



GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AUSTRALIA

PARISH OF THE ANNUNCIATION OF OUR LADY, “EVANGELISMOS”

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SUNDAY 26 MARCH 2017 – ST JOHN CLIMACUS

On this day the Church commemorates St John Climacus (570 – 649AD), a monk and Abbot of Sinai, an ascetic and spiritual writer of the early Church. His “Ladder of Divine Ascent” discusses Christian virtues and vices and the nature of complete detachment from the world. It offers advice, counsel and guidance. Ascetic life is portrayed as a ladder which the aspirant must ascend, each step being a virtue to be acquired, or a vice to be surrendered. Its 30 steps reflect the hidden life of Christ Himself.

EPISTLE The Reading is from St Paul’s Letter to the Hebrews [6:13-20]

For when God made a promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, saying, ‘*Surely blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply you.*’ And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise. For men indeed swear by the greater, and an oath for confirmation is for them an end of all dispute. Thus God, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath, that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us. This *hope* we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence *behind* the veil, where the forerunner has entered for us, *even* Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.

EXPLANATION:

Jesus reminds His disciples that sometimes there is a long interval between making of the promise by God and its fulfilment. But God's promises are irrevocable, and He will not fail to keep them. God confirms the Promise by an oath. **(6:13)** The Promise made to Abraham was that, he would have a son, an heir through whom God would greatly multiply. Despite his advanced years, Abraham had total faith and trust in God. This son was to be the beginning of a great nation. (Gen 12:2) **(6:14)** Isaac was born 25 years after the promise. Abraham's patient endurance was rewarded in his descendants and thus he obtained the promise – but not all of it. Although he did not live to see what God had promised him, that is, "his seed would be as the stars of heaven...." (Gen 22:17), St John the Theologian writes that "Abraham did see his day and rejoiced." (John 8:56) He saw by grace that the Church of many nations or people consists of the children of Abraham. **(6:15)** When men confirm a promise they usually swear by someone greater than themselves (that is, God, the Heavens, etc) in order to put an end to a dispute, and to prove that they do not intend to break their oath. Jesus teaches them not to do this. Their habitual truthfulness should cause them to be believed without the necessity of an oath. **(6:16)** God knows that human beings are weak and capable of doubting even God's Word. In a sense, then, respecting man's trust in oaths of confirmation, He designed to emphasize the irrevocable nature of His will ("counsel") by means of an oath. Thus, St Paul is stressing to the Hebrew Christian that the original intent of God's promise to Abraham – ["in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" (Gen 22:18)] really means that they can only be true Israelites and sons of Abraham ("heirs to the promise") if they follow Christ, remain faithful and accept Him as their Saviour. **(6:17)** The **"two immutable"** things are God's promise and His confirmation of that Promise by an oath. God cannot lie. Nothing is impossible for God except to lie. Therefore the Hebrew Christian should be consoled or encouraged by God's oath and accept His promise of truth and flee for refuge in Christ, as all must do when they realize the futility of worldly hopes and when they become aware of their sinfulness. **(6:19)** Again Jesus, our anchor and our hope has entered into the Holy of Holies, and He is a forerunner for us because He has taken on human nature, which He assumed with Him into the heavenly places and those who became His by faith will follow Him into

those places. His High Priesthood is after the “**order of Melchizedek**” and will last forever. (6:20)

GOSPEL **The Reading is from the Gospel of St Mark [9:17-31]**

Then one of the crowd answered and said, *“Teacher, I brought You my son, who has a mute spirit. And wherever it seizes him, it throws him down; he foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth, and becomes rigid. So I spoke to Your disciples, that they should cast it out, but they could not.”* He answered him and said, *“O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Bring him to Me.”* Then they brought him to Him, and when he saw Him, immediately the spirit convulsed him, and he fell on the ground and wallowed, foaming at the mouth. So He asked his father, *“How long has this been happening to him?”* And he said, *“From childhood.”* And often he has thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him. But if You can do anything, have compassion on us and help us. Jesus said to him, *“If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes.”* Immediately the father of the child cried out and said with tears, *‘Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!’* When Jesus saw that the people came running together, He rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it: *“Deaf and dumb spirit, I command you, come out of him and enter him no more!”* Then *the spirit* cried out, convulsed him greatly, and came out of him. And he became as one dead, so that many said, *“He is dead.”* But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose. And when He had come into the house, His disciples asked Him privately, *“Why could we not cast it out?”* So He said to them, *“This kind can come out of nothing but prayer and fasting.”* Then they departed from there and passed through Galilee, and He did not want anyone to know it. For He taught His disciples and said to them, *“The Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of men, and they will kill Him. And after He is killed, He will rise the third day.”* But they did not understand this saying, and were afraid to ask Him.

EXPLANATION:

The man who approached Jesus to cure his son was weak of faith. He attests to his unbelief when he says, **“Help my unbelief”**. His complaint against the disciples that they could not heal his son clearly shows his unbelief. **(9:17-18)** Jesus confirms unbelief when He says, **“it is your unbelief which is the cause of your son’s not being healed”**. Jesus does not only address this man when he explains, **“O faithless generation”**, but directs this saying to all, reproaching the man, the son his disciples and all the Jews for their unbelief. For it is likely that many of the bystanders were also scandalized by the disciples’ inability to heal. The Lord shows that He welcomes death when He says, **“How long shall I be with you?”** meaning it is a torment to Me to live with you and your unbelief. But He does not just reproach them, but grants the healing as well with great humility. His humility is that He does not attribute the healing to His own power, but to the man’s faith when He says, **“All things are possible to him who believes”** and the man immediately replied, **“Lord I believe.” (9:19-27)** The disciples asked Jesus why they could not cast the demon out? They were afraid that they had lost the grace which the Lord had given them, that is, “cast out demons and to tread on snakes and scorpions.” They thought that it was their fear, this doubt in their belief that prevented them from healing the boy. **(9:28)** But Jesus said to them, **“prayer and fasting”** are essential expressions of the life of faith. To overcome the demons in our life both the one suffering and the one about to heal, must fast and pray, for true prayer is rendered when it is yoked to fasting. When the one who prays is not weighed down by the effects of food, his prayer is not burdened and ascends easily. **(9:29)** Jesus **“did not want anyone to know it”** because He wanted to spend time privately with His disciples. **(9:30)** He wanted to tell them about the events that would soon take place – His Passion, death, resurrection for our sake and for our salvation. **(9:31)** The whole theme of this Gospel lesson is belief. If you believe that Jesus has the power to heal you (body and soul) and if you put your faith in Him all things are possible. Miracles happen, not because of perfect faith, but rather because of imperfect faith in the perfect Christ.