



Evangelion

A Bulletin of Orthodox Christian Faith

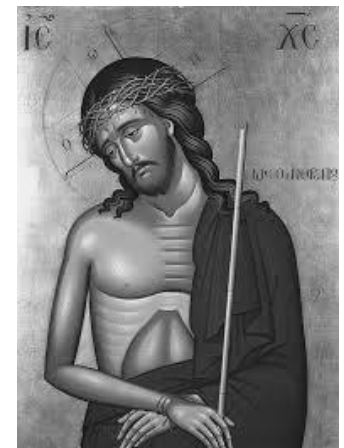
2 April 2017

A Servant and Slave to All

Today, on the Sunday of Saint Mary of Egypt, we hear Jesus prophesying His Passion while on the road to Jerusalem with His Apostles. Saint Mark describes how James and John asked Him for places of honour in His Kingdom. In response, Jesus Christ made it clear to them that, while the gentiles see it as normal for leaders to lord it over others, this is not how it works in His Kingdom. Instead, “Anyone who wants to be great among you must be your servant, and anyone who wants to be first among you must be slave to all.”

In this incident we see how the Gospel that Christ preaches turns the values of our world on their head. We do not follow Christ in order to become rich or powerful, but rather to become like Him. And He “came not to be served but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many.” In Jesus Christ we see someone who poured Himself out for the salvation of the world.

It is easy for us to be critical of the rather obvious ambition of the Apostles who had not yet learnt what it meant to follow Christ. Yet we all have tendencies to self-interest that we may not even be aware of, and there are many subtle ways in which we can use religion to bolster our own egos, somehow expecting that our devotion should result in some form of recognition. As we journey through Lent we pray that God would purify our desires, teach us true humility and shape us ever-more according to the Image of His Son, who teaches us what true greatness means.



Before He humbled Himself, only the angels knew Him. After He humbled Himself, all human nature knew Him. You see how His humbling of Himself did not make Him have less but produced countless benefits, countless deeds of virtue, and made His glory shine forth with greater brightness. God wants nothing and has need of nothing. Yet when He humbled Himself, He produced such great good, increased His household, and extended His kingdom. Why then are you afraid that you will become less if you humble yourself?

Saint John Chrysostom

2 April is the Sunday of Saint Mary of Egypt

Matins Gospel: John 20:11-18

Epistle: Hebrews 9:11-14

Gospel: Mark 10:32-45

Resurrectional Apolytikion:

From on high didst Thou descend, O Compassionate One; to burial of three days hast Thou submitted that Thou mightest free us from our passions. O our Life and Resurrection, Lord, glory be to Thee.

Apolytikion of Sunday of St Mary of Egypt:

The image of God, was faithfully preserved in you, O Mother. For you took up the Cross and followed Christ. By Your actions you taught us to look beyond the flesh for it passes, rather to be concerned about the soul which is immortal. Wherefore, O Holy Mary, your soul rejoices with the angels.

Seasonal Kontakion:

O Protection of Christians that cannot be put to shame, mediation unto the creator most constant: O despise not the voices of those who have sinned; but be quick, O good one, to come unto our aid, who in faith cry unto thee: Hasten to intercession and speed thou to make supplication, O thou who dost ever protect. O Theotokos. them that honor thee.

Love of God is not something that can be taught.

We did not learn from someone else how to rejoice in light or want to live, or to love our parents or guardians.

It is the same – perhaps even more so – with our love for God: it does not come by another’s teaching.

As soon as the living creature (that is, man) comes to be, a power of reason is implanted in us like a seed, containing within it the ability and the need to love.

When the school of God’s law admits this power of reason, it cultivates it diligently, skilfully nurtures it, and with God’s help brings it to perfection.

Saint Basil the Great

Readings and saints for this week:

Monday, 3 April: Isaiah 48:17-49:4; Genesis 27:1-41; Proverbs 19:16-25
Nicetas the Confessor; Joseph the Hymnographer

Tuesday, 4 April: Isaiah 49:6-10; Genesis 31:3-16; Proverbs 21:3-21
George of Maleon; Plato the Studite

Wednesday, 5 April: Isaiah 58:1-11; Genesis 43:26-31; 45:1-16; Proverbs 21:23-22:4
Claudios & Companions; Theodora the Righteous

Thursday, 6 April: Isaiah 65:8-16; Genesis 46:1-7; Proverbs 23:15-24:5
Euty chius, Pat. Of Constantinople; 120 Martyrs of Persia

Friday, 7 April: Isaiah 66:10-24; Genesis 49:33-50:26; Proverbs 31:8-31
Martyrs Calliopius and Akylina; Tikhon, Pat. of Moscow

Saturday, 8 April: Hebrews 12:28-29; 13:1-8; John 11:1-45
Lazarus Saturday; Herodion, Agabus, Rufus, Asyncritus of the 70; Rufus the Obedient



Lazarus Saturday

This coming Saturday is Lazarus Saturday, and, together with Palm Sunday, marks the transition from Lent to Holy Week. Both Lazarus Saturday and Palm Sunday are public events that announce the triumph of Christ and serve as triggers to the events of Holy Week.

