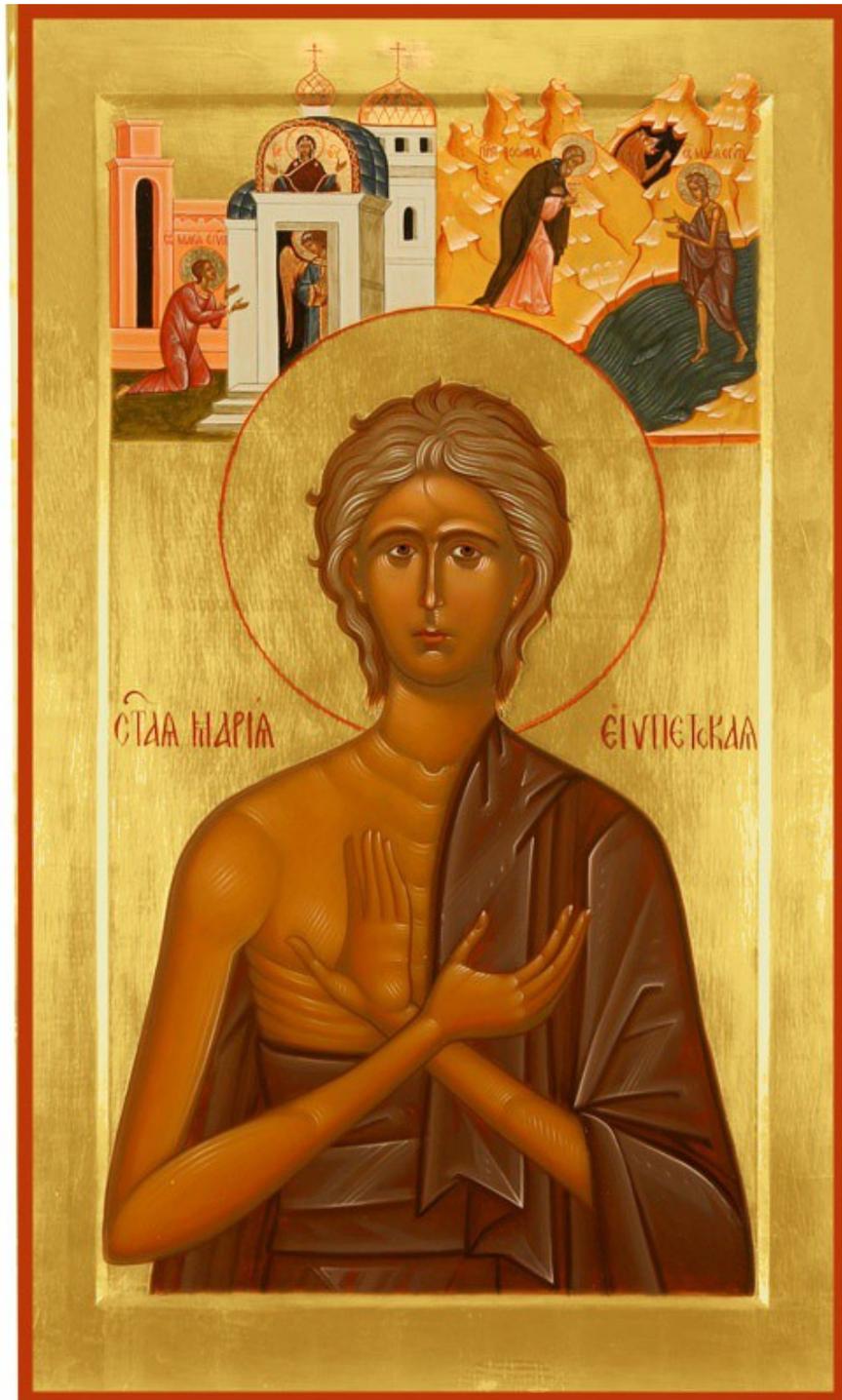


# Readings & Hymns

## Fourth Sunday of Lent:

### St Mary of Egypt



### **Troparion, St Mary of Egypt - Tone 8**

The image of God was truly preserved in thee, O mother,  
for thou didst take up the Cross and follow Christ.

By so doing, thou didst teach us to disregard the flesh for it passes away;  
but to care instead for the soul since it is immortal. //

Therefore thy spirit, O holy Mother Mary, rejoices with the angels.

*verse: Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit;*

### **Kontakion, St Mary of Egypt - Tone 3**

Having been a sinful woman,  
thou didst become a Bride of Christ.

Having attained angelic life,  
thou didst defeat demons with the weapon of the Cross!

Therefore, O most glorious Mary, //  
thou art a Bride of the Kingdom!

*verse: now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.*

### **Theotokion - Tone 6**

Steadfast Protectress of Christians, / Constant Advocate before the Creator:

Despise not the Cry of us sinners,

But in thy goodness speedily help us who call on thee in faith.

Hasten to hear our petition and to intercede for us, / O Theotokos, //

For Thou dost always protect those who honor thee!

### **The Prokeimenon**

*The Prokeimenon in the Tone of the Week, and:*

*verse: And in the 4<sup>th</sup> Tone: God is wonderful in His saints, the God of Israel.*

*(St Mary) Ps 67 [68]: 35)*

*Choir: God is wonderful in His saints, the God of Israel.*

### **Epistle**

*§ 321 from the center: Hebrews 9: 11 - 14 (5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Great Lent)*

*§ 208: Gal. 3: 23 - 29 (Saint)*

**The reading from the Epistle of the Holy Apostle Paul to the Hebrews.**

BRETHREN, Christ came as a High Priest of the good things to come,  
with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands,  
that is to say, not of this creation.

Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by His own Blood,

He entered once into the Holies, having obtained eternal redemption.

For if the blood of goats and oxen, and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling the unclean,  
sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh;

how much more shall the Blood of Christ,

who through the Holy Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God,

cleanse our conscience from dead works to serve the Living and True God?

BRETHREN, before faith came, we were kept under the law,  
kept for the faith which should afterward be revealed.

Therefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ,  
that we might be justified by faith.

But after the faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.

For you are all the children of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free,

there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed,  
and heirs according to the promise.

*Epistle text from "The Apostol" St. Tikhon's Seminary Press, 2012. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition.*

### The Alleluia

*The Alleluia in the Tone of the Week, and:*

*verse:* In the 4<sup>th</sup> Tone: I waited patiently for the Lord; and He inclined to me and heard  
my prayer. (*St Mary*) (*Ps 39 [40]: 1*)

Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia.

### Gospel

§ 47: Mark 10: 32 – 45 (*5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Great Lent*)

§ 33: Luke 7: 36 – 50 (*St Mary of Egypt*)

AT THAT TIME JESUS TOOK the twelve,

and began to tell them what things should happen unto him,

<sup>33</sup> Saying, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem;

and the Son of man shall be delivered unto the chief priests, and unto the scribes;  
and they shall condemn him to death, and shall deliver him to the Gentiles:

<sup>34</sup> And they shall mock him, and shall scourge him, and shall spit upon him,  
and shall kill him: and the third day he shall rise again.

<sup>35</sup> And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, come unto him, saying,

Master, we would that thou shouldest do for us whatsoever we shall desire.

<sup>36</sup> And he said unto them, What would ye that I should do for you?

<sup>37</sup> They said unto him, Grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand,  
and the other on thy left hand, in thy glory.

<sup>38</sup> But Jesus said unto them, Ye know not what ye ask:

can ye drink of the cup that I drink of?

and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?

<sup>39</sup> And they said unto him, We can. And Jesus said unto them,

Ye shall indeed drink of the cup that I drink of;

and with the baptism that I am baptized withal shall ye be baptized:

<sup>40</sup> But to sit on my right hand and on my left hand is not mine to give;

but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared.

41 And when the ten heard it, they began to be much displeased with James and John.

42 But Jesus called them to him, and saith unto them,

Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them.

43 But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister:

44 And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all.

45 For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.

36 AT THAT TIME ONE OF THE PHARISEES DESIRED JESUS that he would eat with him.

And he went into the Pharisee's house, and sat down to meat.

37 And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment,

38 And stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment.

39 Now when the Pharisee which had bidden him saw it, he spake within himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him: for she is a sinner.

40 And Jesus answering said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he saith, Master, say on.

41 There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty.

42 And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most?

43 Simon answered and said, I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged.

44 And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head.

45 Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet.

46 My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment.

47 Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven;

for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.

<sup>48</sup> And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven.

<sup>49</sup> And they that sat at meat with him began to say within themselves,  
Who is this that forgiveth sins also?

<sup>50</sup> And he said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace.

### Hymn to the Theotokos

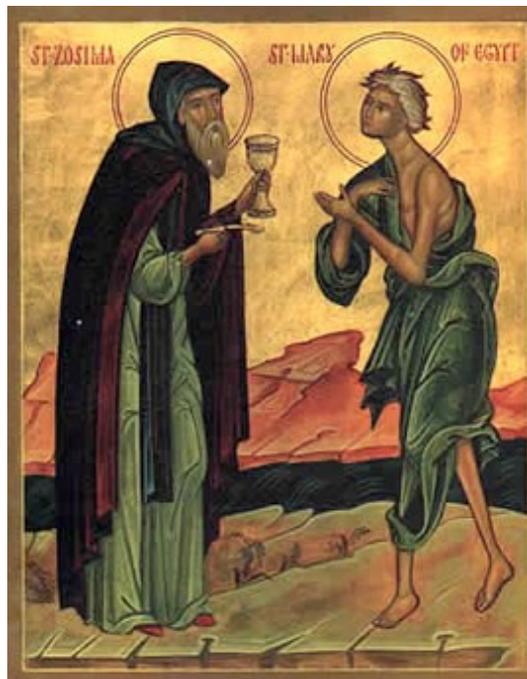
All of creation rejoices in thee, O Full of Grace: the assembly of angels and the race of men. O sanctified temple and spiritual paradise, the glory of virgins, from whom God was incarnate and became a child – our God before the ages. He made thy body into a throne, and thy womb He made more spacious than the heavens. All of creation rejoices in thee, O Full of Grace. Glory to thee.

### Communion Hymns

Praise the Lord from the heavens! Praise Him in the highest! (*Sunday*) (*Ps 148:1*)

The righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance. He shall not be afraid of evil tidings. (*St Mary*) (*Ps 111 [112]: 6b – 7a*)

Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia.



### Fifth Sunday of Great Lent: St Mary of Egypt Hymns for St Mary of Egypt from the Triodion,

On "Lord, I Call ..." Tone 6 Podoben: "Having set all your hope on the things of heaven ..."

The pollution of past sins / prevented thee from entering the church / to see the elevation of the Holy Cross; / but then thy conscience and the awareness of thine actions / turned thee, O wise in God, / to a better way of life. / And, having looked

upon the ikon of the blessed Maid of God, / thou hast condemned all thy previous transgressions, / O Mother worthy of all praise, // and so hast gone with boldness to venerate the precious Cross.

