

SAINT MARY OF EGYPT

On the fifth Sunday of Great Lent, our Church commemorates St. Mary of Egypt. The Mother of God helped this former harlot to arrive at repentance and to flee from sin in the following manner:

“When the day of the Elevation of the Cross arrived [recounts St. Mary of Egypt], I decided to join the people who were going to church for the vigil, my sole intention being to look at the young men who would be there. When I arrived at the church, I tried to enter through the door but was pushed aside by others and was unable to enter. Everyone was proceeding into the church; however, it was impossible for me to enter. Even though I made three-four repeated attempts, I could not get through the door, and so I remained outside in the courtyard. I then walked over to one of the corners of the church. As I stood there pondering, I understood that I had been prevented from entering on account of my innumerable sins. I then began to weep bitterly for my transgressions, and as I did so, I noticed high up on the wall an icon of the Virgin Mary. As I gazed at her icon, I sighed deeply and said, ‘O Virgin Theotokos who gave birth to our Lord Jesus Christ: I know that I am not worthy of looking at your holy icon on account of my many sins. Nevertheless, God became a man in order to call sinners to repentance. Hence, come to my aid and help me enter the church so I can also see the Venerable Cross upon which your Son was crucified for my sins, and upon which He spilt His Immaculate Blood to save us sinners. If I am counted worthy of beholding the Precious Cross, I beg you, intercede on my behalf and assure your Son that I will no longer defile my body; rather, when I exit the church, I will go wherever you guide me.’

“Having said this, I felt relief. Then I joined a group of people and entered the church with them freely without any hindrance as the first time. When I approached and witnessed the Most-Holy Cross, I was overcome with fear and awe. I fell to the ground and venerated it with tears, and then I got up and rushed back to the spot where the icon of the Virgin Mary was located, and I addressed her, ‘O Most-Holy Virgin, you did not disdain me, your sinful and unworthy servant. On the contrary, you helped me see that which I longed for and desired.

Hence, my Lady Theotokos, show me how to be saved. Lead me to salvation. You who became my sponsor, become my guide and teach me how to be pleasing to your Son.’ As I was saying these things, I heard a voice responding, ‘If you cross over the Jordan river, you will find tremendous rest and benefit.’ As soon as I heard this, I exclaimed loudly, ‘My dear Theotokos! My dear Theotokos, do not abandon me.’ Having said this, I left for the Jordan river.”

After she dwelt in the desert, the Mother of God aided her in her struggle toward holiness. This is how she related her experiences to St. Zosimas:

“I lived in this desert for seventeen years, during which time I had innumerable temptations from the demons. Every time I sat down to eat, I would recall the meat and fish of Egypt, I remembered the wine I used to drink, and my heart would be set ablaze because here I barely had enough water to drink. I would also remember the songs I knew, and I would start to sing; however, I would straightaway bring to mind my sins and the Immaculate Virgin who had become my surety and thus I, the wretch, would feel compunction and weep. Without hesitation, I would then call upon the Theotokos and almost immediately a brilliant light would appear before me that dispersed all these evil thoughts. How can I describe the flame of fornication that consumed my heart? Whenever such vulgar thoughts arose, I would fall to the ground weeping, and I would not get up until that light dispersed the evil images. And so, I was plagued and assaulted by such temptations, Abba Zosima, for seventeen years. From then on, and up until today, with the help of my Panagia I am no longer disturbed by any passions.”

Through her holy prayers, may Christ our God grant us sincere repentance. Amen.