

# STS. PETER & PAUL ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN CHURCH



GLORY BE TO  
JESUS CHRIST!  
GLORY BE  
FOREVER!

SLAVA ISUSU  
CHRISTU!  
SLAVA NA VIKI!



## SUNDAY OF ST. JOHN CLIMACUS

NEW CALENDAR: **MARCH 26, 2017**  
OLD CALENDAR: **MARCH 13, 2017**

- ❖ We welcome all of our guests who are with us! Please come and worship with us often.
- ❖ Nut Roll pre-orders are being taken by Elizabeth Lion #973.541.0008. Walnut, Poppy Seed, and Prune are \$13 per roll. Pickup date is Saturday April 8 10am-1pm.
- ❖ Camp Nazareth Registration is now open. Register your kids to go today!
- ❖ There is a sign up in the back of the church for homemade chocolate lambs for pascha. This is a deanery fundraiser to help with the camp bus. Sign up today!
- ❖ There is a sign-up in the back of the church for Pascha breads from Bayonne. Sign-up today. Barbara F. will collect the money next week. There are big and small Paschas \$10 and \$8 respectively. Also Apricot Rolls \$13 and Kolacki \$5/doz.
- ❖ There is a Wine Tasting at Holy Trinity in Randolph on Bright Friday, April 21. If you are interested in going see the details on the flyer downstairs.
- ❖ The cleaning team schedule is in the office in the bak of the church.

### Epistle Reading Schedule

4/2 Zach Fitzgerald  
4/9 Alexa Fitzgerald  
4/16 Lance Michealsen

### Sunday Social Hour

4/2 Benyam & Roman  
4/9 Helen Angle  
4/16 Rectory for Pascha

“Control desire and you will dominate anger; for desire gives rise to anger.”

— St. Thallasios the Libyan

### Sunday School Schedule:

4/9 : Toddler w/ Christyn,  
K-2 w/ Linda,  
3-5 w/ Mary Beth  
Teens w/ Pani Amy  
4/2 : Toddler w/ Leigh,  
K-2 & 3-5 w/ Pani Amy  
Teens w/ Lance

- ❖ The 2017 Diocesan Altarboy Retreat will take place from June 25-28, 2017. The Young Women's Encounter will take place the same days.
- ❖ **The next nut roll baking session will be this Tuesday March 28 at 9:30am. Please come and help out our fundraising efforts!**
- ❖ The ACRY Youth are collecting change over the Lenten Fast to donate towards St. John the Compassionate Mission. This is a great way to give alms, which we are called to do during the fast.
- ❖ The Lenten Mission in South River on March 26th has been rescheduled on Sunday, April 2nd at 4pm.
- ❖ There is a panichida today for Corrine Mary offered by her daughter Elizabeth Lion
- ❖ The Church cleanup for Pascha will be on Lazarus Saturday after the Liturgy. Come and help prepare the church for the Resurrection!

February:	
Income	\$
Disbursements	\$

American Carpatho-  
Russian Diocese of USA  
Ecumenical Patriarchate of  
Constantinople

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## WEEKLY SERVICE SCHEDULE

- ❖ Sunday, March 26, St. John Climacus: Matins 8:15am; Divine Liturgy @ 9:30am
- ❖ Monday, March 27, Akathist to St. Benedict of Nursia @ 9 am
- ❖ Tuesday, March 28, Lenten Matins @ 8 am
- ❖ Wednesday, March 29, Presanctified Liturgy @ 7 pm
- ❖ Thursday, March 30, Canon of St. Andrew @ 7 pm
- ❖ Friday, March 31, Presanctified Liturgy @ Holy Ghost in Manville @ 7pm
- ❖ Saturday, April 1, ACRY Lenten Retreat all day
- ❖ Saturday, April 1, Akathist to Theotokos in Yonkers @ 2pm
- ❖ Sunday, April 2, St. Mary of Egypt: Matins @ 8:15am; Divine Liturgy @ 9:30am

Please Note: If you need to speak with a priest during the week please call Fr. William at # 862.432.9174. Rectory # 973.627.1462. If Fr. William is unavailable and it is an emergency please call Fr. John Theodosion his number is 973.584.0388.