Having worshiped at the holy places with great joy, / thou hast received saving grace for the journey of virtue, / and with all haste thou hast set out upon the good path thou hast chosen. / Crossing the stream of Jordan, / with eagerness thou hast gone to live in the dwelling-place of the Baptist. / Thou hast tamed the savagery of the passions / through thine ascetic way of life, / and boldly thou hast broken the rebelliousness of the flesh, // O Mother ever-glorious.

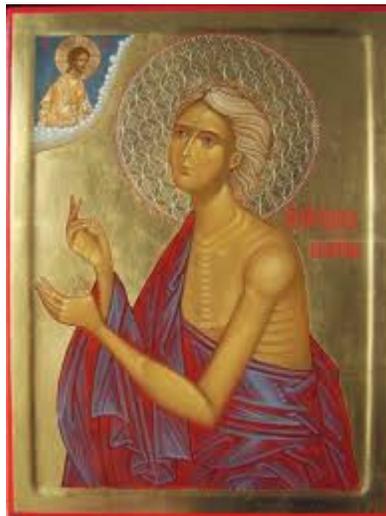
Having gone to dwell in the wilderness, / thou hast blotted out from thy soul the images of thy sensual passions, / and hast marked upon it the God-given imprint of holiness. / Thou hast attained such glory, blessed Mother, / as to walk upon the surface of the waters, / and in thy prayers to God thou wast raised up from the earth. / And now, all-glorious Mary, / standing before Christ with boldness, // entreat Him for our souls.

#### **On "Glory ..." Tone 4**

The power of Thy Cross, O Christ, / has worked wonders, / for even the woman who was once a harlot / chose to follow the ascetic way. / Casting aside her weakness, bravely she opposed the devil; / and having gained the prize of victory, // she intercedes for our souls.

#### **The Apostikha - Tone 2**

The desires of thy soul and the passions of thy flesh / thou hast cut down with the sword of abstinence; / thy sinful thoughts thou hast choked with the silence of the ascetic life. / With the streams of thy tears thou hast watered all the wilderness, / and caused the fruits of repentance to spring up for us: // therefore, O saint, we celebrate thy memory.



## SAINT MARY OF EGYPT

Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh, 16 April 1989

In the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost.

We keep today the memory of Saint Mary of Egypt in the gradual progression from glory to glory which Lent is, and which must lead us step by step to facing the supreme glory of the Divine Love crucified, the sacrificial love of the Holy Trinity.

Saint Mary of Egypt was a sinner, someone whose sin was known to everyone and not to God alone; perhaps she was the only one who was least of all aware of it because sin was her life. And yet, one day, she wanted to go and venerate an icon of the Mother of God in a church. The supreme beauty of womanhood in the Mother of God reached her heart, touched it. But when she came to the gate of this church, a power prevented her from crossing the threshold. The Publican had been able to stand there because his heart was broken; Mary of Egypt had no broken heart, and the entrance of the church was forbidden to her. And she stood there, aware that what she was, was incompatible with the holiness of the Presence, the presence of God, the presence of the Mother of God, the presence of all that is holy on earth and in heaven.

And she was so profoundly shaken by this experience that she left all that had been her life, retired into the desert, and with a life which the service books define as 'extreme', fought to conquer her flesh, her soul, her memories - everything that was sin, but also everything that could lead her away from God. And we know how glorious her life was, the kind of person she became.

What lesson can we receive from her life? How often is it that we have knocked at the door of God in the way in which Mary tried to come into His presence? How often have we tried to pray, to be in His presence in silence? How often has our longing been to God, and how often have we felt that between our prayer and Him, between our silence and Him, between our longing and Him there was a barrier which we could not pass. We were crying, praying into an empty sky, we were turning towards icons that were silent; all we could perceive was the Divine absence, and an absence so frightening, because not only could we not reach Him, but we perceived that unless we reached Him, our soul was laid waste, there was within us nothing but emptiness, an emptiness that if it continued, if it became our definitive condition would mean more than death - ultimate separation.

But how often also has God knocked at the door of our heart. You remember the word of the Book of Revelation: I stand at Thy door and I knock... How often has God, in the words of the Gospel, in the events of our life, in the weak promptings of our soul, in a whispering of the Holy Spirit, in all the ways in which God tries to reach us - how often has He knocked at this door, and how often have we made sure that this door does not open. Either didn't we simply care to open it because we were busy

with things that mattered to us at that moment more than His interrupting, disturbing presence; and how often did we refuse to open the door because the coming of the Lord to us would have meant the end of things which were precious to us, which mattered to us... And the Lord stood knocking, and the door was shut in His face: exactly in the same way in which every door was shut in the face of the Mother of God and Joseph on the night of the Nativity.

We may not be aware of it with the intensity which should be ours; and yet for each of us, simply, the proof of it is that we are here, and millions of other people at some moment have suddenly perceived the presence of God, have heard His knocking, have let perhaps the door ajar, have listened to what He was saying, had a moment of elation, a moment when suddenly we came to life, and then we shut the door again. We chose our aloneness, we chose to be without Him, and what we imagined to be 'free' from Him: we are never free; we are never free not because He enslaves us, not because He hunts us down. We are never free because He is ultimately in the end the only supreme longing of our whole being, because He is the fullness of life, the glory of life, the exultation of life for which we long and which we try to glean right, and left in vain.

