

The Fourth Sunday of Great Lent



In the Church services for the fourth Sunday the Holy Church offers us a great example of the life of fasting in the person of the Venerable John of the Ladder (see page 106), who, "having overcome the flesh through fasting" and "by the sweat of his ascetic efforts quenched the fiery arrows of the enemy" and "renewed the strength of souls" and, "ascending to the height of virtues", "received in his soul the divine wealth of the Spirit, undefiled prayer, chastity, modesty, continuous vigil", "was deified through heavenly glory", "was revealed as a physician to those sick through sin" and was the author of "The Ladder of Paradise". According to the expression of the Holy Church, how the profoundly granted ascetic life of the Venerable John "gives us a pleasure sweeter than honey", and so his "Ladder" "brings to us the ever flowering fruits of his teaching, pleasing the heart with vigilant heeding: for souls are rising up the ladder from earth to heaven and abiding in glory". Approving fasting with the example of the Venerable John, the Holy Church offers us a new consolation in the Gospel and Epistle readings of this Sunday. In the first she shows that fasting and prayer defeats the very spiritual enemy of the salvation of man, and predicted this victory in the circumstances of suffering, the death and the resurrection of Christ; and in the second she reminds us of the inalterability of God's will for the salvation of man, in order that we have a firm hope.

Besides the hymns praising the Venerable John, during the fourth week other hymns are chanted, in which the repentant soul resembles the man, who fell into the hands of the thieves, and whom both the priest and the Levite passed by, not offering help. Testing one's conscience the Holy Church inspires the soul to turn to the Lord with prayer: He cleans off the sinful scabs.

Having concentrated in the hymns of the fourth Sunday on the diverse motives for the zealous bearing of the lenten spiritual struggle, the Holy Church at the end of the Matins service with a tender voice appeals to her children: "Come, let us work in the mystical vineyard, making fruits of repentance work in it, let us not labor for food and drink, but through prayer and fasting let us gain virtue. And

the Lord of the vineyard, pleased by our labor, will provide the denarii by which He delivers souls from the debt of sins, for He alone is rich in mercy".

Troparion, tone 1

**O dweller of the wilderness and angel in the body.
You were a wonder-worker, O our God-bearing Father John.
You received heavenly gifts through fasting, vigil, and prayer:
Healing the sick and the souls of those drawn to you by faith.
Glory to Him who gave you strength.
Glory to Him who granted you a crown.
Glory to Him who through you grants healing to all.**

(Text tr.: OCA 1967)

Kontakion, tone 4

**The Lord truly set you on the heights of abstinence,
To be a guiding star,
Showing the way to the universe,
O our Father and Teacher John.**

(Text tr., OCA, 1967)

The Liturgy of St. Basil the Great. The Epistle: Heb. 6:13-20; sel. 314.
For St. John: Eph. 5:9-19; sel. 229. **The Gospel:** Mk. 9:17-31; sel. 40. For St.
John: Mt. 4:25-5:12; sel. 10.

If a saint's day with the polyeleos falls on this Sunday, then the service to St. John is dropped and is sung at Compline.

*S. V. Bulgakov, **Handbook for Church Servers**, 2nd ed., 1274 pp. (Kharkov, 1900) p. 0522-523.
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