

## Sermon for Climacus Sunday, 2021-04-11

### St. Silouan Chapel at St. John the Compassionate Mission

Christ is among us!

Today is the Sunday of St. John Climacus, John of the Ladder. Personally I don't have a lot to do with ladders. Somehow I have managed to live my life without owning a ladder. I know ladders are necessary and I have a certain respect for ladder users. Recently I watched a van loaded with ladders on its roof park outside where I live. I watched the guys in the van carefully remove the ladders from the van, carry them across the street and extend them against the neighbouring house, and climb up them to the roof. It all looked very professional and certainly orderly. At least so it appeared to be until, suddenly, the owner of the house came home and in a none too friendly manner asked why there were ladders against his house and what were they doing on her roof. Despite all their efforts and care they made one little mistake – they got the wrong house!

Eventually they got the right house, the right ladders against the right walls and access to the right roof. But this is a true story of what actually happened, so of course you know there's trouble ahead, and so it was. Using the ladders in the right place at last it turned out that once they climbed the ladders they didn't know what they were doing and so the homeowner told them to take their ladders and depart hence forth and for evermore.

If you look at the icon of today you will see not several ladders but only one. This is definitely counter-cultural. Is it some kind of communism that everyone has to share the same communal ladder? Surely everyone should be entitled to his/her/other own ladder to share, or not share, with others as they wish. After all is said and done, surely, the important thing is that I get up the ladder to the top and join St John of the Ladder in Paradise. Of course, being a Christian (of sorts) I would feel sorry that you didn't make it but when all is said and done, it's not my fault that you got on the wrong ladder, or put your ladder against the wrong wall, is it?

Sounds a bit farfetched doesn't it until you read the gospel for today. The man who approaches Jesus is obsessed only with his own problem which is about his son. He only goes to Jesus because the disciples of Jesus were as useful as the guys with their ladders against the wrong house. he doesn't come with great expectations – “if you can do anything...” If, if says Jesus, if! Have belief and your if's will disappear. “Help my unbelief” – sounds as though there is a lot more unbelief than there is belief. And yet Jesus responds to what little there is and cures the child. He makes use of what is there, however limited it is. In response to the disciples' anxiety about why they were not successful Jesus tells them simply – you were using the wrong ladder in the wrong place. Learn to use the right tools in the right place. In this case, “prayer and fasting”.

Many years ago in England I met a man who was seriously crippled following an industrial accident. He used to build cranes, massive enormous cranes over 150 feet high. People who saw him at work commented on how fearless he was working at such heights. His industrial accident involved a ladder only 20 feet high. Like the disciples, overconfident in his abilities, he fell from the ladder and damaged his spine. Overconfidence can be dangerous wherever one is on the ladder, or where we think we are on the spiritual journey up the ladder of divine ascent.

In the icons of the ladder of divine ascent Christ is shown at the top of the ladder receiving those who have successfully made it to the top. In today's epistle we are shown that Christ in the Church is also at the bottom of the ladder where we start from.

We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner shrine behind the curtain, where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.

Where is this inner shrine behind the curtain where Christ acts as our Great High Priest (remember the proclamation of the Sunday of Orthodoxy at the beginning of Great Lent). It is before us here and now\*;<sup>1</sup> the sure and steadfast anchor of our souls and of our ladders.

Amen.

— Deacon Pawel Mucha

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<sup>1</sup> The veil/curtain behind the Royal Doors of the iconostasis and the inner shrine of the altar.