Mary of Egypt confronted with the Divine absence, with God's refusal to allow her into His presence, confronted with a shut door within herself felt that unless the door opened, everything was vain. And she turned away from everything that stood between her and God, and life, and fullness, and exultation.

Isn't she for us an example, a call, an image of what could be the life of each of us? But we may say, Yes, this applied to her, she was a prospective saint... Each of us is called to commune with God in such a way, that God and each of us should become one, that each of us should become partaker of the Divine nature, a living member, a brother, a sister, a limb of Christ, a temple of the Holy Spirit, a son and a daughter of the Living God! This is our vocation; but can that be achieved by our own strength? No, it cannot! But it can be achieved by God in us if we only turn to Him with all our mind, all our heart, all our longing, determinably, yes: it is determination, and it is longing, a passionate, desperate longing... And then - and then all things become possible. I have said so often that when Saint Paul asked God for strength to fulfil his mission, the Lord said to him, My grace sufficeth unto thee, My power deploys itself in weakness... And at the end of his life, having fulfilled his vocation, Paul, who knew what he was saying, said, all things are possible unto me in the power of Christ Who sustains me... All things are possible, because God does not call us to more than can be achieved by Him with us and in us.

How much hope, how much inspiration can we find in each of the Saints of God, as frail as we are, and in whom the power, the glory, the victory, the life unfolded itself, deployed itself gloriously.

Let us once more receive inspiration from what we hear, receive inspiration from what we meet face to face in the Gospel, in Holy Communion, in prayer, in the silence in the presence of God. And let us move one step more forward towards the vision of the love of God made manifest in Holy Week, in the last steps of the way of the Cross, in the final victory of crucified Love, and in the victory of the Resurrection of God. Amen.

## **SUNDAY OF SAINT MARY OF EGYPT**

Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh, 1 April 1990

In the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost.

On the fifth Sunday in Lent we remember Saint Mary of Egypt, and she can teach us a great deal of what we need to know. She was a sinner, publicly known, a temptation and a scandal to men. How she became a sinner - we do not know; whether there was evil in her, whether she was seduced or raped, how she became a harlot, we shall never know. What we know for sure is that one day she came to a church of the Mother of God - the image of perfect wholeness - and she suddenly felt that she could not enter it. We need not imagine a miraculous force preventing her from crossing the threshold; the force was probably - certainly - within herself. She felt that the realm was too sacred, and the person of the Mother of God too holy for her to dare walk into Her presence and stand in the precincts of the church.

This was enough for her to realise that all the past was darkness, and that there was but one way out of it: to shake off all evil and to start a new life. She did not go for advice, she did not go for confession; she walked out of the city into the desert, into the scorching desert where there was nothing but sand and heat and hunger, and desperate loneliness.

She can teach us something very great. As Saint Seraphim of Sarov repeated more than once to those who came to see him, the difference between a sinner who is lost and a sinner who finds his way to salvation lies in nothing but determination. The grace of God is always there; but our response is not. But Mary responded; through the horror of her new perception of herself she responded to the holiness, the grace, the wholeness and sanctity of the Mother of God, and nothing, nothing was too much for her to change her life.

Year after year, in fasting and prayer, in the scorching heat, in the desperate aloneness of the desert she fought all the evil that had accumulated in her soul; because it is not enough, to become aware of the evil, it is not enough even to reject it in an act of will, it is there, in our memories, in our desires, in our frailty, in the rottenness which evil brings. She had to fight for her whole life, but at the end of that life she had conquered; indeed, she had fought the good fight, she had become pure of stain, she could enter the realm of God: not a temple, not a place but eternity.

She can teach us a great deal. She can teach us that only if one day we become aware that in the realm into which we walk so freely: the church, or simply the world created by God and which has remained pure of evil although subjected, enslaved to evil, because of us - is so holy that we alone have no place there, we might in response to this sense repent, that is turn away from ourselves in horror, and turn against ourselves with stern determination. Then we could follow her example.

This example of hers is presented to us as a crowning moment of this spring of life, which is Lent. A week before we heard the teaching and call of Saint John of the Ladder, the one who has established a whole ladder of perfection for us to overcome evil and come to right. And today we see one who from the very depth of evil was brought to the heights of saintliness, and as the Canon of Saint Andrew of Crete says: 'Be sure that God Who could heal the leprous could heal the leprosy which is yours'.

Let us therefore see in her a new encouragement, a new hope, indeed, a new joy, but also a challenge, a call, because it is in vain that we sing the praise of saints if we do not learn from them and emulate them. Amen.

## **Sunday of St Mary of Egypt**

Metropolitan Anthony Sourozh, 16th April 2000

In the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Week after week we feel that we are coming closer and closer to the glorious Resurrection of Christ. And it seems to us that we are moving fast, from Sunday to Sunday as it were, to the day when all horrors, all terrors, will have disappeared.

And yet so easily do we forget that before we reach the day of the Resurrection we must, together with Christ, together with His apostles, tread the road of the Crucifixion. 'So we are ascending to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered into the hands of men, and they shall crucify Him, and the third day He will rise'. All we notice is that He will rise. But do we ever think of the way in which the disciples went to Jerusalem, knowing that the Crucifixion was at hand? They were moving in fear. They were not yet mature enough to be those who would give their lives for the message to be spread. They were moving in fear. When Christ told them that they would go now to Jerusalem, return to the city which had then renounced Christ, put Him into danger of His life, they said to Him, 'Let us not go.' And only one disciple, Thomas, said, 'No. Let us go with Him, and die with Him.'