Saint John tells us in his Gospel that six days before His own death, Jesus went to Bethany where his friend Lazarus had died and had already been in the tomb for four days. By publicly raising Lazarus to life, He was clearly foreshadowing His own resurrection and proclaiming the universal resurrection of humankind.

The Church gives us this celebration of the raising of Lazarus just before we enter Holy Week in order to reassure us during the coming commemoration of Christ's Passion. It reminds that, though He suffers and dies, He remains Lord and Victor over death. The liturgical texts emphasize the two natures of Christ, the God-man. In His grief for His friend we see His true humanity, and in His act of raising Lazarus from the dead we see His divine power. We shall continue to encounter this fullness of both humanity and divinity through Holy Week, for Christ enters into our suffering as a human being. But He also enters it as it as the God who defeats all suffering and death.

O Lord, Thy voice destroyed the dominion of hell, and the word of Thy power raised from the tomb him that had been four days dead; and Lazarus became the first-fruits of the regeneration of the world.

From Vespers of
Lazarus Saturday



'If you fall, rise and you shall be saved.' You are a sinner, you continually fall, learn also how to rise; be careful to acquire this wisdom. This is what the wisdom consists in: learning by heart the psalm, 'Have mercy upon me, O God, after Thy great goodness,' inspired by the Holy Spirit to the king and prophet David, and say it with sincere faith and trust, with a contrite and humble heart. After your sincere repentance, expressed in the words of King David, the forgiveness of your sins shall immediately shine upon you from the Lord, and your spiritual powers will be at peace. The most important thing in life is to be zealous for mutual love, and not to judge anyone. Everybody shall answer for himself to God, and you must look to yourself. Beware of malice.

Saint John of Kronstadt

The Sunday of Saint Mary of Egypt

Today, on the fifth Sunday of Great Lent, we commemorate Saint Mary of Egypt. A notorious sinner who had a dramatic conversion and lived the rest of her life in ascetic labour, Saint Mary provides a striking model for our Lenten repentance.

This past Thursday the Church prayed the Great Canon of St Andrew of Crete at Matins, which included a reading of her life, giving us a verbal icon of what it means to repent. St Mary is a symbol of contrition, conversion and austerity and the story of her life expresses the urgency of the Church's call to us to repent in these last days of Lent before we enter the great and Holy Week where we will be journeying with Christ to His death and Resurrection.

Our sin may not be as notorious as hers was, nor our conversion as dramatic, but we too are in need of her honesty before God, and her sorrow for her sin. Now, as we come towards the end of Lent, we realize even more our need of purification as we journey towards Jerusalem with Christ so that we will be able to contemplate the great Mystery of His Cross and Resurrection. We need to ask for God's grace to be able to see ourselves as we really are and to cry out to Him asking for mercy.



Hastening to see the Cross, O Mary, thou wast illumined by its light, through the divine providence of thy Crucified Lord; and thou wast thyself crucified to the world, O saint most worthy of our wonder.

She who once led many into wickedness through evil lust, shines now in her sanctity like the sun, and has become a heavenly guide to all who sin.

From Matins for the
Sunday of St Mary of Egypt

Who was Saint Mary of Egypt?

We know about St Mary of Egypt through the writings of St Sophronius, the seventh century patriarch of Jerusalem, although the exact dates of Saint Mary's life are unknown and estimates vary from the fourth to the sixth centuries. She was from Egypt and as a young girl went to Alexandria where she led an extremely promiscuous life. One day, seeing a ship setting sail for the Holy Land, she joined the pilgrims although even in Jerusalem she continued to live a life of licentiousness and sexual depravity. One day she tried to enter the Church of the Exaltation of the Cross and was unable to enter due to some sort of mysterious force. In her distress she looked up and saw an icon of the Theotokos, and this brought her to her senses and she began to repent, praying all night to the Mother of God and promising to change her ways. The next morning she entered the Church easily, and after venerating the Cross she left Jerusalem, crossed the Jordan River and spent the rest of her life as a solitary ascetic in the Jordanian desert. Towards the end of her life she was found by St Zosimas, who was able to give her Holy Communion just before her death.