

*Welcome to St. Olympia Orthodox Church,  
a young and, God willing, growing community of worshipers.*

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*Please join us for prayer and fellowship.*

**Upcoming Services:**  
**Saturday, April 6,13**  
**Great Vespers: 5pm**

**Sunday, April 7,14**  
**Divine Liturgy: 10am**  
**Coffee and fellowship will  
follow the service**

*The above services are at  
St. Olympia Church  
34 North Main Street  
Norwood, NY, 13668*

*Mailing Address  
St.Olympia Orthodox  
Church PO Box 122  
Canton, NY13617*

## **The Fourth Sunday of Great Lent: Saint John of the Ladder April 14**



*Dweller of the desert and angel in the body, you were shown to be a wonderworker, our God-bearing Father John. You received heavenly gifts through fasting, vigil, and prayer: healing the sick and the souls of those drawn to you by faith. Glory to Him who gave you strength. Glory to Him who granted you a crown. Glory to Him Who, through you, grants healing to all.*

**Troparion**

*The Lord truly set you on the height of abstinence, O our instructor and Father John, as an unerring star, guiding the ends of the earth by your light.*

**Kontakion**

## **The Fourth Sunday of Lent Saint John Climacus, (of the Ladder)**

The Fourth Sunday of Lent is dedicated to Saint John Klimakos, the author of The Ladder of Divine Ascent. In this book the Igoumen of Saint Katherine's Monastery on Mount Sinai bears witness to the great effort which is required for entry into God's Kingdom (Matthew 10:12). The spiritual struggle of the Christian life is difficult since it is "not against flesh and blood, but against ... the rulers of the present darkness ... the hosts of wickedness in heavenly places ..." (Ephesians 6:12). Saint John encourages the faithful in their efforts for, as the Lord has said, only "he who endures to the end will be saved" (Matthew 24:13).

Saint John was born around the year 525, the son of devout and wealthy parents. He received a very good education, but at the age of sixteen, he forsook the world and went to Mount Sinai, subjecting himself to the spiritual guidance of Elder Martyrios. When he was nineteen years of age [this was his monastic age; he was, in fact, thirty-five years old], his Elder reposed. Then Saint John entered the arena of hesychasm, visiting the monastic communities of Skētē and Tabénnisē in Egypt. For another forty years, he lived in a cell at Thora in the Sinai Desert, which was a two hour (5 mile) walk from the Monastery of Saint Katherine.

Aflame with indescribable longing for God, he ate everything that was permitted by the monastic Rule, but only in very small quantities, and not unto satiety. By so doing, he overcame the vice of pride; and by eating just a little food, he humbled the stomach, which always wants more. He raised his body from death and paralysis by the remembrance of death, and he overcame the tyranny of anger with the sword of obedience.

Who can describe the fountain of his tears, which is now to be seen in very few individuals? He slept only as much as was necessary to prevent his mind from being distracted. Before going to sleep he prayed a great deal, and he also wrote books. This was how he subdued despondency. His entire life was spent in unceasing prayer, and incomparable love for God.

After writing The Ladder at the request of Igoumen John of Raithu Monastery, and leading a God-pleasing life, Saint John fell asleep in the Lord when he was about seventy-five years old (ca. 603). He is also commemorated on March 31.

### **Three Steps to Everlasting Life By Fr. Vladimir Berzonsky April 14, 2002**

*"For as Jonah was for three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matthew 12:40)*

On the fourth Sunday of the Great Lent the Holy Church honors the memory of St. John called Climacus, which means "The Ladder." He's called that because of the astounding book he wrote dedicated to helping those serious about salvation to progress on the way to God's Kingdom. He lived not far from Mt. Sinai, where Moses received the Ten Commandments. He divided his book into thirty chapters in honor of the hidden years that our Lord Jesus Christ spent on earth. Each chapter is a stage, or rung, on the ascent to Heaven. He wrote it for monks, yet thousands of lay persons have been helped and edified by applying its lessons to themselves. The themes include spiritual and physical seclusion, or at least separating ourselves from the society around us; obedience to God's will; self-discipline; discernment, meaning evaluating everything in life and perceiving what will do us good and what is harmful; purity of life; and prayer.