This disciple is the one whom, foolishly I believe, we call the Doubter: the one who was not prepared to give his trust to God, his faith, his life, his blood, without certainty. But his heart was unreservedly given to Christ. How wonderful to be such a man! But the other disciples would not desert Christ. They walked towards Jerusalem.

And we have today another example of one who went through a tragedy before

they met Christ. It is Mary of Egypt. She was a sinner. She was a harlot. She was unfaithful to God in her soul and in her body. She had no reverence for this body which God had created and this soul. And yet she was tragically confronted with the fact that there was no way for her into the temple of God unless she rejected evil and chose purity, repentance, newness of life.

Let us reflect on the disciples who almost begged Christ not to return to Jerusalem, because Jerusalem was a city where all prophets had died; and they did not want Christ to die, and they were afraid. Let us ask ourselves how much we resemble them. And let us ask ourselves freely today how do we resemble, or not, Mary of Egypt - Mary who had lived her life according to her own ways and desires, followed all temptations of her body and soul; and one day realised that as she was, she could not enter the temple of God.

So easily do we enter the divine temple, forgetting so easily that the church into which we come is a small part of a world that has chosen to be alien to God, that has rejected God, lost interest in Him; and that the few believers have created for God a place of refuge - yes, the church is the fullness of Heaven, and at the same time a tragic place of refuge, the only place where God has a right to be because He is wanted. And when we come here, we enter into the divine realm. We should come into it with a sense of awe, not just walk into it as into a space but walk into it as a space which is already the divine Kingdom.

If we were in that mood we would, when we come to the doors of the church, be, however little, like Mary of Egypt. We would stop and say, 'How can I come in?' And if we did that with our whole heart, broken-heartedly, with a sense of horror of the fact that we are so distant from God, so alien, so unfaithful to Him, then the doors would open and we would see that we are not simply in a big space surrounded with walls but we are in a space which is God's Heaven come to earth.

Let us therefore learn from this experience what it means to go step by step towards the Resurrection, because in order to reach the Resurrection we must go through Calvary, we must go through the tragedy of Holy Week and make it our own, partaking with Christ and His disciples and the crowds around in the horror, the terror of it; and also experience it as a scorching fire that will burn in us all that is unworthy of God and make us clean. And perhaps one day, when the fire will have burnt everything which is not worthy of God, each of us may become an image of the burning bush, aflame with divine fire and not consumed, because only that which could survive the fire of God would have remained is us. Amen.



## Abbreviated Life of St Mary of Egypt

from OCA.org

Saint Zosimas (April 4) was a monk at a certain Palestinian monastery on the outskirts of Caesarea. Having dwelt at the monastery since his childhood, he lived there in asceticism until he reached the age of fifty-three. Then he was disturbed by the thought that he had attained perfection, and needed no one to instruct him. "Is there a monk anywhere who can show me some form of asceticism that I have not attained? Is there anyone who has surpassed me in spiritual sobriety and deeds?"

Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared to him and said, "Zosimas, you have struggled valiantly, as far as this is in the power of man. However, there is no one who is righteous (Rom 3:10). So that you may know how many other ways lead to salvation, leave your native land, like Abraham from the house of his father (Gen 12:1), and go to the monastery by the Jordan."

Abba Zosimas immediately left the monastery, and following the angel, he went to the Jordan monastery and settled in it.

Here he met Elders who were adept in contemplation, and also in their struggles. Never did anyone utter an idle word. Instead, they sang constantly, and prayed all night long. Abba Zosimas began to imitate the spiritual activity of the holy monks.

Thus much time passed, and the holy Forty Day Fast approached. There was a certain custom at the monastery, which was why God had led Saint Zosimas there. On the First Sunday of Great Lent the igumen served the Divine Liturgy, everyone received the All-Pure Body and Blood of Christ. Afterwards, they went to the trapeza for a small repast, and then assembled once more in church.

The monks prayed and made prostrations, asking forgiveness one of another. Then they made a prostration before the igumen and asked his blessing for the struggle that lay before them. During the Psalm "The Lord is my Light and my Savior, whom shall I fear? The Lord is defender of my life, of whom shall I be afraid?" (Ps 26/27:1), they opened the monastery gate and went off into the wilderness.

Each took with him as much food as he needed, and went into the desert. When their food ran out, they ate roots and desert plants. The monks crossed the Jordan and scattered in various directions, so that no one might see how another fasted or how they spent their time.

The monks returned to the monastery on Palm Sunday, each having his own conscience as a witness of his ascetic struggles. It was a rule of the monastery that no one asked how anyone else had toiled in the desert.

Abba Zosimas, according to the custom of the monastery, went deep into the desert hoping to find someone living there who could benefit him.

He walked into the wilderness for twenty days and then, when he sang the Psalms of the Sixth Hour and made the usual prayers. Suddenly, to the right of the hill where he stood, he saw a human form. He was afraid, thinking that it might be a demonic apparition. Then he guarded himself with the Sign of the Cross, which removed his fear. He turned to the right and saw a form walking southward. The body was black from the blazing sunlight, and the faded short hair was white like a sheep's fleece. Abba Zosimas rejoiced, since he had not seen any living thing for many days.

The desert-dweller saw Zosimas approaching, and attempted to flee from him. Abba Zosimas, forgetting his age and fatigue, quickened his pace. When he was close enough to be heard, he called out, "Why do you flee from me, a sinful old man? Wait for me, for the love of God."