### Prayer List:

“Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.” — James 5:16 NKJV

### For those who need prayers:

Desiree Stanchina, Peter Lyasko, Esther Horchor, Ann Willis, Marilyn/Tony George, Margot, Adam, Debbie, Rosalie Nemerovich, Michael Carmona, Klava Trofimova, Inna Kudryavtseva, Joan King, Eleni Matangos, Evangelia Portelos, Jeannette Webb, Elizabeth T., Mary Elizabeth, George Matangos, Gregory Griff, Lillian, Sandi Mahtook, Sandi Reisbeck, Anna Hollis, Catherine Bowan, William O’Keefe, Ann Smith, Sonia Geiger, Tatyana and Zoe Ellis, Dolores Falk, Joann Talmadge, Estella Vreeland, Barbara Kmech, Roy Michealsen, Florine Nandrajog

## Stewardship around the Parish

- Paint trim on Shed
- Add a water spigot to the far side of hall
- Repaint Narthex
- Paint trim in-between altar wall and ceiling red in altar boy and priest sacristy
- Build bookshelves in priest sacristy
- repair/touch-up tomb

## READINGS AND SAINTS FOR THE COMING WEEK:

**Sun:** St. John Climacus; Hebrews 6:13-20; Mark 9:17-31

**Mon:** Venerable Benedict of Nursia; Isaiah 37:33-38:6; Genesis 13:12-18; Proverbs 14:27-15:4

**Tues:** Martyr Agapius; Isaiah 40:18-31; Genesis 15:1-15; Proverbs 15:7-19

**Wed:** Martyr Sabinas of Egypt; Isaiah 41:4-14; Genesis 17:1-9; Proverbs 15:20-16:9

**Thurs:** Venerable Alexis, Man of God; Isaiah 42:5-16; Genesis 18:20-33; Proverbs 16:17-17:17

**Fri:** St. Cyril of Jerusalem; Isaiah 45:11-17; Genesis 22:1-18; Proverbs 17:17-18:5

**Sat:** Sts. Chrysanthus and Daria; Hebrews 9:24-28; Mark 8:27-31

## **SALVATION HISTORY: PRIESTHOOD; BY FR THOMAS HOPKO**

It was prophesied in the Old Testament that the time would come when the glory of the Lord would fill all creation. It was foretold that in the time of the Messianic King, God would dwell in men as in His holy temple. The ritual sacrifices of the temple would cease, as the perfect and everlasting covenant of mercy and peace would be accomplished between God and man (see Isa 55.3, 61.1–11, 66.18–23, Jer 31.31–34, Ezek 34.22–31, 37.24–28).

When Jesus came, the new and everlasting covenant between God and man was established forever. The temple of God became the body of Christ, which was the assembly of His people filled with the Holy Spirit of God. Indeed, one of the accusations against Jesus at the time of His crucifixion was that He said that He would destroy the temple in Jerusalem.

*The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple He found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers at their business. And making a whip of cords, He drove them all, with the sheep and oxen, out of the temple; and He poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. And He told those who sold the pigeons, "Take these things away; you shall not make my Father's house a house of trade." His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for thy house will consume me." The Jews then said to Him, "What sign have you to show us for doing this?" Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews then said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?" But He spoke of the temple of His body. When therefore He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken (Jn 2.13–22).*

*Now the chief priests and the whole council sought false testimony against Jesus that they might put Him to death, but they found none, though many false witnesses came forward. At last two came forward and said, "This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days.'" And the high priest stood up and said, "Have you no answer to make? What is it that these men testify against you?" But Jesus was silent. And the high priest said to Him, "I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God." Jesus said to him, "You have said so. But I tell you, hereafter you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven" (Mt 26.59–64).*

In Christ, the Messiah, human persons become the temple of the Living God. The deacon Stephen, the first Christian martyr, bore witness to this and died for his testimony (see Acts 7.44–59). The apostle Paul also taught this explicitly, as did the apostle Peter.

