he said unto them, *Verily I say unto you, That there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power*. You could say that at first glance, these words are unconnected with the previous speech. But the connection is clear, and the end wondrous. The Lord does not want to leave His faithful without consolation. Having called them to take up their crosses, to deny even their own souls, and fiercely threatening them concerning the terrible

punishment that awaits those who are ashamed of Him and His words, the Lord now traces a rainbow in the sky after the storm. He hastens to give them good tidings about the reward for those who obey Him and follow after Him with their crosses. Some will receive this reward even before the end of the world and the Last Judgment, and even before the end of their lives, here on earth. They *shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power*. That is how wise the Lord is in His preaching! He never talks about judgment without reminding them about the reward; He does not rebuke without praising; He does not lead people to the thorny path without reminding them about the joys at the end of the path; He does not pronounce threats without providing consolation. He does not leave the heavens veiled with clouds without soon showing the radiance of the sun and the grandeur of the rainbow.

But who are those *who will not taste of death till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power*? Speaking before the gathered crowds and His disciples, the Lord says, *there be some of them that stand here*. So, to whom is He referring? First of all, to all those who fulfill His commandments about carrying the cross and denying oneself. They will feel the power of the Kingdom of heaven on themselves yet in this life. On them will descend the Spirit of God, Who cleanses and enlightens them, and opens to them the gates of heavenly mysteries, just as would happen later to the apostles and Archdeacon Stephen. Didn't the apostles see the Kingdom of God come in power on the day of Pentecost, when they were clothed with power from on high? *But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God* (Acts 7:55). And didn't the evangelist John see the Kingdom of God before his physical death? Wasn't the apostle Pavel taken up to the third heaven without having tasted death? But putting the apostles aside, who knows how many of those present at Christ's preaching that day would feel the power of the Holy Spirit and see the Kingdom of God, come in power, before departing from this world?

However, aside from this interpretation, certain Spirit-bearing exegists of the Gospel give another meaning to Christ's words we have cited above. Namely, they relate these words of the Savior to the three disciples—Peter, James, and John—who shortly after this preaching beheld the Lord transfigured on Mount Tabor, speaking with Moses and Elias. There is no doubt that this interpretation is correct, but it does not exclude the former explanation. The three apostles truly saw the Kingdom of God come with power when, on Mount Tabor, the Lord revealed Himself in His heavenly radiance, and when Moses and Elias, appeared visibly from another world, standing on either side of the Lord of Glory. But one should by no means think that this is the only time that mortal men have seen the kingdom of God come with power. This event on Tabor was indeed majestic and unique; however, it does not exclude the countless other times when mortal men, during their earthly lives—though in a different manner—have seen the kingdom of God come in power and glory.

If we so desire, we too may behold the kingdom of God come with power, without tasting of death. The conditions under which it is revealed are clearly recounted in today's Gospel reading, Let us willingly take up our cross and follow the Lord. Let us strive to lose our old soul, our sinful life, and embrace the truth that saving our soul is more important than gaining the whole world. Then we too shall be deemed worthy, by God's mercy, to behold the Kingdom of God, great in

power and incomparable in glory, where angels and the saints unceasingly glorify the living God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—the Trinity One in essence and Indivisible, now and ever, throughout all times, and unto the ages of ages. *Amen.*

St. Nikolai (Velimirovic)

Services this Week

- **5th Sunday of Lent – St Mary of Egypt (04.06.2025.)**
 - Ven. Father Zachariah the Recluse, St Irinej of Backa (Foref. Of the Annunciation)
 - *Divine Liturgy starts at 10:00 AM.*
 - *Vesper Service 05:00 PM*
 - *Speaker: Fr. Sasha Medic*

Donations March 23, 2025

**Offering - \$1,016.00 Candles - \$91.00
Donations**

In Honor of Kathleen McDowell' Birthday from Dianna Dunnington- \$100

Large Candles

**IMO Jeffrey Smith - 42 years of marriage from wife, Mariam Smith
IMO Shawn Novatny from Joe & Rose Novatny
IMO Shawn Novatny from Mike & Lindy Bakos
IMO Shawn Novatny from Tom & Carole McAllister
IMO Natalie Ofsanko from Olga Bulich
IMO Linda Palmer from Olga Bulich**

**Nut, Apricot, and Poppyseed Rolls are available! - \$15
(Also Pumpkin Rolls - \$10)**

**Thanks to all our WONDERFUL volunteers at the Fish Fry
A special Shut-out to the best workers
Eli Ribaric, Nikki Ribaric and Petar Vukovic (We love you!)**

Please see Suzette to sign up for your Fish Fry Slot

Sarma Sale!!!!

**Please fill-out the order form located in the church hall
or see Suzette for more information.**

\$15/ ½ dozen - \$30/ dozen

Flowers for Pascha

LAST DAY TO ORDER!!

ORDERS DUE NO LATER THAN MARCH 31st

UPCOMING EVENTS

Lenten Fish Fries

Friday, March 7th to Friday April 11, 2025

Lenten Vespers

5th Sunday of Lent – St. Mary of Egypt

Sunday, April 6, 2025 – 5:00 PM

*** Palm Sunday – Sunday, April 13, 2025**

*** PASCHA! – Sunday, April 20, 2025**

*** St. Nicholas Anniversary Celebration–**

Sunday, May 18, 2025

*** Polka Fest – May 30, – June 1, 2025**

*** Band of Brothers – July 2025**

*** Taste of Serbia – Saturday, August 9, 2025**

*** Johnstown Slavic Festival –**

September 19–20, 2025



FLOWERS FOR PASCHA



Provided by SEADS Garden Center

No.		Price	Total \$
	4 ½" - Bluebells	\$6	
	4 ½" - Mini Daffodils	\$7	
	5" - Gerber Daisy	\$7	
	6½" - Daffodils	\$11	
	6 ½ " - Hyacinths	\$11	
	6 ½ " - Tulips	\$11	
	6 ½ " - Martha Washington Geraniums	\$12	
	6 ½ " - Mums	\$14	
	6 ½ " - White Lily Single Stem	\$15.50	
	8 ½ " - Lily Double	\$29	
	8 ½ " - Hydrangea	\$25	
		Total	
		=	

Name: _____

In Memory of: _____

Paid _____ Check # _____

Please return to Suzette Gardenhour no later than Sunday, March 31st. If you are out of town - payment and completed form can be mailed to:

St. Nicholas Church
1001 St. Clair Road, Johnstown PA 15905

Or contact Suzette at 814-421-1276 or shliva16@gmail.com