



My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Pascha is weeks away, and it can become easy for our weariness to become, at first a distraction, and then a temptation. It is for this very reason that the Church has chosen to dedicate this Sunday of Lent to a saint who gave us a guide to help us overcome our weaknesses.

St. John Climacus compiled his knowledge into a book for the benefit of the Brotherhood of the Raithu Monastery. His Ladder of Divine Ascent takes the form of thirty “steps” toward theosis, or unification with God. These steps on the ladder begin with a renunciation of the world, continue with discussions on sins like slander & greed, before nearing the top and learning how to acquire ήσυχία, or the peace of soul. While the book began as a guide for those ascetics, there is much that we can take from it. Indeed, even if we only see its title, we understand that our journey towards God is like a ladder; we make progress, and when we sin, we fall a few rungs—but (recalling the Parable of the Prodigal Son) so long as we repent, we can continue.

Consider this Sunday's Gospel: a man has brought his demonically possessed son to Jesus, telling Him: *“I asked your disciples to cast it out, and they were not able... if you can do anything, have pity on us and help us And Jesus said to him, ‘If you can! All things are possible to him who believes.’ Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, ‘I believe; help my unbelief!’”* (Mark 9:18; 22-24). How moving is this phrase; perhaps it is one of the most perfect summations of what it means to have faith: We say, *“help my unbelief!”*, and we lose our balance on the ladder; we say, *“I believe!”* and we continue our journey toward heaven.

Even the conclusion of the Gospels restates our primary tools of our journey. After our Lord has restored the boy, the Disciples privately ask Jesus, *“‘Why could we not cast it out?’” And he said to them, ‘This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer and fasting’”* (Mark 9:28-29). We may not have the ability to discern all the teachings of St. John's Ladder of Divine Ascent, but, even so, we are still on the ladder.

My brothers and sisters, though we may be weary with cares, and with the burden of our own sinfulness, let us not fall into the sin of despair, If we keep our eyes focused on Christ above us, and if we maintain prayer and fasting, then we will be in a better position to reach the ending of our Lenten journey in a truly Paschal spirit of hope and joy.

+SEVASTIANOS
Metropolitan of Atlanta