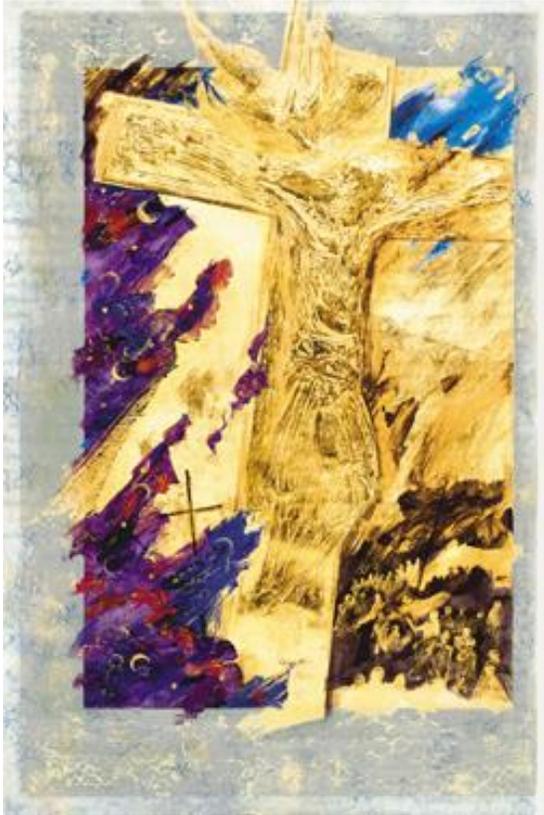


Lenten Reflections

April 1, 2019



My reflection comes from the Ruthenian Byzantine perspective on Lent or as we refer to it as The Great Fast.

In just about any activity that is worthwhile, there is always room for improvement. When I rest content with my past performance in anything, I will never get any better at it. Only those who know their own imperfection and strive to overcome it have much chance of reaching a higher goal.

In the fourth week of the Great Fast, we Byzantines commemorate St. John Climacus, who wrote the book *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* to guide us step by step to a life of greater holiness. Now only two weeks from Palm Sunday, the Church reminds me and you that we must all move upward on that ladder if we are to follow our Lord to His Passion, to His death on the cross, to His descent into hell, and to His glorious resurrection on the third day. But the first step upward requires what seems like a step downward. It is the step of humbly, acknowledging our weakness, and our imperfection. Without that honest confession, you and I will never develop the spiritual strength according to St. John of the Ladder necessary to enter the deep mystery of our salvation through the great offering and victory of our Savior.

In the gospel text of the 4th Sunday of the Great Fast, the father of the demon-possessed young man stands as a model of the honesty that we must cultivate in order to unite ourselves more fully to our crucified and risen Lord. When Christ told him that “all things are possible for him who believes,” the man “cried out and said with tears, ‘Lord, I believe; help my unbelief.’” The disciples had lacked the spiritual strength to cast out the demon, but in response to this anguished cry from the heart, the Lord Himself healed the young man. It was by acknowledging the imperfection of his faith,

even as he begged for mercy, that the father's prayer was answered.

Whether I like it or not, my life and yours I suspect is full of opportunities for us to become more like that broken-hearted, honest, humble father. Sickness, family difficulties, hardships, and so many other common challenges reveal the weakness of my faith and I know I never respond to them perfectly. The disciplines of the Great Fast - prayer, fasting, and almsgiving help me catch a glimpse of how much room I have to grow in my Christian life. None of us does them perfectly; indeed, it is beyond our ability to know what it would mean to do them perfectly, for our goal is to be perfect as our Heavenly Father is perfect. (Matt. 5:48) Who does not have more room for growth than we could possibly imagine? I know I do! But the more I embrace these disciplines and acknowledge my own weakness before life's daily challenges, the more aware I become of how far *I am* from sharing fully in the life of our Lord. The more I grasp my own sinfulness and brokenness, the more I must cry out from my heart, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief."

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**Monday of the Fourth Week of Lent
Lectionary: 244**

Reading 1 [Is 65:17-21](#)

Thus says the LORD:

Lo, I am about to create new heavens
and a new earth;

The things of the past shall not be remembered
or come to mind.

Instead, there shall always be rejoicing and happiness
in what I create;

For I create Jerusalem to be a joy
and its people to be a delight;

I will rejoice in Jerusalem
and exult in my people.

No longer shall the sound of weeping be heard there,
or the sound of crying;

No longer shall there be in it
an infant who lives but a few days,

or an old man who does not round out his full lifetime;
He dies a mere youth who reaches but a hundred years,

and he who fails of a hundred shall be thought accursed.

They shall live in the houses they build,
and eat the fruit of the vineyards they plant.

Responsorial Psalm [Ps 30:2 and 4, 5-6, 11-12a and 13b](#)

R. (2a) I will praise you, Lord, for you have rescued me.

I will extol you, O LORD, for you drew me clear
and did not let my enemies rejoice over me.

O LORD, you brought me up from the nether world;
you preserved me from among those going down into the pit.

R. I will praise you, Lord, for you have rescued me.

Sing praise to the LORD, you his faithful ones,
and give thanks to his holy name.

For his anger lasts but a moment;
a lifetime, his good will.

At nightfall, weeping enters in,
but with the dawn, rejoicing.

R. I will praise you, Lord, for you have rescued me.

"Hear, O LORD, and have pity on me;
O LORD, be my helper."

You changed my mourning into dancing;
O LORD, my God, forever will I give you thanks.

R. I will praise you, Lord, for you have rescued me.

Verse Before the Gospel [Am 5:14](#)

Seek good and not evil so that you may live,
and the LORD will be with you.

Gospel [Jn 4:43-54](#)

At that time Jesus left [Samaria] for Galilee.

For Jesus himself testified
that a prophet has no honor in his native place.

When he came into Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him,
since they had seen all he had done in Jerusalem at the feast;
for they themselves had gone to the feast.

Then he returned to Cana in Galilee,
where he had made the water wine.

Now there was a royal official whose son was ill in Capernaum.
When he heard that Jesus had arrived in Galilee from Judea,
he went to him and asked him to come down
and heal his son, who was near death.

Jesus said to him,

"Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will not believe."

The royal official said to him,

"Sir, come down before my child dies."
Jesus said to him, "You may go; your son will live."
The man believed what Jesus said to him and left.
While the man was on his way back,
his slaves met him and told him that his boy would live.
He asked them when he began to recover.
They told him,
"The fever left him yesterday, about one in the afternoon."
The father realized that just at that time Jesus had said to him,
"Your son will live,"
and he and his whole household came to believe.
Now this was the second sign Jesus did
when he came to Galilee from Judea.