



**Orthodox Mission of the
Entrance of the Theotokos
into the Temple**

**306 W. Main Street
Emmitsburg, MD 21727**

The Rev. Fr. Elias Yelovich,

Pastor

<http://EntranceMission.org>

***The Ladder of Divine Ascent*
April 11, 2021**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!

When writing to the servants of God, one should begin with our God and King Himself, the good, the supremely good, the all-good God is the life of all free beings. He is the salvation of believers or unbelievers, of the just or the unjust ... of monks or those living in the world, of the educated or the illiterate, of the healthy or the sick, of the young or the very old. He is like the outpouring of light, the glimpse of the sun, or the changes of the weather, which are the same for everyone without exception. "For God is no respecter of persons" (Rom. 2:11). (St. John Climacus. Ladder of Divine Ascent)

These are the words with which St. John Climacus opens his remarkable book, the *Ladder of Divine Ascent*. We commemorate St. John Climacus every year on the Fourth Sunday in Lent, this coming Sunday. His writing is one of great spiritual wisdom, a truly helpful guide to both monastics and non-monastics living in the world. St. John begins with a discussion of the first step in our spiritual pilgrimage, renunciation of life apart from God, and carefully moves through a discussion of each of the steps in our wonderful pilgrimage toward the last and greatest of the virtues, faith active in love.

Our spiritual pilgrimage is like a journey. We begin our journey with one step and progress along our journey toward our destination with a second step, then a third step and so on until we reach our goal. Each step brings us closer to that goal, which for the Christian disciple is the submission of our free will to that of our loving Creator. As we journey in our spiritual pilgrimage, we grow every closer to that goal: oneness with the One Who is our Supreme Good, our Loving Lord and God, who alone can and desires to save us. We set out on our journey by turning away from our false securities in the world and by setting our eyes on God, our only real security, our only real hope. Eventually, as we travel closer and closer to Him, we become more and more like Him, eventually becoming less self-concerned and more other-concerned in the free exercise of the greatest of all virtues, love, the fruit of our faith, our closeness to the One Who is love.

Last evening, we focused on the humble response of the Theotokos to the angel Gabriel who announced that she had found favor with God and would bear the One Who would be the salvation of the ages. Her humble response and simple, straightforward acceptance of the Will of the Father had the effect of leading countless souls to the bliss of Eternal Life. Just as we see concentric rings flowing out from a stone thrown into the water, so the effects of her assent to the will of the Father spread throughout the universe to the salvation of all who would follow her example.

John Climacus similarly reminds us of the importance of each and every step, of each and every decision in our pilgrimage of faith. The most difficult battles are won through the individual, small victories, one after the other. We learn to overcome the big sins, the crushing passions, by resisting the small ones, one after the other. We also learn to follow the will of the Father by making small, individual steps toward the obedience of His commands and the free assent to His revelations, most especially in the Life, Word and Example of our Lord, the Savior, Jesus Christ.

The Ladder of Divine Ascent is a sure and helpful guide to everyone who seeks to work out their salvation with fear and trembling. Grace is given freely; God never withholds Himself to anyone; all who seek Him, find Him. But first, we must set out on that journey, each and every one of us, turning aside our eyes from the world and its many lures and false securities, and focusing our eyes, the eyes of our hearts, on the One Who alone can save and Who desires the salvation of every person. This, Brothers and Sisters, is the purpose of Great Lent, to help us turn aside from all that might hold us back in our pilgrimage and to encourage us to keep our eyes on our one goal: Oneness with the Lord, faith that is genuine and love that is truly unfeigned.

Fr. Elias

Orthodox Mission of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple

306 West Main Street

Emmitsburg, MD 21727

<http://EntranceMission.org>

717-817-0084