



Parish Information Bulletin

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Fr Athanasios and Fr Ephraim are available at the Church every Monday to Friday between 4.00 and 6.00pm for Holy Confession and any spiritual need.

..it is not the task of Christianity to provide easy answers to every question, but to make us progressively aware of a mystery. God is not so much the object of our knowledge as the cause of our wonder.



Bishop Kallistos Ware

SUNDAY 5 APRIL

5th Sunday of Lent, St Mary of Egypt, Mark 10: 32-45

SATURDAY 11 APRIL

SATURDAY OF LAZARUS

SUNDAY 12 APRIL

GOSPEL READING: John 12: 1-18
EPISTLE READING: Philippians 4: 4-9

Saturday of the Holy and Righteous Friend of Christ, Lazarus

On the Saturday before Holy Week, the Orthodox Church commemorates a major feast of the year, the miracle of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ when he raised Lazarus from the dead after he had lain in the grave four days. Here, at the end of Great Lent and the forty days of fasting and penitence, the Church combines this celebration with that of Palm Sunday. In triumph and joy the Church bears witness to the power of Christ over death and exalts Him as King before entering the most solemn week of the year, one that leads the faithful in remembrance of His suffering and death and concludes with the great and glorious Feast of Pascha.

According to an ancient tradition, it is said that Lazarus was thirty years old when the Lord raised him; then he lived another thirty years on Cyprus and there reposed in the Lord. It is furthermore related that after he was raised from the dead, he never laughed till the end of his life, but that once only, when he saw someone stealing a clay vessel, he smiled and said, "Clay stealing clay." His grave is situated in the city of Kition, having the inscription: "Lazarus the four days dead and friend of Christ." In 890 his sacred relics were transferred to Constantinople by Emperor Leo the Wise, at which time undoubtedly the Emperor composed his stichera for Vespers, "*Wishing to behold the tomb of Lazarus . . .*"



Meditation - Mark 10: 32-45

True greatness can be discovered by looking upon every person as one's brother or sister and by seeking to serve that person with selfless love. True greatness is bestowed by God, not the world. True greatness confounds human expectations of self-acquired glory; and it eliminates human friction caused by pride and vanity. True greatness reconciles, liberates, and unites all through the power of the love of Christ. The supreme example of true greatness is Christ Himself who at the Last Supper washed His disciples' feet and said to them: "I, your Lord and Teacher, have just washed your feet. You, then, should wash one another's feet" (Jn. 13:14).

Christ humbled Himself unto death on the Cross and so God glorified Him with "the name that is greater than any other name, [that is], Jesus Christ [who] is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:10-11).

Humble Repentance or Paralysing Guilt?

Whenever we experience guilt and shame because of something we have done wrong, we need to ask ourselves a question. Do we feel that way because we are sorrowful that we have disobeyed God or because we cannot stand being less than perfect in our own eyes or those of others? The first kind of humiliation is spiritually beneficial and may lead to repentance, but the second kind is simply a form of pride that easily paralyses us in obsessive despair. At this point in our lives, most of us probably experience some mixture of these two types of shame. As we grow closer to Christ, the first must increase and the second must decrease.

When we wonder if there is hope for the healing of our souls in this way, we should remember St. Mary of Egypt. She stands as a brilliant icon of how to repent from even the most shameful sins. Mary experienced a healthy form of guilt when her eyes were opened to how depraved she had become through her life of addiction to perverse sexual pleasure. Through the intercessions and guidance of the Theotokos, she venerated the Holy Cross at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and received Communion on her way to decades of ascetical struggle in the desert. When the monk Zosima stumbled upon her almost 50 years later, he was amazed at her holiness. He saw this holy woman walk on water and rise up off the ground in prayer, but like all the saints she knew only her own sins and perpetual need for the Lord's mercy.

Perhaps what makes St. Mary of Egypt's story such a beautiful icon of true repentance is that she was genuinely humble before God. She was not sorrowful for her sin out of a sense of wounded pride, obsessive self-centred guilt, or fear of what others thought of her. Instead, she said earnestly to the Theotokos "Be my faithful witness before your Son that I will never again defile my body by the impurity of fornication, but as soon as I have seen the Tree of the Cross I will renounce the world and its temptations and will go wherever you will lead me." And she did precisely that, abandoning all that she had known for the long and difficult journey that led to the healing of her soul. Her focus was completely on doing whatever it took to reorient her life toward God, to purify her desires so that she would find true fulfilment in Him.

Today the Orthodox Church calls us all to follow her example of repentance, regardless of the details of how we have sinned in thought, word, and deed. By commemorating a notorious sex addict who became a great saint, we proclaim that no sin is so shameful that we cannot repent of it. An honest look at our lives, as we should all take during Lent, dredges up shame and regret in various forms. St. Mary of Egypt reminds us to accept humbly the truth about our failings as we confess our sins, call for the Lord's mercy, and do what is necessary to find healing. Her example reminds us not to be paralysed by prideful obsessions that block us from being freed from slavery to our passions. Even her depraved way of life did not exclude St. Mary of Egypt from acquiring remarkable holiness. If she did not let a perverse form of pride deter her from finding salvation, then no one should be ashamed to kneel before Christ in humility. The Saviour did not reject her and He will not reject us when we come to Him as she did.

In today's gospel text, James and John related to Christ in a very different way, for they wanted the best positions of power when He came into His Kingdom. The Lord challenged their prideful delusions by reminding the disciples that humility, not self-exaltation, is the way to life eternal. He said "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." How shocking that today we celebrate honest, humble repentance from a woman with a truly scandalous past while some of the men closest to Christ in His earthly ministry think only of getting worldly power for themselves.

Perhaps the key difference is that St. Mary of Egypt got over obsession with herself. Instead of assuming that she was "damaged goods" for whom there was no hope, she humbly died to self by taking up her cross. Indeed, her repentance began in the context of venerating the Holy Cross at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. The rest of her journey required profound faith, sacrifice, and courage. To undo with God's help the harm that she had done to herself through years of debauchery must have been incredibly difficult. But sustained by the Lord's mercy and the intercessions of the Theotokos, that is precisely what she did over the remaining decades of her life.

Today, so near the end of Lent and only a week from Palm Sunday, we see that this is the path we must take also. In order to follow it, we must not be paralysed in prideful shame about anything we have said, thought, done, or otherwise experienced or participated in at any point in our lives. Instead, we must have the brutal honesty and deep humility of St. Mary of Egypt, a woman with a revolting past who became a shining beacon of holiness. That is how she found healing for her soul and it is how we will find healing for ours also. The good news of this season is that the Lord makes such blessedness possible for us all through His Cross, His descent into Hades, and His glorious resurrection on the third day. But in order to participate in the great mystery of His salvation, we too must get over our pride, accept His mercy, and actually repent. If St. Mary of Egypt could do that with her personal history, we can too.