



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

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The Ladder of Divine Ascent
April 14, 2024

Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!

Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Today, the fourth Sunday of Great Lent, we commemorate St. John of the Ladder. He is called St. John of the Ladder due to a famous writing of his, the Ladder of Divine Ascent.

Not much is known to us of the life of St. John. It is believed that at the age of 16 he went to become a monk on Mt. Sinai. He lived under obedience to a spiritual father for roughly 20 years, at which point his spiritual father reposed in the Lord. When this happened, St. John retreated into a cave, living the life of a hermit for another 20 years. He would later become the abbot of the monastery at Sinai, but during those 20 years in the cave he wrote the Ladder of Divine Ascent.

The Ladder is a treatise, a guide on ascetism, ascetism being the denial of oneself for the sake of uniting to God. It was written at the request of an abbot of a different monastery. It is therefore a treatise written by a monastic for monastics. For those of us living in the world, it

can seem intimidating to read the Ladder, as we are not monastics. However, all of us are called to live an ascetic life, to deny ourselves our passions so that we can unite ourselves to Christ's passion. Sure, the asceticism we live in the world will outwardly be different than it would in a monastery. But it should be a part of our lives nevertheless, especially during the season of Great Lent, a season where we prepare ourselves to participate in the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ.

There are many wise words we can take to heart that are written in the Ladder. I will quote just a few:

From Step 8 of the Ladder, the step titled, On freedom from anger and on meekness: "If the Holy Spirit is peace of soul, as He is said to be, and as He is in reality, and if anger is disturbance of heart, as it actually is and as it is said to be, then nothing so prevents [the Holy Spirit's] presence in us as anger."

From Step 22 of the Ladder, the step titled, On the many forms of vainglory: "It is not he who depreciates himself who shows humility ... but he who maintains the same love for the very man who reproaches him."

From Step 25 of the Ladder, the step titled, On the destroyer of the passions, most sublime humility, which is rooted in spiritual perception: "It is a sign of the beginning of health when our thought no longer prides itself on its natural gifts. But as long as it has that stench in its nose, it cannot detect the fragrance of myrrh."

If you haven't already, I would recommend reading the Ladder of Divine Ascent this Great Lent, with the understanding that it was written for monastics but has wisdom which pertains to us living in the world. Let us use the wisdom found in this work to promote our own ascetism, knowing that there are no attachments in the world that can match the greatness of attaching ourselves to our Creator.

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