

Climbing the Ladder



This coming Sunday marks the 'Sunday of St John of the Ladder.'

The Church dedicated this Sunday of Lent to this great writer and ascetic, as his 'Ladder of Divine Ascent' is seen to be a truly helpful guide and inspiration, not only for the period of Great Lent, but also for our entire lives as Christians. The book, in 30 steps, takes us through the virtues, the challenges, the ways in which we can spiritually grow by the Grace of God and by our personal and prayerful struggle against sin.

St John was born in the sixth century and dedicated his body and soul entirely to God. He lived 'in exile,' or in isolation from the ways of the world, separating himself from the things that bind us to the self-centredness of the ego and of sin. From the young age of sixteen he followed God's calling and went to Mount Sinai, where God had revealed Himself to Moses (Exodus 3) and offered Himself to the Lord with humility and trust. He was tonsured a monk at the age of 20 and climbed the spiritual ladder of virtue day by day, growing in maturity, in prayer, obedience and discernment. This may seem rather unrealistic to implement in our own context, in our own busy lives and routines, living in the bustling cities and towns of

the 21st century. However, the Church offers us this Sunday dedicated to the example and the writings of St John, as we journey through Lent – to remind us that we may also rise up in virtue towards the light, the joy and peace of God’s love.

Dear friends, we really can take so much from his writings and example, from his disregard of thoughts and actions centred on vainglory and greed, to his transformation of any affliction into an opportunity of purification, heavenly joy and divine contemplation.

Most importantly, St John tried to keep his virtues hidden from human eyes. Even though he shone like a star on the Sinai Peninsula of Egypt, and was held in awe by all his fellow monastics, he thought himself no more than a beginner, a sinful human being and an unworthy monk. During this period of lent we may well be struggling to keep the fast, to cultivate prayer, to offer ourselves to others and to attend the uplifting Lenten services – however, let us not allow this to increase our vanity, our egoism and any form of competitive rhetoric. Like St John, let us humbly struggle through this period and our entire lives, and concern ourselves with our own repentance and salvation, while treating others with mercy, ‘economy,’ forgiveness and sacrificial love, without judging or looking down upon any of our brothers and sisters: ‘Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye...?’ (Matt 7:1-4)

As we journey through Lent toward Pascha, let us read St John’s Ladder – offering us 30 steps we are able to take in order to grow closer to God in virtue. Let us not forget that, according to St John, the greatest virtue, or rather, the fulfilment and epicentre of all virtue, is that of love. Each step of the ladder raises the Christian one step closer to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, Who awaits us all at the top. The ‘top step’ is Faith, Hope and Love, described as a ‘concentration of light,’ with the greatest of the three being love. This is because love is the very resemblance of God, love is God Himself (1 John 4:8) Who radiates His uncreated energies (See St Gregory Palamas’ teachings) on us as we unite with Him.

Hymn to St John of the Ladder:

As ever-blooming fruits, you offer the teachings of your God-given book, O wise John, most blessed, while sweetening the hearts of all them that heed it with vigilance; for it is a ladder from the earth unto Heaven that confers glory on the souls that ascend it and honour you faithfully.

Sign up to our online event taking place next Wednesday the 14th at 18:00 by emailing: [\[email protected\]](#)

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