*But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near in the blood of Christ. For He is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in His flesh the law of commandments and ordinances, that He might create in Himself one new man in place of two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby bringing the hostility to an end. And He came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; for through Him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built into it for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit (Eph 2.13–22).*

*Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If any one destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and that temple you are (1 Cor 3.16–17).*

*Come to Him, to that living stone, rejected by men but in God's sight chosen and precious; and like living stones be yourselves built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in scripture: "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and he who believes in Him will not be put to shame" (1 Pet 2.4–6).*

Jesus Christ is not only the living temple of God—God Himself in human flesh—through whom all men become God's temple in the Holy Spirit; Jesus is also the one great high priest and the one perfect sacrificial

offering, Who assumes and fulfills the entire Levitical priesthood of the Old Testament which was merely a “shadow” of the “reality” to come. Upon the cross, Jesus sacrificed Himself. He rose from the dead and entered the sanctuary in heaven. After this, there is no other priesthood and no other sacrifice well-pleasing to God (see Heb 6–10).

*But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tabernacle (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) He entered once for all into the Holy place, taking not the blood of goats and calves but His own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. For if the sprinkling of defiled persons with the blood of goats and bulls and with the ashes of a heifer sanctifies for the purification of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, purify your conscience from dead works to serve the living God (Heb 9.11–14).*

*For Christ has entered, not into a sanctuary made with hands, a copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. Nor was it to offer Himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the Holy Place yearly with blood not his own; for then He would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, He has appeared once for all at the end of the age to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. And just as it is appointed for men to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin, but to save those who are eagerly waiting for Him (Heb 9.24–28).*

*Consequently, when Christ came into the world, He said, “Sacrifices and offerings thou hast not desired, but a body hast thou prepared for me; in burnt offerings and sin offerings thou hast taken no pleasure. Then I said, ‘lo, I have come to do thy will, O God,’ as it is written of me in the roll of the book.” When He said above, “Thou hast neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings” (these are offered according to the law), then He added, “Lo, I have come to do thy will.” He abolishes the first in order to establish the second. And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. And every priest stands daily at His service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, He sat down at the right hand of God, then to wait until His enemies should be made a stool for His feet. For by a single offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified (Heb 10.5–14).*

In the Church of Christ, there is only one priesthood and one sacrifice. It is the priesthood of Jesus and the sacrifice of the Cross. The entire Church of Christ is a “royal priesthood” (1 Pet 2.4). The ordained clergy of the Church exists to manifest and realize the unique priesthood of Jesus in the community which is the “body of Christ” (1 Cor 12.27).

In the Kingdom of God, Christ, the great High Priest and Lamb will rule. He Who “was dead and is alive again” (Rev 2.8) will govern all creation which will be the dwelling place of God.

*And I saw no temple in the heavenly city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light shall the nations walk; and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it, and its gates shall never be shut by day—and there shall be no night there; they shall bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. But nothing unclean shall enter it, nor any one who practices abomination or falsehood, but only those who are written in the Lamb’s book of life (Rev 21.22–27).*

Thus, the Old Testament temple, the priesthood and the sacrifices are all fulfilled in Christ Who is Himself the Temple and the Priest and the Sacrificed Lamb of the Kingdom of God which exists for His People whom He has made “a kingdom, priests to His God and Father” (Rev 1.16, 6.10).

## **ON STEWARDSHIP AND THE ORTHODOX LIFE: PART 86: DEBT I: EVERYONE’S IN DEBT:**

*“Owe no one anything, except to love one another.” (Romans 13:8 RSV)*

How many have never learned the lesson of keeping expenditures within the limit of their income? So many do not learn to adapt themselves to their circumstances. They borrow and borrow again and again. They become overwhelmed with debt. And the result? So often they become discouraged and disheartened. Sometimes such discouragement leads to “get-rich-quick” schemes like lottery or gambling, all of which cost even more money with the debt circle then widening and widening. Some even resort to illegal or criminal ways to “get rich.”

Here's a few garnered from the internet: Advanced Fee Scams, Inheritance Scam, Lottery Scam, money laundering, money mule, Mystery Shopper, Red Cell, Romance Scam, Secret Shopper and the list goes on and on.

