

FAMILY GOSPEL LESSON

Mark 9:17-31

On this Sunday of Great Lent, we remember St. John Climacus or St. John of the Ladder. He was the abbot of the Monastery of St. Katherine on Mt. Sinai during the seventh century. St. John wrote *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, which is a guide to ascetic living (living a spiritually disciplined life). This book is read in every Orthodox monastery during Great Lent. In this book, St. John writes about 30 rungs of the ladder we climb in our ascent to heaven. Each rung represents a different Christian virtue (obedience, repentance, love, humility, etc.).

In today's Gospel passage, we are shown that through faith in Christ all things are possible. We too need to cry as the father in today's Gospel, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief." Furthermore, this passage reveals that faith to conquer our demons comes only from prayer and fasting. At this point, Christ begins to reveal to the disciples about His upcoming suffering.



For Consideration

- What did the father need to do for his son to be healed?
- Why could the disciple not heal the boy? Do we believe that with the Lord all things are possible?
- What does this Gospel passage mean for our lives?

TO DO TOGETHER

Jacob's Ladder

Read the Old Testament story about Jacob's Ladder, which can be found in Genesis 28:10-17. The ladder represents the Theotokos. Talk about how Jesus came down the ladder in order to show us how to ascend it to heaven. Talk about things that help us climb the ladder to heaven and things that make us slide down. For young children, the game Chutes and Ladders can be helpful in illustrating this point.

Icon of the Ladder of Divine Ascent

This is a very vivid icon. It shows people ascending toward heaven with angels helping them. It also shows demons pulling people off the ladder, causing them to fall into the pits of hell. It can be a great discussion starter, especially for teenagers. Consider making copies of this icon for each family member as a reminder of their spiritual ascent and the demons that will be trying to prevent it. This icon can be viewed at: <https://bit.ly/1mkY4fw>.

Lord I Believe; Help My Unbelief

Challenge your family to use the plea of the father in today's Gospel passage as a prayer throughout their day. Remind your children that we should constantly be calling on God to help us.

CLOSING PRAYER

Glory to the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit both now and forever. Amen

O holy father, hearing the voice of the Gospel of the Lord, you have forsaken the world, counting its riches and its glory as nothing; and so you have cried out to all: "Love God, and you shall find eternal graces. Set nothing higher than His love, that when He comes in glory you may find rest with all the saints." At our prayers, O Christ, guard and save our souls.

-From the Vespers of St. John of the Ladder

FINAL THOUGHT

Ascend, my brothers, ascend eagerly. Let your hearts' resolve be to climb. Listen to the voice of the one who says: "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of our God" (Isaiah 2:3), Who makes our feet to be like the feet of the deer, "Who sets us on the high places that we may be triumphant on His road" (Habakkuk 3:19). Run, I beg you, run with him who said, "Let us hurry until we arrive at the unity of faith and of the knowledge of God, at mature manhood, at the measure of the stature of Christ's fullness" (Ephesians 4:13).

-from "The Ladder of Divine Ascent" by St. John Climacus

