



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

*Our priest is Fr. Peter Irfan, Acting Rector.  
 You may reach him at 716-342-8520 (cell) or at fatherpeter777@yahoo.com.*

*Please join us for prayer and fellowship.*

**Upcoming Services:**  
**Sunday, March 29**  
**Divine Liturgy: 10am**

**No coffee hour  
 following the service**

*The above services are  
 at St. Olympia Chapel  
 123 Main Street  
 Potsdam, NY, 13676*

**Fourth Sunday of Great Lent: St John of the Ladder**



The Ladder of Divine Ascent for Us Today  
 by Fr. Steven Kostoff

According to Metropolitan Kallistos Ware, “With the exception of the Bible and the service books, there is no work in Eastern Christendom that has been studied, copied and translated more than *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* by Saint John Climacus.” It is a work, then, that has nurtured endless generations of Christian believers seeking to deepen their relationship with God in and through Christ.  
*(on the OCA website)*

**The Annunciation of our Most Holy Lady, the Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary**

Today the good tidings of joy are proclaimed, today is the festival of the Virgin; things below are joined together with things on high. Adam is made new; Eve is freed from the primal grief; and by the deification of the human nature that the Lord assumed, the tabernacle of our substance has become a temple of God.

Oh, what a mystery! The manner of His emptying cannot be known; the manner of His conception is beyond speech. An Angel ministers at the miracle; a virginal womb receives the Son; the Holy Spirit is sent down; the Father on high is well pleased, and according to their common counsel, a reconciliation is brought to pass in which and through which we are saved. For this reason let us unite our song with Gabriel’s, crying aloud to the Virgin:

“Rejoice, O Lady full of grace, the Lord is with you!  
 From you is our salvation, Christ our God,  
 Who, by assuming our nature, has led us back to Himself.  
 Humbly pray to Him for the salvation of our souls!”

*from the Aposticha of Great Compline for the Annunciation*

## Sermon on the Cross by +Metropolitan Anthony Bloom

*In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.*

We have been keeping these days the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross. There is a passage in the Gospel in which the Lord says to us, “No one has greater love than he who gives his life for his neighbor.” And these words resolve the antinomy between the horror of the Cross and the glory of it, between death and the resurrection. There is nothing more glorious, more awe-inspiring and wonderful than to love and to be loved. And to be loved of God with all the life, with all the death of the Only-Begotten Son, and to love one another (as well) at the cost of all our life and, if necessary, of our death, (this) is both tragedy but mainly victory. In the Canon (Anaphora) of the Liturgy we say:

“Holy art Thou and all-holy, Thou and Thine only-begotten Son and Thy Holy Spirit! Holy art Thou and all-holy, and magnificent is Thy glory! Who hast so loved Thy world as to give Thine only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life; who when He had come and had fulfilled all the dispensation for us, in the night in which He was given up — or rather, gave Himself up for the life of the world — took bread in His holy, pure, and blameless hands; and when He had given thanks and blessed it, and hallowed it, and broken it, He gave it to His holy disciples and apostles.....”

This is the divine love. At times one can give one’s own life more easily than offer unto death the person whom one loves beyond all; and this is what God our Father has done. But it does not make less the sacrifice of Him who is sent unto death for the salvation of one person or of the whole world.

And so when we think of the Cross we must think of this strangely inter-twined mystery of tragedy and of victory. The Cross, an instrument of infamous death, of punitive death to which criminals were doomed — because Christ’s death was that of an innocent, and because this death was a gift of self in an act of love — becomes victory.

This is why Saint Paul could say, “It is no longer I, it is Christ Who lives in me.” Divine love filled him to the brim, and therefore there was no room for any other thought or feeling, any other approach to anyone apart from love, a love that gave itself unreservedly: love sacrificial, love crucified, but love exulting in the joy of life.

And when we are told in today’s Gospel, “Turn away from yourself, take up your Cross, Follow Me” (Mark 8: 34) — we are not called to something dark and frightening; we are told by God: “Open yourself to love! Do not remain a prisoner of your own self-centeredness.” Do not be, in the words of Theophane the Recluse, “like a shaving of wood which is rolled around its own emptiness.” Open yourself up! Look — there is so much to love, there are so many to love! There is such an infinity of ways in which love can be experienced, and fulfilled and accomplished. Open yourself and love (others) — because this is the way of the Cross! Not the way which the two criminals trod together with Christ to be punished for their crimes; but the wonderful way in which giving oneself unreservedly, turning away from self, existing only for the other, loving with all one’s being so that one exists only for the sake of the other — this is the Cross and the glory of the Cross.

So, when we venerate the Cross, when we think of Christ’s crucifixion, when we hear the call of Christ to deny ourselves — and these words simply mean: turn away from yourself! Take up your cross! — we are called to open ourselves to the flood of Divine Love, love that is both death to ourselves and openness to God, as well as to each and to all.

In the beginning of the Gospel of Saint John we are told, “And the Word was with God”; in the Greek it says “Godwards.” The Word, the Son, had no other love, no other thought, no other movement but towards the Beloved One, giving Himself to Him Who gave Himself perfectly to Him.

Let us learn the glory of crucified Love, of this sacrificial Love which is, in the words of the Old Testament, “stronger than death, stronger than hell,” stronger than all things because it is Divine Life conquering us and poured through us onto all those who need to be loved in order to come to Life, to believe in Love, and themselves to become children of Love, children of Light, to inherit Life eternal. Amen.