In chapter 26:158 the saint refers to the story of Jonah who fell overboard from a ship and was swallowed by a great fish, usually thought to be a whale. When Jesus was being asked for some miracle or sign of His authority, our Lord told the Pharisees who asked for a sign that only the sinful and adulterous need a sign to supplement their faith. The only sign that God will provide will be for He Himself to die, to be buried and to be resurrected after three days to life everlasting. St. John explained that it would be enough for a human being to spend three hours, or three periods of time in overcoming three different impediments to salvation. They are:

A. Ambition, or the love of glory. How sad to see this sin dominate many, even among the leaders of the Church, those ordained to set an example of humility and selflessness, who strut about seeking praise and honors. *"They love the place of honor at banquets...they love to be greeted in the marketplaces and to have men call them 'Rabbi.' But you are not to be called 'Rabbi,' for you have only one Master and you are all brothers" (Matthew 23:7). "For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted" (Matthew 23:12).*

B. Sensuality, or the love of pleasure. We Americans take for granted that we have the right to enjoy life in all ways and varieties. It's not just envy, but loathing that many people in the world have for us. Our image is that of shameless

hedonists. Many people of culture and taste see us as self-indulgent pleasure-seekers bent on wallowing in all forms of opulence and extravagance. Obviously not all Americans are like that. Certainly true Christians may never be among them.

C. Love of money. It pains me to hear of the boasting even from my fellow Orthodox of their wealth, as though that were to their spiritual credit. I realize that our nation is essentially capitalist. Money is an obsession with so many fellow citizens. For a serious Christian this is an impediment to salvation. Jesus felt pity for those who worshipped money, and He said so many times in His preaching: *“I tell you it is easier for a camel to pass through a needle, than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God”* (Matthew 19:24).

This then is the challenge set before us. A struggle for our souls continues to engage us. Do we offer ourselves heart, soul, mind and body to the God who created us and claims us for Himself, or do we surrender to the devil?

### **Venerable Anthusa of Constantinople** **April 12**

The holy princess Anthusa of Constantinople was the daughter of the Iconoclast emperor Constantine Copronymos (reigned 741-775) and his third wife Eudokia. She and her twin brother, the future emperor Leo the Khazar (775-780), were born on January 25, 750.

Constantine had tortured the holy Abbess Anthusa of Mantinea (July 27) because she venerated the holy icons. During a campaign in Paphlagonia, he had her brought before him again, promising her even harsher torments if she did not come around to his way of thinking. She remained steadfast in defending the icons, however. Constantine told her that his wife was having difficulty in her pregnancy, and he asked her to pray for the empress. She agreed to do so, and told him that the children would be born safely, and even spoke about their future life.

Empress Eudokia's daughter was given the name Anthusa, in thanksgiving for the safe delivery of the twins. When Saint Anthusa's prediction was fulfilled, she was allowed to return to her convent, where she died at a ripe old age.

When she grew up, the emperor began to urge his daughter to marry. But from her youth Saint Anthusa yearned for monasticism and refused to consider his suggestions. After the death of her father, she shared her possessions with the poor, and used her wealth to adorn many churches. She became a mother to orphans, and was also a protector of widows. She devoted herself entirely to a life of piety, constantly offering prayers to the Lord and reading the Holy Scriptures. The devout empress Irene (780-802), wife of Leo the Khazar, regarded Saint Anthusa with love and esteem and invited her to be a co-regent. Saint Anthusa, however, did not desire any worldly honors. Since she lived at the palace, she wore clothes befitting her position as an emperor's daughter, but underneath her finery she wore a hair-shirt.

Desiring a life of solitary asceticism, Anthusa entered the monastery of Saint Euthymia, and received the monastic tonsure from Saint Tarasius, the Patriarch of Constantinople (Feb. 25). She founded the Omonia (Concord, or Charity) monastery at Constantinople, which was known for its strict Rule. Saint Anthusa was an example of humility to the other nuns. She did hard work, she cleaned the church, and carried water. She never sat at the table during meals, but served the sisters instead. She made sure that no one left the monastery in need.

The humble and gentle ascetic lived until the age of fifty-two, and died peacefully in 801. Other sources say she reposed in 808 when she was fifty-seven.



