

**The Fourth Sunday of Great Lent:
Our Holy Father John of the Ladder ("Climacus")**

By Very Rev. Fr. Lawrence Farley

St. John was Abbot of the Mt. Sinai monastery in the seventh century, and he wrote his *Ladder of Divine Ascent* for his monks. The volume became a classic whose value was recognized even by those struggling to serve Christ in the non-monastic world. The book was read by the monks of Mt. Sinai during the Lenten season, and this Sunday of Great Lent commemorates the writer with gratitude, thereby commending his work to the entire Orthodox world. Below is a little background on Holy Father John.

John was born about 579 and came to the monastery at Mount Sinai when he was sixteen, learning from his spiritual father Martyrius, who tonsured him a monk at about age twenty. Martyrius died soon after, and John retired to Tholas, five miles from the monastery, to live as a hermit. He lived in prudent moderation, eating everything allowed but in small amounts. He slept very little and received the grace of continual prayer and the gift of tears. He became famous as a spiritual guide and received many visitors—so many that some criticized him as a chatterbox. After this he kept silence for a year, finally speaking only when entreated by those who had once criticized him. John visited a large monastery in Egypt but continued to live at his hermitage. After forty years there he was elected abbot of Mount Sinai. John was a great spiritual director, and he placed much emphasis on mourning for one's sins, attaining inner stillness, and being constantly in prayer, invoking the Name of Jesus. It was for his monks that he wrote his famous book of monastic direction, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, which is read by monks during Great Lent. In it, he said, "When we die, we will not be criticized for having failed to work miracles. We will not be accused of having failed to be theologians or contemplatives. But we will certainly have to offer some explanation to God for not having mourned unceasingly." Before his death he resigned as abbot and returned to the quiet of a hermitage. He died in peace in about 649.