This world makes it even easier to be in debt. Credit card debt is at the top of the list of ways to accumulate debt. Use of a credit card is simply borrowing money at a (usually) outrageous interest rate. One might get an auto loan of a few percentage points; but a credit card "loan" is usually 9% to upwards of 20%. Such "loans" can build up very quickly. Today there are actual companies whose mission is to help people get out of debt – and of course you have to pay them to help you. Now, let's see. You can pay them through installments – or you can put it on your credit card... And here we go again.

Paying off personal debt usually gets to be a priority when it comes to budgeting income. The cause of God is usually not remembered. Paying off that debt is vitally important these days because we are also duped into thinking that our "credit score" is a description of who we are: the better the score, the better the person. And when it comes to spending, despite the debt we still must have our amusements, entertainments and good food. What does God's cause get in the end? Leftovers – that is if there is anything left.

In the thirteenth chapter of his letter to the Romans, St. Paul talks about the relationship a Christian has with government. Government is a tool that God uses to keep order in the world. Thus taxes are imposed to pay the costs of keeping such order. In the 7th verse of that chapter, he writes: Pay all of them their dues, taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due... . But the key comes in the next verse: "***Owe no one anything, except to love one another.***" (to be continued)

## OUR EXAMPLES OF HOLINESS

In the year 313 Saint Constantine the Great issued an edict, from which the Christians were permitted freedom of belief and made equal with pagans under the law. But his co-ruler Licinius was prevailed upon by pagans, and in his part of the empire he decided to eradicate Christianity, which had become considerably widespread there. Licinius prepared his soldiery to fight against Constantine and, fearing mutiny, he decided to rid Christians from his army.

One of the military-commanders of that time in the Armenian city of Sebasteia was Agricolaus, a zealous proponent of paganism. Under his command was a company of forty Cappadocians – brave soldiers – who emerged victorious from many a battle. All of them were Christians. When these soldiers refused to offer sacrifice to the pagan gods, Agricolaus locked them up in prison. The soldiers immersed themselves in diligent prayer, and at one point during the night they heard a voice: "Persevere until the end, then shalt ye be saved".

On the following morning the soldiers were again taken to Agricolaus. This time the pagan tried the method of flattery. He began to praise their valor, their youthfulness and strength; and again he urged them to renounce Christ and thereby win themselves the respect and favor of their emperor. And again hearing their refusal, Agricolaus gave orders to shackle the soldiers. But the eldest of them, Kyrion, said: "The emperor has not given thee the right to put shackles upon us". Agricolaus became embarrassed and gave an order to take the soldiers back to prison without shackles.

Seven days later, the renown judge Licius arrived at Sebasteia and held trial over the soldiers. The saints steadfastly answered: "Take not only our military insignia, but also our lives, since nothing is more precious to us than Christ God". Licius thereupon ordered the holy martyrs to be beaten with stones. But the stones flew past them entirely; and the stone thrown by Licius, hit Agricolaus in the face. The torturers realized that the saints were guarded by some invisible force. In prison, the soldiers spent the night at prayer and again they heard the voice of the Lord comforting them: "Believing in Me, if anyone shalt die he shalt live. Be brave and fear not, since ye shall obtain crowns imperishable".

On the following day also the judge repeated the interrogation in front of the torturer, but the soldiers remained unyielding.

It was winter, and there was a strong frost. They lined up the holy soldiers, led them to a lake located not far from the city, and placed them under guard on the ice all night. In order to break the will of the martyrs, a warm bath-house was set up not far away on the shore. During the first hour of the night, when the cold had become unbearable, one of the soldiers could not hold out and made a dash for the bath-house, but barely had he stepped over the threshold, that he fell down dead. During the third hour of the night the Lord sent consolation to the martyrs: suddenly there was light, the ice melted away, and the water in the lake became warm. All the guards were asleep, except for one who kept watch by the name of Aglaios. Looking at the lake he saw, that over the head of

each martyr there had appeared a radiant crown. Aglaios counted thirty-nine crowns and realized, that the soldier who fled had lost his crown. Aglaios thereupon woke up the other guards, discarded his uniform and said to them: "I too – am a Christian" – and he joined the martyrs. Standing in the water he prayed: "Lord God, I believe in Thee, in Whom these soldiers do believe. To them add me also, and esteem me worthy to suffer with Thy servants".