**Venerable Anthusa  
of Constantinople**



**Venerable Athanasia  
Abbess of Aegina**

## **Venerable Athanasia, Abbess of Aegina** **April 12**

Saint Athanasia was abbess of a monastery on the island of Aegina in the ninth century. She was born into a pious Christian family, and her parents were named Nicetas and Marina. Already at seven years of age the girl studied the *Psalter*, which she read constantly and with feeling. Once, while working at the weaver's loom, Saint Athanasia saw a shining star coming down to her from above, which touched her bosom and lightened all her being, and then disappeared. From that moment, the maiden was illumined in soul and she firmly resolved to enter a monastery.

When Saint Athanasia reached the age of sixteen, her parents entreated her to marry. She consented, but after sixteen days her husband was killed by barbarians who invaded Aegina.

Saint Athanasia decided to take advantage of her unexpected freedom and dedicate herself to God. Then the emperor Michael the Stammerer (820-829) issued a decree ordering all young widows and virgins to take husbands. Therefore, Saint Athanasia was forced to marry again. It is said that her second husband was a Moslem, whom she converted by her holy way of life.

She led a pious and virtuous life. She did housework, helped the sick and those in need, and took in wanderers. On Sundays and feasts she invited family and acquaintances to her home and read the Holy Scriptures to them. Under her influence, her husband entered a monastery, and progressed in virtue and holiness. Soon, he departed to the Lord.

The saint gave away her property, became a nun, and founded a women's monastery in a remote place. After four years, the sisters asked Saint Athanasia to become the abbess of the small community. In spite of her position, the saint surpassed all the others in meekness and humility. She asked about the infractions of the sisters with love, not anger.

Although Saint Athanasia had the title of abbess, she regarded herself as the least of the sisters and always had in mind the commandment of the Savior: "Whoever would be first among you, let him be your servant" (Mt. 20:27). The saint never permitted the sisters to wait on her, not even to pour water over her hands.

Saint Athanasia wore a hair-shirt, and over it clothes of coarse sheep's wool. She slept very little, and prayed most of the night. By day she labored together with the sisters. On most days she ate only bread and water, and that in moderation, and only after the ninth hour of the day. She never ate cheese or fish except on Pascha and on the twelve Great Feasts. During Lent, she did not eat bread or drink water. She would only eat some vegetables every other day.

On the island of Aegina lived a certain monk named Matthew, who had been an igumen. Each night he read the whole Psalter, and also read prayers. The saint slept sitting up and only for a short time. He could not refrain from tears when the Psalms were chanted, while reading prayers, or offering the Bloodless Sacrifice.

He wore only a coarse hair-shirt, and through his temperance and struggles his body became completely withered. He had a special love for Saint John the Theologian. Once, during the Divine Liturgy he saw the Apostle standing by the altar table.

The saint healed a paralytic with his mantle; by making the Sign of the Cross he corrected the face of a man distorted by the actions of the devil; he cast out demons and worked many other miracles. Saint Matthew blessed Saint Athanasia to go to a more isolated place with her sisters. She built a monastery on a desolate hill of the island near an ancient church of the Protomartyr Stephen.

Saint Athanasia was granted the gift of healing by God. After she healed a man afflicted with a malady of the eyes, a crowd of people began to flock to her in order to receive healing from their infirmities of soul and body. From the abundant gifts brought to the monastery, she built three churches at the monastery: one dedicated to the Most Holy Theotokos, another to the holy Prophet John the Forerunner, and the third to Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker.

Her increasing celebrity distressed the saint, and she took the two sisters closest to her in spirit (Maria and Eupraxia) and went secretly to Constantinople. There, as a simple nun, she entered one of the women's monasteries, where she lived for seven years.

Again, her holy life attracted attention. The sisters of the Aegina monastery learned where their abbess had gone, and they went to her imploring her to return. Submitting to the will of God, she returned to the monastery she founded. Soon after this she had a vision of two radiant men, giving her a document which said: "Here is your freedom, take it and rejoice."

Saint Athanasia spent the twelve days before her death in unceasing prayer. On the eve of the Dormition of the Most Holy Theotokos she summoned the sisters and said that she was able to read the Psalter only as far as the twelfth Psalm. The saint asked them to continue reading the Psalter for her in church. The sisters went to church and there fulfilled her request, and then they came to bid the saint farewell. She blessed them and asked them to celebrate the Feast of the Dormition of the Most Holy Theotokos solemnly and joyfully, and also to provide a meal for the poor and destitute. Then, after Divine Liturgy, they could bury her body. With these words, Saint Athanasia fell asleep in the Lord on August 14, 860.