The stranger said to him, "Forgive me, Abba Zosimas, but I cannot turn and show my face to you. I am a woman, and as you see, I am naked. If you would grant the request of a sinful woman, throw me your cloak so I might cover my body, and then I can ask for your blessing."

Then Abba Zosimas was terrified, realizing that she could not have called him by name unless she possessed spiritual insight.

Covered by the cloak, the ascetic turned to Zosimas: "Why do you want to speak with me, a sinful woman? What did you wish to learn from me, you who have not shrunk from such great labors?"

Abba Zosimas fell to the ground and asked for her blessing. She also bowed down before him, and for a long time they remained on the ground each asking the other to bless. Finally, the woman ascetic said: "Abba Zosimas, you must bless and pray, since you are honored with the grace of the priesthood. For many years you have stood before the holy altar, offering the Holy Gifts to the Lord."

These words frightened Saint Zosimas even more. With tears he said to her, "O Mother! It is clear that you live with God and are dead to this world. You have called me by name and recognized me as a priest, though you have never seen me before. The grace granted you is apparent, therefore bless me, for the Lord's sake."

Yielding finally to his entreaties, she said, "Blessed is God, Who cares for the salvation of men." Abba Zosimas replied, "Amen." Then they rose to their feet. The woman ascetic again said to the Elder, "Why have you come, Father, to me who am a sinner, bereft of every virtue? Apparently, the grace of the Holy Spirit has brought you to do me a service. But tell me first, Abba, how do the Christians live, how is the Church guided?"

Abba Zosimas answered her, "By your holy prayers God has granted the Church and us all a lasting peace. But fulfill my unworthy request, Mother, and pray for the whole world and for me a sinner, that my wanderings in the desert may not be

useless.”

The holy ascetic replied, “You, Abba Zosimas, as a priest, ought to pray for me and for all, for you are called to do this. However, since we must be obedient, I will do as you ask.

The saint turned toward the East, and raising her eyes to heaven and stretching out her hands, she began to pray in a whisper. She prayed so softly that Abba Zosimas could not hear her words. After a long time, the Elder looked up and saw her standing in the air more than a foot above the ground. Seeing this, Zosimas threw himself down on the ground, weeping and repeating, “Lord, have mercy!”

Then he was tempted by a thought. He wondered if she might not be a spirit, and if her prayer could be insincere. At that moment she turned around, lifted him from the ground and said, “Why do your thoughts confuse you, Abba Zosimas? I am not an apparition. I am a sinful and unworthy woman, though I am guarded by holy Baptism.”

Then she made the Sign of the Cross and said, “May God protect us from the Evil One and his schemes, for fierce is his struggle against us.” Seeing and hearing this, the Elder fell at her feet with tears saying, “I beseech you by Christ our God, do not conceal from me who you are and how you came into this desert. Tell me everything, so that the wondrous works of God may be revealed.”

She replied, “It distresses me, Father, to speak to you about my shameless life. When you hear my story, you might flee from me, as if from a poisonous snake. But I shall tell you everything, Father, concealing nothing. However, I exhort you, cease not to pray for me a sinner, that I may find mercy on the Day of Judgment.

“I was born in Egypt and when I was twelve years old, I left my parents and went to Alexandria. There I lost my chastity and gave myself to unrestrained and insatiable sensuality. For more than seventeen years I lived like that and I did it all for free. Do not think that I refused the money because I was rich. I lived in poverty and worked at spinning flax. To me, life consisted in the satisfaction of my fleshly lust.

“One summer I saw a crowd of people from Libya and Egypt heading toward the sea. They were on their way to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. I also wanted to sail with them. Since I had no food or money, I offered my body in payment for my passage. And so I embarked on the ship.

“Now, Father, believe me, I am very amazed, that the sea tolerated my wantonness and fornication, that the earth did not open up its mouth and take me down alive into hell, because I had ensnared so many souls. I think that God was seeking my repentance. He did not desire the death of a sinner, but awaited my conversion.

“So I arrived in Jerusalem and spent all the days before the Feast living the same sort

of life, and maybe even worse.

“When the holy Feast of the Exaltation of the Venerable Cross of the Lord arrived, I went about as before, looking for young men. At daybreak I saw that everyone was heading to the church, so I went along with the rest. When the hour of the Holy Elevation drew nigh, I was trying to enter into the church with all the people. With great effort I came almost to the doors, and attempted to squeeze inside. Although I stepped up to the threshold, it was as though some force held me back, preventing me from entering. I was brushed aside by the crowd, and found myself standing alone on the porch. I thought that perhaps this happened because of my womanly weakness. I worked my way into the crowd, and again I attempted to elbow people aside. However hard I tried, I could not enter. Just as my feet touched the church threshold, I was stopped. Others entered the church without difficulty, while I alone was not allowed in. This happened three or four times. Finally my strength was exhausted. I went off and stood in a corner of the church portico.

“Then I realized that it was my sins that prevented me from seeing the Life-Creating Wood. The grace of the Lord then touched my heart. I wept and lamented, and I began to beat my breast. Sighing from the depths of my heart, I saw above me an icon of the Most Holy Theotokos. Turning to Her, I prayed: “O Lady Virgin, who gave birth in the flesh to God the Word! I know that I am unworthy to look upon your icon. I rightly inspire hatred and disgust before your purity, but I know also that God became Man in order to call sinners to repentance. Help me, O All-Pure One. Let me enter the church. Allow me to behold the Wood upon which the Lord was crucified in the flesh, shedding His Blood for the redemption of sinners, and also for me. Be my witness before Your Son that I will never defile my body again with the impurity of fornication. As soon as I have seen the Cross of your Son, I will renounce the world, and go wherever you lead me.”