In the morning the torturers beheld with surprise that the martyrs were alive, and their guard Aglaios was glorifying Christ together with them. They then led the soldiers out of the water and broke their legs. At the time of this horrible execution the mother of the youngest of the soldiers, Meliton, pleaded with her son not to endure and suffer everything all the way to death. They put the bodies of the martyrs on a cart and committed them to fire. Young Meliton was still breathing, and they left him to lay on the ground. His mother then pulled up her son, and on her own shoulders she carried him behind the cart. When Meliton gasped out his last breath, his mother put him on the cart amidst the bodies of his fellow sufferers. The bodies of the saints were committed to fire, and they then threw the charred bones into the water, so that christians would not gather them up.

Three days later the martyrs appeared in a dream to Blessed Peter, bishop of Sebasteia, and commanded him to give their remains over to burial. The bishop together with several clergy gathered up the remains of the glorious martyrs by night and buried them with honor.

## **THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF GREAT LENT: SUNDAY OF ST. JOHN OF CLIMACUS, FROM GOARCH.ORG**

### **Introduction**

On March 30 and on the Fourth Sunday of Holy Lent the Orthodox Church commemorates our Righteous Father John Climacus. He is called Climacus due to his authorship of the great spiritual work *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*. His commemoration is designated by the Church on one of the Sundays of Lent as his life and writings affirm him as a supreme bearer and proponent of Christian asceticism. The ascetic example of this great Saint of the Church inspires us in our Lenten journey.

### **Life of the Saint**

Saint John Climacus was probably born in the second half of the sixth century; but his country and origins are alike unknown because, from the beginning of his renunciation of the world, he took great care to live as a stranger upon earth. "Exile," he wrote, "is a separation from everything, in order that one may hold on totally to God." We only know that, from the age of sixteen, after having received a solid intellectual formation, he renounced all the pleasures of this vain life for love of God and went to Mount Sinai, to the foot of the holy mountain on which God had in former times revealed His glory to Moses, and consecrated himself to the Lord with a burning heart as a sweet-smelling sacrifice.

Setting aside, from the moment of his entry into the stadium, all self-trust and self-satisfaction through unfeigned humility, he submitted body and soul to an elder called Martyrios and set himself, free from all care, to climb that spiritual ladder (klimax) at the top of which God stands, and to "add fire each day to fire, fervor to fervor, zeal to zeal." He saw his shepherd as "the image of Christ" and, convinced that his elder was responsible for him before God, he had only one care: to reject his own will and "with all deliberateness to put aside the capacity to make [his] own judgement," so that no interval passed between Martyrios' commands, even those that appeared unjustified, and the obedience of his disciple. In spite of this perfect submission, Martyrios kept him as a novice for four years and only tonsured him when he was twenty, after having tested his humility. Strategios, one of the monks present at the tonsure predicted that the new monk would one day become one of the great lights of the world. When, later, Martyrios and his disciple paid a visit to John the Savaite, one of the most famous ascetics of the time, the latter, ignoring the elder, poured water over John's feet. After they had left, John the Savaite declared that he did not know the young monk but, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he had washed the feet of the Abbot of Sinai. The same prophecy was confirmed by the great Anastasios the Sinaite (April 21), whom they also went to visit.

In spite of his youth, John showed the maturity of an elder and great discernment. Thus one day, when he had been sent into the world on a mission, and finding himself with lay-people, he had preferred to give in somewhat to vainglory by eating very little, rather than to gluttony; for, of these two evils, it was better to choose that which is less dangerous for beginners in monastic life.