The saint predicted that she would receive glory in Heaven forty days after her death. On the fortieth day, two devout sisters were granted to see Saint Athanasia and two radiant men standing before the royal doors of the iconostasis. They



clothed her with a purple robe embroidered with gold, pearls, and precious stones. They set a crown on her head, handed her a gleaming staff, and led her through the royal doors into the altar.

Before her death, Saint Athanasia ordered the nuns to feed the poor for forty days. The sisters, however, did not fulfill her request and set out the memorial meal for only ten days. The saint appeared to some of the sisters and said, "Let everyone know that alms given for a departed soul for forty days after death, and food offered to the hungry, appease God. If the departed souls are sinful, they receive forgiveness from God. If they are righteous, then the good deeds bring God's mercy on the souls of those who perform them."

Then she thrust her staff into the ground and became invisible. The staff left behind sprouted the next day and became a live tree. A year after the saint's death, they led a possessed woman to the grave. When they dug up the ground, they then noticed a fragrance and removed the coffin. After she touched it, the demoniac was immediately healed. Then they opened the lid of the coffin and saw the saint's incorrupt body, from which myrrh flowed.

Saint Athanasia looked like she was asleep. Her face shone brightly, her body was preserved incorrupt and soft, and even her hands were supple. The priests decided to place her body in church. When they transferred the body into a new coffin, the nuns removed the hair-shirt from her holy relics and wanted to dress her in silken clothes, but the hands of Saint Athanasia were so firmly clasped to her bosom, that the nuns could not dress her in the silken garb. Even in death the saint displayed her love for poverty. Then one of the sisters knelt down and began to pray to the saint, saying, "O lady, hear us as you heard us when you lived with us. Now consent to be dressed in these clothes, our humble gift to you." Saint Athanasia, as though alive, lifted and extended her hands into the clothing.

The holy relics of Saint Athanasia were put into a crypt and became a source of healings.

The Life of Saint Athanasia is found in Vatican codex 1660, which dates from the year 916.

Saint Athanasia of Aegina is commemorated on April 12 (Slavic usage), and on April 18 (Greek usage).



**Removing the Rug!**



**Pew Placement to begin**



**Rejuvenating the floor!**

## PARISH WISH LIST

*A wish list to help our parish grow!*

### RECURRING needs:

**Paper Plates** (small and large), **Paper Bowls**, **Hot Cups**  
**Napkins**  
**Plastic Utensils**, especially **Forks**  
**Paper Towels**  
**Toilet Paper**

*Holy Mother Olympia, pray to God for us!*

## UPCOMING DIOCESAN & PARISH EVENTS

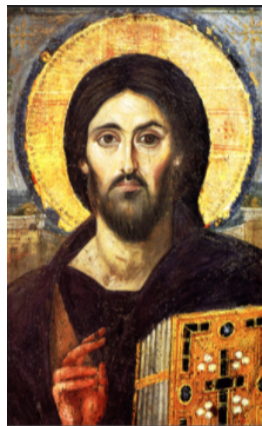
### **Presanctified Liturgy with Archbishop Michael**

Wednesday, April 17, 6 PM

### **Presbyter's Council Meeting**

Thursday, April 25, 11 AM

Zoom



### **St. Paisios the New, on prayer:**

"The soul must be constantly ready and alert and always in contact with the spiritual headquarters--that is, with God. Only then will it feel secure, full of hope and joy.

"When I was in the army, during the war, I was a radio operator. I noticed that we felt secure only when we communicated with the Army Division on an hourly basis. When our communication was limited to every two hours, we felt a little bit insecure; and when we could only be in touch with them twice a day, we felt uncomfortable, lonely and lost.

"The same thing applies to our prayer. The more we pray, the more secure we feel--on a spiritual basis, of course."

*Elder Paisios of the Holy Mountain, p. 79*

*This is how you pray continually - not by offering prayers in words, but by joining yourself to God through your whole way of life, so that your life becomes on continuous and uninterrupted prayer.*

**Saint Basil the Great**