

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

Sunday 21 April 2013 is the Sunday of Saint Mary of Egypt

Matins Gospel: Mark 16:1-8

Epistle: Hebrews 9:11-14

Gospel: Mark 10:32-45

Apolytikion for the feast:

In thee the image was preserved with exactness, O Mother; for taking up thy cross, thou didst follow Christ, and by thy deeds thou didst teach us to overlook the flesh, for it passeth away, but to attend to the soul since it is immortal. Wherefore, O righteous Mary, thy spirit rejoiceth with the Angels.

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Readings and saints for this week:

Monday: Isaiah 48:17-49:4; Genesis 27:1-41; Proverbs 19:16-25
Theodore of Sykeon; Holy Apostle Nathaniel

Tuesday: Isaiah 49:6-10; Genesis 31:3-16; Proverbs 21:3-21
Great Martyr George

Wednesday: Isaiah 58:1-11; Genesis 43:26-31; 45:1-16; Proverbs 21:23-22:4
Elizabeth the Wonderworker; Savvas the General of Rome

Thursday: Isaiah 65:8-16; Genesis 46:1-7; Proverbs 23:15-24:5
Apostle and Evangelist Mark; New Martyr Emmanuel and Companions

Friday: Isaiah 66:10-24; Genesis 49:33-50:26; Proverbs 31:8-31
Hieromartyr Basil of Amaseia; Glaphyra the Righteous

Saturday: Hebrews 12:28-29; 13:1-8; John 11:1-45
Lazarus Saturday; Hieromartyr Symeon; Eulogios the Innkeeper



Archbishopric of Good Hope,
Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa

Evangelion

A Bulletin of Orthodox Christian Faith

21 April 2013

A Servant and Slave to all

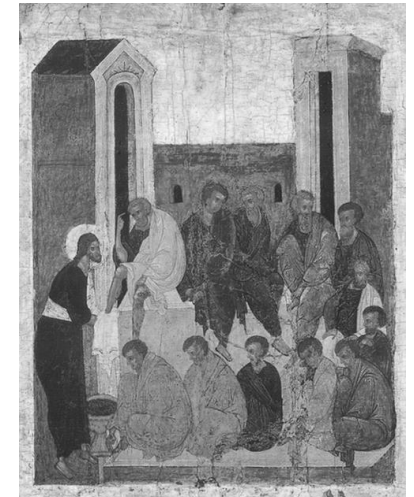
Today, on the fifth Sunday of Great Lent, which is also the Sunday of Saint Mary of Egypt, we hear Jesus prophesying His Passion while on the road to Jerusalem with His Apostles. Saint Mark describes how James and John asked Him for places of honour in His Kingdom. In response, Jesus Christ made it clear 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.

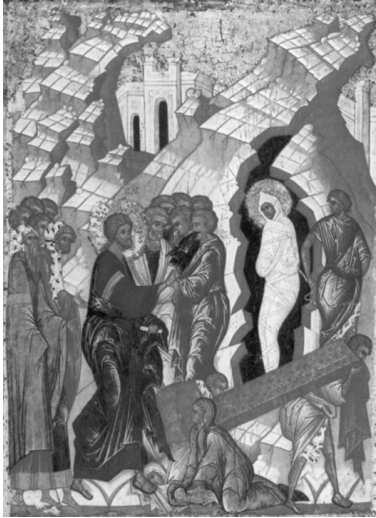
He is our sanctification, as Himself being purity, that the pure may be encompassed by His purity. He is our redemption, because He sets us free who were held captive under sin, giving Himself as a ransom for us, the sacrifice to make expiation for the world. He is our resurrection, because He raises up, and brings to life again, those who were slain by sin.

Saint Gregory the Theologian



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 emphasise 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



On Wednesday we commemorate the holy **Apostle and Evangelist Mark**, the founder of the Church of Alexandria.

Saint Mark originally came from Cyrene of Pentapolis, near Libya. He came to faith in Christ through St Peter and followed him to Rome, where he wrote his gospel. He later travelled to Alexandria where he preached the Gospel and established the Church. He encountered opposition and was martyred in the year 68 by being tied up and dragged around the city until he died.

Christ assumed the worse that He might give us the better; He became poor that we through His poverty might be rich; He took upon Him the form of a servant that we might receive back our liberty.

Saint Gregory the Theologian

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.