He thus passed nineteen years in the blessed freedom from the care that obedience gives, freed from all conflict by the prayer of his spiritual father and on "a safe voyage, a sleeper's journey," moved towards the harbor of impassibility. On the death of Martyrios, he resolved to continue his ascension in solitude, a type of life suitable for only a small number, who, made strong on the rock of humility, flee from others so as not to be even for a moment deprived of the "sweetness of God." He did not commit himself to this path, one so full of snares, on his own judgment, but on the recommendation of the holy elder George Arsilaite, who instructed him in the way of life proper to hesychasts. As his exercise ground, he chose a solitary place called Tholas, situated five miles from the main monastery, where other hermits lived, each not far from the others. He stayed there for forty years, consumed by an ever-increasing love of God, without thought for his own flesh, free of all contact with men, having unceasing prayer and vigilance as his only occupation, in order to "keep his incorporeal self shut up in the house of the body," as an angel clothed in a body.

He used to eat all that was compatible with his monastic profession, but in very small quantities, thus subduing the tyranny of the flesh while not providing a pretext for vainglory. By living in solitude and retreat, he put to death the mighty flame of greed, which, under the pretext of charity and hospitality, leads negligent monks to gluttony, the door to all passions, and to the love of money, "a worship of idols and the offspring of unbelief." He triumphed over sloth (acedia) that death of the soul which attacks hesychasts in particular and laxity, by the remembrance of death. By meditating on eternal rewards, he undid the chain of sadness; he knew only a single sadness: that "affliction which leads to joy" and makes us run with ardor along the path of repentance, purifying the soul from all its impurities.

What still prevented him from arriving at impassibility (apatheia) He had long since conquered anger by the sword of obedience. He had suffocated vainglory, that three-pointed thorn which forever harasses those who battle for holiness, and which entwines itself with every virtue like a leech, by solitude and even more by silence. As a reward for his labors, which he took care to season constantly with self-accusation, the Lord gave him the queen of virtues, holy and precious humility: "a grace in the soul, and with a name known only to those who have had experience of it, a gift from God."

As his cell was too near the others, he would often withdraw to a distant cave at the foot of the mountain, which he made an antechamber of heaven by his groans and the tears which fell effortlessly from his eyes like an abundant spring, transfiguring his body as with a "wedding garment." By this blessed affliction and these continual tears, he "did not cease to celebrate daily" and kept perpetual prayer in his heart, which had become like an inviolable fortress against the assaults of evil thoughts (logismoi). Sometimes he was ravished in spirit in the midst of the angelic choirs, not knowing if he was in the body or out of it, and then with great simplicity he asked God to teach him about the mysteries of theology. When he came out of the furnace of prayer, he sometimes felt purified as if by fire, and sometimes totally radiant with light.

As for sleep, he allowed himself just the measure necessary to keep his spirit vigilant in prayer and, before sleeping, he prayed at length, or wrote down on tablets the fruit of his meditations on the inspired Scriptures.

He took great care over many years to keep his virtues hidden from human eyes, but, when God judged that the time had come for him to transmit to others the light he had acquired for the edification of the Church, He led a young monk named Moses to John, who, thanks to the intervention of the other ascetics, succeeded in overcoming the resistance of the man of God, and was accepted as his disciple. One afternoon, when Moses had gone a long way away to find earth for their little garden, and had lain down under a large rock to rest, Abba John, in his cell, received the revelation that Moses was in danger, and he immediately seized the weapon of prayer. In the evening, when Moses returned, he told John that in his sleep he had, all of a sudden, heard the voice of his elder calling him, at the very moment when the rock began to break away from its moorings and threatened to crush him.

Saint John's prayer also had the power to heal visible and invisible wounds. It was thus that he delivered a monk from the demon of lust, which had pushed him to the point of despair. On another occasion, he made rain fall. Yet it was above all in the gift of spiritual teaching that God manifested His grace in him. Basing his teaching on his personal experience, he generously instructed all those who came to him on the snares which lay in wait for monks in their battle passions and against the prince of this world. This spiritual teaching, however, attracted the jealousy of some who then spread around calumnies about him, accusing him of being a conceited chatterer. Although his conscience was clear, Abba John did not attempt to justify himself but, seeking rather to take away any pretext from those who sought one, he stopped teaching for a whole year, convinced that it was better to do

some slight harm to his friends rather than to exacerbate the resentment of the wicked. All the inhabitants of the desert were edified at his silence and by this proof of humility, and it was only at the insistence of his repentant calumniators that he agreed to receive visitors again.