“After I had spoken, I felt confidence in the compassion of the Mother of God, and left the spot where I had been praying. I joined those entering the church, and no one pushed me back or prevented me from entering. I went on in fear and trembling, and entered the holy place.

“Thus I also saw the Mysteries of God, and how God accepts the penitent. I fell to the holy ground and kissed it. Then I hastened again to stand before the icon of the Mother of God, where I had given my vow. Bending my knees before the Virgin Theotokos, I prayed:

“O Lady, you have not rejected my prayer as unworthy. Glory be to God, Who accepts the repentance of sinners. It is time for me to fulfill my vow, which you witnessed. Therefore, O Lady, guide me on the path of repentance.”

“Then I heard a voice from on high: ‘If you cross the Jordan, you will find glorious rest.’

“I immediately believed that this voice was meant for me, and I cried out to the Mother of God: ‘O Lady, do not forsake me!’

“Then I left the church portico and started on my journey. A certain man gave me three coins as I was leaving the church. With them I bought three loaves of bread, and asked the bread merchant the way to the Jordan.

“It was nine o’clock when I saw the Cross. At sunset I reached the church of Saint John the Baptist on the banks of the Jordan. After praying in the church, I went down to the Jordan and washed my face and hands in its water. Then in this same temple of Saint John the Forerunner I received the Life-Creating Mysteries of Christ. Then I ate half of one of my loaves of bread, drank water from the holy Jordan, and slept there that night on the ground. In the morning I found a small boat and crossed the river to the opposite shore. Again I prayed that the Mother of God would lead me where She wished. Then I found myself in this desert.”

Abba Zosimas asked her, “How many years have passed since you began to live in the desert?”

“I think,” she replied, “it is forty-seven years since I came from the Holy City.”

Abba Zosimas again asked, “What food do you find here, Mother?”

And she said, “I had with me two and a half loaves of bread when I crossed the Jordan. Soon they dried out and hardened. Eating a little at a time, I finished them after a few years.”

Again Abba Zosimas asked, “Is it possible you have survived for so many years without sickness, and without suffering in any way from such a complete change?”

“Believe me, Abba Zosimas,” the woman said, “I spent seventeen years in this wilderness (after she had spent seventeen years in immorality), fighting wild beasts: mad desires and passions. When I began to eat bread, I thought of the meat and fish which I had in abundance in Egypt. I also missed the wine that I loved so much when I was in the world, while here I did not even have water. I suffered from thirst and hunger. I also had a mad desire for lewd songs. I seemed to hear them, disturbing my heart and my hearing. Weeping and striking myself on the breast, I remembered the vow I had made. At last I beheld a radiant Light shining on me from everywhere. After a violent tempest, a lasting calm ensued.

“Abba, how shall I tell you of the thoughts that urged me on to fornication? A fire seemed to burn within me, awakening in me the desire for embraces. Then I would throw myself to the ground and water it with my tears. I seemed to see the Most Holy Virgin before me, and She seemed to threaten me for not keeping my vow. I lay face downward day and night upon the ground, and would not get up until that blessed Light encircled me, dispelling the evil thoughts that troubled me.

“Thus I lived in this wilderness for the first seventeen years. Darkness after

darkness, misery after misery stood about me, a sinner. But from that time until now the Mother of God helps me in everything.”

Abba Zosimas again inquired, “How is it that you require neither food, nor clothing?”

She answered, “After finishing my bread, I lived on herbs and the things one finds in the desert. The clothes I had when I crossed over the Jordan became torn and fell apart. I suffered both from the summer heat, when the blazing heat fell upon me, and from the winter cold, when I shivered from the frost. Many times I fell down upon the earth, as though dead. I struggled with various afflictions and temptations. But from that time until the present day, the power of God has guarded my sinful soul and humble body. I was fed and clothed by the all-powerful word of God, since man does not live by bread alone, but by every word proceeding from the mouth of God (Dt 8:3, Mt.4:4, Luke 4:4), and those who have put off the old man (Col 3:9) have no refuge, hiding themselves in the clefts of the rocks (Job 24:8, Heb 11:38). When I remember from what evil and from what sins the Lord delivered me, I have imperishable food for salvation.”

When Abba Zosimas heard that the holy ascetic quoted the Holy Scripture from memory, from the Books of Moses and Job and from the Psalms of David, he then asked the woman, “Mother, have you read the Psalms and other books?”

She smiled at hearing this question, and answered, “Believe me, I have seen no human face but yours from the time that I crossed over the Jordan. I never learned from books. I have never heard anyone read or sing from them. Perhaps the Word of God, which is alive and acting, teaches man knowledge by itself (Col 3:16, 1 Thess 2:13). This is the end of my story. As I asked when I began, I beg you for the sake of the Incarnate Word of God, holy Abba, pray for me, a sinner.

“Furthermore, I beg you, for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior, tell no one what you have heard from me, until God takes me from this earth. Next year, during Great Lent, do not cross the Jordan, as is the custom of your monastery.”

Again Abba Zosimas was amazed, that the practice of his monastery was known to the holy woman ascetic, although he had not said anything to her about this.

