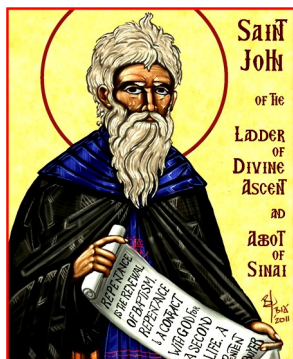


# Celebrating Our Faith

Byzantine Catholic Worship: *Our Church, Its Customs and Rich Heritage*

## The Fourth Sunday of the Great Fast



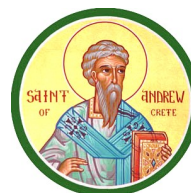
ON THE FOURTH SUNDAY of the Great Fast (and on March 30), the Eastern Church commemorates our Righteous Father John Climacus. He is called Climacus due to his authorship of the great spiritual work 'The Ladder of Divine Ascent.' In this work, we see how, by means of thirty steps, the Christian gradually ascends from below to the heights of supreme spiritual perfection. We see how one virtue leads to another, as one rises higher and higher and finally attains to that height where there abides the crown of the virtues, which is called "Christian love."

His commemoration is designated by the Church on one of the Sundays of Lent as his life and writings affirm him as a supreme bearer and proponent of Christian asceticism, that is, a lifestyle characterized by abstinence from sensual pleasures, often for the purpose of pursuing spiritual goals. The ascetic example of this great Saint of the Church inspires us in our Lenten journey.

In our time, many lay people ask the question: "Why should people of the 21<sup>st</sup> century act according to the rules written by monks and for monks in deep antiquity? Why should they read monastic books in which there isn't even a remote mention of the problems that we face today? What is the relevance of the writings of St. John Climacus for our times?"

If we think about it, all of the basic problems of human life are rooted in our soul, in our passions and sins, and we often do not know how to struggle with them. How can we bring order into our own souls? This is what St. John Climacus wrote about. We don't have to think that *The Ladder* is a super-monastic book of instruction; there is much in it that is important for all Christians in general. Much is written there about repentance and the struggle with the passions, which is especially important during Great Lent. For example, St. John said that, at the Last Judgment, we will not be accused for not performing miracles, or for not theologizing, or not having spiritual visions, but we will be accused if we did not bring forth repentance for our sins. St. John beautifully describes the development of the passions and the means for warring with them. In general, the Christian takes from *The Ladder* what is most important — the need for the soul's constant turning to God, cutting off from ourselves with discernment everything that harms our eternal salvation. *The Ladder* of St. John Climacus without a doubt brings benefit to every Christian, no matter what times he or she lives in. That is why St. John says that being a Christian means, "for one as much as possible to emulate Christ in words, deeds, and thoughts, sacredly and immaculately believing in the Holy Trinity."

## The Great Canon of St. Andrew of Crete



THE CONSCIENTIOUS AND FAITHFUL OBSERVANCE of the Great Fast to the very end demands from every Christian great strength of spirit and will. The Holy Church, desiring that we finish our fasting as zealously as we began it, proposed certain special devotions designed to induce us to fast and do penance during Lent. The observance of the Sunday of the Veneration of the Holy Cross as well as those of Matins with Prostrations provide these inducements. The Sixth Ecumenical Council decreed that this Matins service, in which the Great Canon of St. Andrew of Crete occupies the central place, be celebrated on Thursday of the fifth week of the Great Fast. Customarily, however, this celebration take place on Wednesday evening.

A special feature of this service is the triple bow prescribed after every troparion of every Ode of the Canon by the Typicon. According to the custom of the Ukrainian Church, however, only one profound bow to the ground occurs. In all, 250 prostrations or profound bows are prescribed. For this reason, the Ukrainians call this Matins service simply "Prostrations" (Poklony). More than any other, perhaps, this service symbolizes the spirit of penance in our Eastern Church.

### What Is Meant by the Word 'Canon' in General?

A significant portion of every matins service is arranged according to definite rules. For this reason, this section of the morning service is called "canon", a Greek word meaning "rule", "measure", or "norm". Biblical hymns are the basis of the canon which included nine odes, the second of which, because of its penitential nature, occurs only during the time of the Great Fast. At first, the canons were small in content because they consisted of two or three odes. Each ode has an irmos, the initial verse of each individual ode in a canon (from the Greek "to tie" or "to link") and several verses called troparions. The irmos links the theme of the canon with the theme of the Biblical Ode which corresponds to the ode of the canon. The number of troparions in an ode varies and may be any number from two or three to over ten. St. Andrew of Crete was the first to compose canons consisting of nine odes.

### The Author of the Great Canon

St. Andrew of Crete was a native of Damascus in Asia Minor. As a young man, he made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and there, in the year 678, he entered the monastery of St. Sabbas. His piety and keen intellect drew the attention of Theodore, Patriarch of Jerusalem, and as a result, the Patriarch made him his secretary. St. Andrew participated in the Sixth Ecumenical Council that met at Constantinople. Afterwards, he served for a time as a deacon at the Cathedral of St. Sophia there and had care of the orphans. Later the Patriarch of Constantinople consecrated him archbishop of the city of Gortyn on the island of Crete. For this reason, he is called St. Andrew of Crete. The date of his death is uncertain; some writers give the year 712 as the date of his death, while others give 740. His memory is celebrated in the Eastern Church on July 4 on the Gregorian calendar.