Filled with all the virtues of action and contemplation, and having arrived at the summit of the holy ladder through victory over all the passions of the old man, Saint John shone like a star on the Sinai peninsula and was held in awe by all the monks. He thought himself no less of a beginner for all that and, avid to find examples of evangelical conduct, undertook journeys to various Egyptian monasteries. He visited in particular a great coenobitic monastery in the region of Alexandria, a veritable earthly paradise which was governed by a shepherd gifted with infallible discernment. This brotherhood was united by such charity in the Lord, exempt from all familiarity and useless talk, that the monks had scarcely need of the warnings of the superior, for they mutually encouraged each other to a most divine vigilance. Of all their virtues, the most admirable, according to John, was the way they were especially careful never to "injure a brother's conscience" in the slightest. He was also very edified by a visit to a dependency of this monastery, called "The Prison," where monks who had gravely sinned lived in extreme asceticism and gave extraordinary proofs of repentance, straining by their labors to receive God's forgiveness. Far from appearing as hard and intolerable, this prison seemed rather to the Saint to be the model of monastic life: "A soul that has lost its one-time confidence and abandoned its hope of dispassion, that has broken the seal of chastity, that has squandered the treasury of divine graces, that has become a stranger to divine consolation, that has rejected the Lord's command ... and that is wounded and pierced by sorrow as it remembers all this, will not only take on the labors mentioned above with all eagerness, but will even decide devoutly to kill itself with penitential works. It will do so if there is in it only the tiniest spark of love or of fear of the Lord."

When the Saint had sojourned these forty years in the desert, he was charged by God, like a second Moses, to be at the head of this new Israel by becoming abbot of the monastery at the foot of the holy mountain (c. 650). It is recounted that, on the day of his enthronement, six hundred pilgrims were present, and when they were all seated for the meal, the great prophet Moses himself, dressed in a white tunic, could be seen coming and going, giving orders with authority to the cooks, the cellarers, the stewards and the other helpers.

Having penetrated into the mystical darkness of contemplation, this new Moses, having been initiated into the secrets of the spiritual Law, and coming back down the mountain impassible, his face transfigured by divine grace, was able to become for all the shepherd, the physician and the spiritual master. Carrying within him the Book written by God, he did not have need of other books to teach his monks the science of the sciences and the art of arts.

The Abbot of Raitho, who was also named John, having been informed of the wonderful manner of life of the monks of Sinai, wrote to Saint John, asking him to explain briefly but in a methodical way what those who had embraced the angelic life should do in order to be saved. He who did not know how to go against the wishes of another, thus engraved with the stylus of his own experience the Tablets of the Spiritual Law. He presented this treatise as a Ladder of thirty steps, that Jacob, "he who supplanted the passions" contemplated while he was lying on the bed of asceticism (Genesis 28:12). In his Orthodox Summa of the spiritual life, which has remained for centuries the outstanding guide to evangelical living, both for monks and for lay people, Saint John does not institute rules but, by practical recommendations, judiciously-chosen details and short pithy maxims and riddles often full of humor, he initiates the soul into spiritual combat and the discernment of thoughts. His "word" is brief, dense and tapered, and it penetrates like a sword to the depths of the soul, uncompromisingly cutting out all self-satisfaction, and tracing hypocritical asceticism and egoism to their roots. Like that of Saint Gregory (January 25) in the theological domain, this "word" is the Gospel put into practice, and it will lead most surely those who let themselves be impregnated by it through an assiduous reading to the gates of heaven, where Christ awaits us.

At the end of his life, the blessed John designated his brother George, who had embraced the hesychast life from the beginning of his renunciation, as his successor at the head of the monastery. When he was about to die, George said to him: "So, you are abandoning me and leaving! I prayed, however, that you would send me to the Lord first, for without you I cannot shepherd this brotherhood." But Saint John reassured him, and said: "Do not grieve and do not be afraid. If I find grace before God, I shall not let you complete even a year after me." And it was so: ten months after John's falling asleep, George departed in his turn to the Lord.