29/03/2020

Sunday Sermon by His Eminence Archbishop Seraphim of Zimbabwe (March 29, 2020)



“On this day, the fourth Sunday of Great Lent, we commemorate the memory of our blessed Father John, author of the book “The Ladder”.

St. John of the Ladder lived in the years 525- 60. From the age of 16 he dedicated his life to monasticism and asceticism. For 59 whole years he lived in the desert of Egypt, around the monastery of Saint Catherine at Sinai, at which by the end of the 6th century he also served as Abbot. However, what made Saint John most well known to the Christian world is his distinguished ascetic book entitled “The Ladder of Divine Ascent” from which the Saint also takes his surname.

In reality, this book consists of two thematic parts. The first part refers to the ideal characteristics which should adorn a shepherd and teacher of the church. The second part consists of a description of the manner of Spiritual asceticism. This part consists of 30 chapters as many stages as a Christian has to follow in his life in order to complete his Christian life, to arrive with God's help at his personal salvation through Christ.

The title of "Climacus"(the ladder) which Saint John gave as the title to his work was taken from the well-known vision of Jacob (Genesis 28:12) after the flight from his home, when he deceived his brother Esau and his father Issac into taking the blessing of the rights of the first born. The presentation of his work in 30 chapters, which refer to the 30 stages of spiritual asceticism, he dedicated using the age of Jesus Christ as the basis, when he formally started his public ministry and his redemptive work. These stages constitute a spiritual ascending just like when we climb up a ladder from the bottom to the top, from the lowest to the highest, from the easy to the more difficult, so that the successful path of every stage constitutes a prerequisite for our transition to the next one.

Amongst other things he stresses the value of grief, obedience, repentance, the remembrance of death, silence, fasting and prayer. At the peak of worth, based on the Apostle Paul's witness, the basis; he stresses the virtues of faith, of love and hope.

In paragraph 61 of the 26th chapter "concerning discernment" Saint John referring to one of the many problems which contemporary humans also face. He observes that desperation exists, which is owed to the multitude of sins and the heaviness of the conscience and the unbearable grief, because the soul is completely overcome with wounds and exhausted from their heaviness at the bed of desperation. There also exists another type of desperation, which occurs due to pride and conceit, because he assumes that our person does not deserve to have such a calamity happen to it (when someone truly desires to succeed when he can't, or who does not do anything to achieve the things he wants, or who simply wants them from a conceited point of view in order to stress his ego thus, in his failure he becomes despondent). This is the characteristic sign with which a careful, observant person will discern with in very type of desperation. In the first instance, man surrenders to indifference, in the second he continues his struggles with desperation and in a harmful manner (without correct orientation torturing and being tortured). A therapy for the first kind of desperation is sobriety and hope, for the second kind, humility (the sacrifice of that which you want and you can't have, and the identification of your happiness with what you already have or with that which you

can achieve with your strengths as the basis and God’s help) in combination with our effort to stop judging others.

The book “the Ladder” by Saint John constitutes also for our era a contribution to the better handling of human problems. One of these problems is the treat of the Coronavirus. First of all, all of us we pray to God our Medical Scientific community to find the medicine to deal properly with this virus. We pray to God to protect the whole Humanity. At the same time , we have realized that the whole world is one big family and we should help and support each other in order to survive. It’s time now for social solidarity.

— Source: Greek Orthodox Archbishopric of Zimbabwe / Facebook