## Lazarus Saturday

*"Your voice, O Lord, destroyed the kingdom of Hades, and by the power of Your word, You raised Lazarus from the tomb after four days. He became the saving pre-figurement of the resurrection..."*

**ALMOST EVERY WEEK** of the Great Fast has its special liturgical features. The same must be said of its Saturdays and Sundays which are dedicated to some event in the life of Jesus Christ, His Blessed Mother and the Church or the Saints.



The special characteristic of the sixth week of Lent is that it spiritually prepares us for two great and glorious events in the life of Jesus Christ: the resurrection of Lazarus from the dead, to which are dedicated the Saturday before Palm Sunday, and the triumphal entry into Jerusalem of our Lord Jesus Christ on Palm Sunday.

In our liturgical books this week bears the name — the weeks of palms (*i.e.* palm branches), flowers or blossom-bearing week. The dominant theme of the services of this week is the ending of the Great Fast and the preparation of the faithful for the great miracle of the raising of Lazarus from the dead and Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday.

Strictly speaking, the Great Fast ends on the Friday of this week. Lazarus Saturday is outside the scope of the season. That this is a concluding service is evident when on Friday we sing in the stichera of Vespers: "Having completed the Forty Days Fast for the benefit of our souls, permit us, O Lover of mankind, to also see the holy week of Your Passion, so that during this week we may glorify Your majesty and Your incomprehensible Providence regarding us as we sing with one mind and heart: Glory to You, O Lord!"

The leading character in the church services of this week is the righteous Lazarus. The Monday service calls this week the vestibule to Lazarus Saturday: "The vestibule to the resurrection of Lazarus is opened," says the eighth Ode of the canon of Matins, "for Christ is coming to wake the dead Lazarus from sleep and to conquer death with life. "In the eighth Ode of the canon of Tuesday's Matins we sing: "Rejoice, O Bethany, home of Lazarus, for Christ having come to you, accomplished the glorious resurrection of Lazarus."

In the services of this week, the Church frequently calls upon the faithful to prepare themselves worthily with good deeds to meet Christ: "Bearing the branches of good deeds and the palm branches of chastity, let us all prepare ourselves to meet Christ Who is approaching Jerusalem as our God." (Ode 9 of the canon of Monday Matins) "Uniting love with mercy, let us, the faithful hasten to offer our good works up to Christ as a prayer, asking that He raise us also from the grave of our secret passions." (Ode 4 of the canon Thursday's Matins)

A venerable tradition of the Church relates that Lazarus, after his resurrection, left Bethany because the Jewish leaders sought to kill him. He then sailed to the island of Cyprus, where he became a bishop and lived for thirty more years before he died.

## Easter Confession and Holy Communion

**WE PREPARE OURSELVES** for the glorious feast of Christ's Resurrection with the holy Great Fast and conclude our spiritual preparation with the paschal or Easter Confession and Holy Communion. Confession and Holy Communion are singularly important sacraments in the life of the Church and of the faithful, for they are the pulse of their spiritual life and holiness.



Regarding Confession and Holy Communion the prescriptions of the Kyivan Metropolitan, Peter Mohyla (†1647), merit special attention. In his "Euchologion", published in 1646, he directs all pastors to remind their people as early as Cheesefare week and the first week of Lent of their obligation to confess their sins twice during the Great Fast — both at the beginning and at the end — as well as to receive Holy Communion.

Before every confession, the Eastern Church still prescribes a so-called "hoviniye" — a special preparation that lasts seven days, or three days or at least one day. During this period of preparation, the faithful are encouraged, as far as possible, to be present in church every day at the divine services, observe a strict fast, pray more at home, perform works of mercy, reflect upon their sins and during this time seek reconciliation with all. Therefore, let these two great and holy Sacraments serve us as a perpetual fountain of love of God and of neighbour, of our faith and holiness and as our guarantee of everlasting happiness.



**ДО СВІТЛОГО ПРАЗНИКА** Христового Воскресення ми приготуємося святим Великим постом, а своє духовне приготування завершуємо пасхальною сповіддю і святим причастям. Сповідь і святе причастя — це надзвичайно важливі святі таїнства в житті Церкви і її вірних, бо вони є живчиком їхнього духовного життя і святости.

Щодо сповіді і причастя, на особливу увагу заслуговують приписи київського митрополита Петра Могили († 1647). У "Требнику", виданому в 1646 р., він наказує всім парохам, щоб уже в сиропусний і перший тиждень посту пригадували своїм парафіянам, що в часі Великого посту мають відбути дві сповіді: одну на початку, а другу при кінці Великого посту та причаститися.

Східна Церква перед кожною сповіддю приписує т. зв. говіння, тобто особливе приготування, що триває сім днів, а в потребі три дні або принаймні один день. У часі говіння вірні за можливістю мають щодня бути в церкві на богослуженнях, зберігати строгий піст, більше молитися вдома, творити діла милосердя, роздумувати над своїми гріхами та в тому часі з усіма примиритися. Тож хай і для нас ці два великі і святі таїнства будуть постійним джерелом любови до Бога і ближнього, нашої віри, нашої святости та запорукою нашого вічного щастя.

