

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 from 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, skillfully nurtures it and with God's help brings it to perfection.

Saint Basil the Great



Sunday 29 March 2015 is the Sunday of St Mary of Egypt

Matins Gospel: John 20:19-31

Epistle: Hebrews 9:11-14

Gospel: Mark 10:32-45

Resurrectional Apolytikion

When the stone had been sealed by the Jews and the soldiers were guarding Thine immaculate Body, Thou didst arise on the third day, O Saviour, granting life unto the world. Wherefore, the powers of the Heavens cried out to Thee, O Lifegiver: Glory to Thy Resurrection, O Christ. Glory to Thy Kingdom. Glory to Thy dispensation, O only Friend of man.

Apolytikion of the 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.

Readings and saints for this week:

Monday: Isaiah 48:17-49:4; Genesis 27:1-41; Proverbs 19:16-25
John Climacus; Sosthenes Apollos, Cephas, Caesar, & Epaphroditos, the Apostles of the 70

Tuesday: Isaiah 49:6-10; Genesis 31:3-16; Proverbs 21:3-21
Hieromartyr Hypatius; Metropolitan Innocent of Moscow

Wednesday: Isaiah 58:1-11; Genesis 43:26-31; 45:1-16; Proverbs 21:23-22:4
Mary of Egypt; Martyrs Gerontius and Basilides

Thursday: Isaiah 65:8-16; Genesis 46:1-7; Proverbs 23:15-24:5
Titus the Wonderworker; Theodora the Virgin-martyr of Palestine

Friday: Isaiah 66:10-24; Genesis 49:33-50:26; Proverbs 31:8-31
Nicetas the Confessor; Joseph the Hymnographer

Saturday: Hebrews 12:28-29; 13:1-8; John 11:1-45
Lazarus Saturday; George of Maleon; Plato the Studite



Evangelion

A Bulletin of Orthodox Christian Faith

29 March 2015

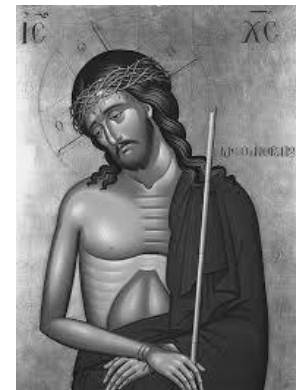
Archbishopric of Good Hope
Patriarchate of Alexandria & All Africa

Not to be Served, but to Serve

Today, on the fifth Sunday of Great Lent, which is also 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.



He accomplished so many good deeds that neither I nor all humanity together could set them before your minds in words. 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 for 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

Lazarus Saturday

This coming Saturday is Lazarus Saturday, and, together with Palm Sunday next 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.



By Your word, O Word of God, Lazarus now leaps out of death, having returned to this life. Therefore the peoples honour You with their branches, O Mighty One; for You shall destroy Hades utterly by Your own death.

By means of Lazarus has Christ already plundered you, O death. Where is your victory, O Hades? For the lament of Bethany is handed over now to you. Let us all wave against it our branches of victory.

Exaposteilaria
for Lazarus Saturday

Saint John tells us in his Gospel that six days before His own death, Jesus Christ 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 for Lazarus Saturday emphasize the two natures of Christ, the Godman. 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.

Do not ask for love from your neighbour, for if you ask and he does not respond, you will be troubled. Instead show your love for your neighbour and you will be at rest, and so will bring your neighbour to love.

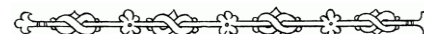
Saint Dorotheos of Gaza

The Sunday of St Mary of Egypt

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

This past Thursday, the Great Canon of St Andrew of Crete included a reading of her life, giving us a powerful verbal icon of what it means to repent. St Mary is a symbol of contrition, conversion and austerity. The story of her life expresses the urgency of the Church's call to us to repent in these last days of Lent.

Our sin may not be as notorious as hers was, nor our conversion as dramatic, but we too need her honesty before God and her sorrow for her sin. Coming 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.



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 St 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.



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