

## Next Services

**Wednesday  
March 21st**

**Visit of  
Archbishop Michael**

**Presanctified  
Liturgy at 6:30 pm  
followed by Lenten  
meal and fellowship**

**Saturday  
March 24th**

**Great Vespers at  
5:00 pm**

**Sunday  
March 25th**

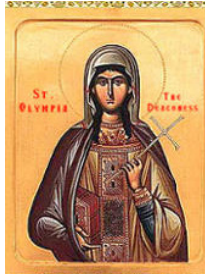
**Feast of the  
Annunciation/  
St. Mary of Egypt**

**Divine Liturgy  
at 10:00 am**

**All services are at**

**St. Olympia Chapel  
123 Main Street  
Potsdam, NY**

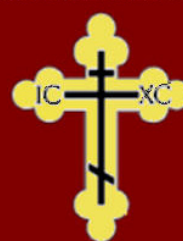
**All welcome!**



**ST OLYMPIA ORTHODOX CHURCH**

POTSDAM, NEW YORK 13676

ORTHODOX CHURCH OF AMERICA  
DIOCESE OF NY AND NJ



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

**Join us for prayer and fellowship.**

**Divine Liturgies are held every Sunday  
and are preceded by Great Vespers every Saturday evening.**

**Services are primarily in English.**

## Fourth Sunday of Great Lent - St. John Climacus

**Gospel: Mark 9:17-31**

*Note: the following article has been written by an anonymous contributor.  
It is included here by permission.*

In today's Gospel, Mark 9:17-31, we see a contrast which, for Peter, James, and John who experienced it, must've been dizzying. In a very few minutes they passed from the Mount of Transfiguration to a miserable example of the devil's work; they went from a vision of the Lord's glory to the sight of a demonic possession. They had to leave the foretaste they experienced of being in the blindingly beautiful presence of God and the voice of the Father testifying to the divine glory of the Son, and return again to what we so often call "real life:" to the world in its pain, weakness, and misery; to a boy in agony of body to a father in deep distress; and to the little band of disciples feeling feeble and defeated. The contrast was huge.

Of course, it was nothing compared to the contrast and change Jesus freely chose to experience for our sake. Imagine trying to squeeze yourself into the body and life of an ant. Well, Philippians 2:6-8 says that the pre-eternal Word did just about that: "Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross." But what the chosen three disciples experienced was a picture of what every true follower of Jesus Christ will experience. For us, just as for Jesus and those first disciples, being confronted with conflict, weakness and sorrow, and being called to serve those needs, will always be the rule, while for us, just as for those three, visions of glory and foretastes of heaven will always be the exception.

And leads us to four specific lessons we believers need to learn from this Scripture, the first being **the lesson of humility**. Imagine for a moment the sight which meets the eyes of Jesus and the three disciples when they came down from Mount Tabor: absolute chaos. People were arguing, yelling at each other, shaking their fingers under each other's noses; it was confusion everywhere. The nine apostles Jesus had left to take care of things while He was gone were surrounded by a group of hostile scribes, mocking them for being unable to do what Jesus had empowered them to do: heal one little boy who'd been brought to them possessed with a demon. Matthew 10:8 tells us that this incident took place **after** Jesus had sent out the Twelve, giving them authority to "heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons." Yet the very same disciples who, a short time before, had worked miracles, now appeared powerless and useless. Why? Because they needed to learn that the power to heal and cleanse and raise and set free was not theirs but His, and that as He teaches in John 15:5 "without Me you can do nothing." And yes, they did need to learn that hard lesson by being embarrassed by a very public failure; and so do we, most of the time. There's a perversity in our fallen human nature which refuses to value highly what we receive freely. But the lessons we learn the hard way, especially if we learn them by an experience that stings, stick with us a lot better than truths we just hear with our ears.

And no, we don't like learning bitter lessons. And one of the bitterest to our pride is the truth that we can **never** "be like God, knowing good and evil;" that we can **never** be truly and fully self-sufficient; and that we can do **nothing** of any lasting value and importance without Christ. But that lesson, once **really** learned, not only sticks with us but opens the door for effective Christian service. If we look back into the history of Christ's people in every age, we'll notice that the very men and women who did great things in the cause of Christ and the Gospel were the same people who at another point in their lives failed miserably because they were relying on self, not on Christ. In 1 Corinthians 4:7, St. Paul takes a poke at people puffed up with the pride of supposed self-sufficiency when he asks, "What do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?" God's grace, God's love, forgiveness of our sins, our salvation, faith itself, physical life and strength and gifts and talents and opportunities, education, loving relationships: what of any value whatsoever do you and I have that we did not first receive as a gift of God's providence and of His grace? And mark you this: a heart ungrateful for what we have received and a refusal to rely solely upon the grace and presence of Christ is an invitation to God to leave us on our own for a while, so we learn the hard way that while with Him we can do all things, without Him we can do nothing. As it says in 1 Peter 5:5, "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble."