“Remain at the monastery,” the woman continued. “Even if you try to leave the monastery, you will not be able to do so. On Great and Holy Thursday, the day of the Lord’s Last Supper, place the Life-Creating Body and Blood of Christ our God in a holy vessel, and bring it to me. Await me on this side of the Jordan, at the edge of the desert, so that I may receive the Holy Mysteries. And say to Abba John, the igumen of your community, ‘Look to yourself and your brothers’ (1 Tim 4:16), for there is much that needs correction. Do not say this to him now, but when the Lord shall indicate.”

Asking for his prayers, the woman turned and vanished into the depths of the

desert.

For a whole year Elder Zosimas remained silent, not daring to reveal to anyone what he had seen, and he prayed that the Lord would grant him to see the holy ascetic once more.

When the first week of Great Lent came again, Saint Zosimas was obliged to remain at the monastery because of sickness. Then he remembered the woman's prophetic words that he would not be able to leave the monastery. After several days went by, Saint Zosimas was healed of his infirmity, but he remained at the monastery until Holy Week.

On Holy Thursday, Abba Zosimas did what he had been ordered to do. He placed some of the Body and Blood of Christ into a chalice, and some food in a small basket. Then he left the monastery and went to the Jordan and waited for the ascetic. The saint seemed tardy, and Abba Zosimas prayed that God would permit him to see the holy woman.

Finally, he saw her standing on the far side of the river. Rejoicing, Saint Zosimas got up and glorified God. Then he wondered how she could cross the Jordan without a boat. She made the Sign of the Cross over the water, then she walked on the water and crossed the Jordan. Abba Zosimas saw her in the moonlight, walking toward him. When the Elder wanted to make prostration before her, she forbade him, crying out, "What are you doing, Abba? You are a priest and you carry the Holy Mysteries of God."

Reaching the shore, she said to Abba Zosimas, "Bless me, Father." He answered her with trembling, astonished at what he had seen. "Truly God did not lie when he promised that those who purify themselves will be like Him. Glory to You, O Christ our God, for showing me through your holy servant, how far I am from perfection."

The woman asked him to recite both the Creed and the "Our Father." When the prayers were finished, she partook of the Holy Mysteries of Christ. Then she raised her hands to the heavens and said, "Lord, now let Your servant depart in peace, for my eyes have seen Your salvation."

The saint turned to the Elder and said, "Please, Abba, fulfill another request. Go now to your monastery, and in a year's time come to the place where we first time spoke."

He said, "If only it were possible for me to follow you and always see your holy face!"

She replied, "For the Lord's sake, pray for me and remember my wretchedness."

Again she made the Sign of the Cross over the Jordan, and walked over the water as before, and disappeared into the desert. Zosimas returned to the monastery with joy and terror, reproaching himself because he had not asked the saint's name. He

hoped to do so the following year.

A year passed, and Abba Zosimas went into the desert. He reached the place where he first saw the holy woman ascetic. She lay dead, with arms folded on her bosom, and her face was turned to the east. Abba Zosimas washed her feet with his tears and kissed them, not daring to touch anything else. For a long while he wept over her and sang the customary Psalms, and said the funeral prayers. He began to wonder whether the saint would want him to bury her or not. Hardly had he thought this, when he saw something written on the ground near her head: "Abba Zosimas, bury on this spot the body of humble Mary. Return to dust what is dust. Pray to the Lord for me. I reposed on the first day of April, on the very night of the saving Passion of Christ, after partaking of the Mystical Supper."

Reading this note, Abba Zosimas was glad to learn her name. He then realized that Saint Mary, after receiving the Holy Mysteries from his hand, was transported instantaneously to the place where she died, though it had taken him twenty days to travel that distance.

Glorifying God, Abba Zosimas said to himself, "It is time to do what she asks. But how can I dig a grave, with nothing in my hands?" Then he saw a small piece of wood left by some traveler. He picked it up and began to dig. The ground was hard and dry, and he could not dig it. Looking up, Abba Zosimas saw an enormous lion standing by the saint's body and licking her feet. Fear gripped the Elder, but he guarded himself with the Sign of the Cross, believing that he would remain unharmed through the prayers of the holy woman ascetic. Then the lion came close to the Elder, showing its friendliness with every movement. Abba Zosimas commanded the lion to dig the grave, in order to bury Saint Mary's body. At his words, the lion dug a hole deep enough to bury the body. Then each went his own way. The lion went into the desert, and Abba Zosimas returned to the monastery, blessing and praising Christ our God.

Arriving at the monastery, Abba Zosimas related to the monks and the igumen, what he had seen and heard from Saint Mary. All were astonished, hearing about the miracles of God. They always remembered Saint Mary with faith and love on the day of her repose.

Abba John, the igumen of the monastery, heeded the words of Saint Mary, and with the help of God corrected the things that were wrong at the monastery. Abba Zosimas lived a God-pleasing life at the monastery, reaching nearly a hundred years of age. There he finished his temporal life, and passed into life eternal.

The monks passed on the life of Saint Mary of Egypt by word of mouth without writing it down.

"I however," says Saint Sophronius of Jerusalem (March 11), "wrote down the Life of Saint Mary of Egypt as I heard it from the holy Fathers. I have recorded everything,

putting the truth above all else.”

“May God, Who works great miracles and bestows gifts on all who turn to Him in faith, reward those who hear or read this account, and those who copy it. May he grant them a blessed portion together with Saint Mary of Egypt and with all the saints who have pleased God by their pious thoughts and works. Let us give glory to God, the Eternal King, that we may find mercy on the Day of Judgment through our Lord Jesus Christ, to Whom is due all glory, honor, majesty and worship together with the Unoriginate Father, and the Most Holy and Life-Creating Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.”