Now secondly, let's learn **the lesson of how early in life we come under Satan's attacks**. I don't know about you, but it freaks me out a bit to read what the evil spirit did to this poor kid: "And whenever it seizes him, it throws him down; he foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth, and becomes rigid." And what's worse is how long it had been happening: "From childhood." And if that doesn't teach us to do good to and spiritually nurture children from the get-go, nothing will. It frosts my cupcakes to hear parents parroting the nonsense about letting their children "decide for themselves when they're older" about God and faith and living out that faith in Christian community. Do they let their children decide for themselves whether or not they'll brush their teeth, wash behind their ears, eat their vegetables, learn to tie their own shoes, go to school, do chores? And what in the world makes adults think that Satan and his gang have a "hands-off" policy when it comes to kids? It's not only godly parents but Satan too who tries to implement Proverbs 22:6, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." The difference is the values,

priorities, attitudes and behaviours Satan wants to train the child in. How soon in life a child becomes responsible and accountable before God is difficult to determine; it may well be far sooner than we generally suppose. But clearly, it's never too soon to pray for the salvation of one's children; never too soon to speak to them as moral beings; never too soon to tell them of God, and of Christ, and of right, and of wrong; never too soon to teach them to pray, simply but honestly. Right from the womb, the devil's wasting no time in trying to influence the minds even of infants; he starts in on them even "from childhood." So it's the responsibility, not just of the parents, but of the whole parish community, to work hard to counteract him by setting a good and godly and prayerful example for the young ones, because as a very wise man once said, "If young hearts can be filled by Satan, they can also be filled with the Spirit of God."

Thirdly, let's learn **the lesson of how faith and unbelief can be mixed together in the same heart**. In the anguished words of the boy's father, we find an all-too-clear picture of many a Christian's heart: "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief." We might not want to admit it, but few believers enjoy total freedom from that painful mixture of trust and doubt, faith and fear. In that regard, most of us are a walking civil war. Yes, through Holy Baptism we've become children of the true and living God; but we're not perfect and never will be as long as we're in this body. Our knowledge, our love, our humility, our trust, our faith: they're all in one way or another defective, and mixed with corruption. So we believe, yet have still within us a remainder of unbelief.

What, then, shall we do with our faith? Use it! Weak and wobbly as it may be, we must use it. We dare not wait till we feel our trust in God is great, perfect, and powerful, because we'll be waiting forever. Rather, like this father, we have to use whatever trust we have, praying that someday our faith will be stronger. "Lord," he said, "I believe;" and it was enough. What counts is not the size of my faith but the power and love of the God in Whom I put my faith. That's why in Matthew 17:20 Jesus assures us that "if you have faith as a mustard seed," it's enough to move a mountain. As for our unbelief? Resist it, pray against it and take it straight to Christ, the same way we take all our other sins and weaknesses to Him, and cry to Him for deliverance: "Help my unbelief."

And we can do that with confidence when, lastly, we learn **the lesson that Christ has complete dominion over the Enemy**. The spirit afflicting the boy may have been too strong for the disciples; but Jesus cast it out with but a word. He spoke, and Satan immediately is forced to obey: "I command you, come out of him and enter him no more." Satan tries to trick us into thinking that he's more powerful than he really is; he wants us to think that he's God's opposite number, that he's as powerful as God. He's not; as 1 John 4:4 makes clear, "He [the Holy Spirit] Who is in you is greater than he who is in the world." Yes, Satan is strong, busy, active, and malicious beyond description. But, as the Apostle asks in Romans 8:31, "If God is for us [and He is], who can be against us [and ultimately win]?" And the answer is "Nothing and nobody." Jesus is "able to save to the uttermost all that come to God through Him." And therefore, the Apostle concludes in Romans 8:38-39, "Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."



We welcomed Fr. Peter and Matushka Mary Irfan, shown above after Great Vespers on Saturday evening. They plan to return to Potsdam to be with us for Holy Week and Pascha.



Congratulations to Emma Trulock who had a featured solo in the St. Lawrence Figure Skating Club's 65th Annual Ice Show. Emma is a Senior at H.C. Williams Senior High School in Canton.

### Lenten Prayer of St. Ephraim the Syrian:

O Lord and Master of my life, take from me the spirit of sloth, vain-heartedness, lust of power and idle talk.

[prostration]

Instead, give me the spirit of chastity, humility, patience and love.

[prostration]

Yea, Lord and King, grant me to see my own errors and not to judge my brother, for Thou art blessed unto ages of ages. Amen.

[prostration]