

# A Voice in the Wilderness

The Newsletter of St. George Orthodox Christian Church



Rev. Matthew P. Binkewicz, Pastor

*Glory be to Jesus Christ! Glory be Forever!*



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5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Great Lent-St. Mary of Egypt

March 21, 2021



"Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death and deliver Him to the Gentiles; and they will mock Him, and scourge Him, and spit on Him, and kill Him. And the third day He will rise again." (Mk 10:33-34)

As we meditate on these words of

our Lord's passion, beloved in Christ, and ponder its mystery, let us take heart from the words of promise uttered by our Lord Himself: "And the third day He will rise again." For the Christian who takes these words seriously, they are words of hope, strength, and victory over evil. This is especially so when considering the lurking dangers which surround us in our struggle to live what the life in Christ implies.

One of these dangers is the possibility of slipping back into our old ways and bad habits following our intense efforts of conversion during Great Lent and Holy Week. More cunning still is the danger that our practice of religion might one day become a thing of habit. In the early days of Christianity there was vigorous enthusiasm towards the new faith. But by the end of  
*(continued p. 3)*

5th Sunday-St. Mary of Egypt

\* St. Benedict of Nursia \*

Epistle: Hebrews 6: 13-20

Gospel: Mark 9: 17-31

St. George Orthodox Christian Church is a community of believers who strive to live a life according to the Gospel of Christ and teachings of the Church.

We worship God in Trinity - Father+Son+Holy Spirit.

We are dedicated to living out Christ's commandment to, *Love the Lord your God with all your heart, ad with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.*

## **On Repentance by Metropolitan Jeremiah of Gortnya**

My Christian brothers and sisters, what will become of our sins, the multitude of our great sins? With those we committed when we were young and those when we were grown. And even in old age we don't abandon vile sin.

And if you think about it, sin's a terrible thing because it blemishes our beautiful soul; it takes away our joy and makes us sad; and, worst of all, it separates us from God. But I have to tell you that you should be happy,

because the cure has been found for the soul that's sinned and it washes and cleanses it of the ugliness of sin.

And this remedy is the blood of Christ! Indeed. Christ's death on the Cross was a sacrifice for the remission of our sins: 'The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us of all sin' (1 Jn. 1, 7). Had Christ's blood not been shed, we wouldn't have been able to erase any transgression, not even a white lie, however much we tried. Let me say

again: 'The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us of all sin'.

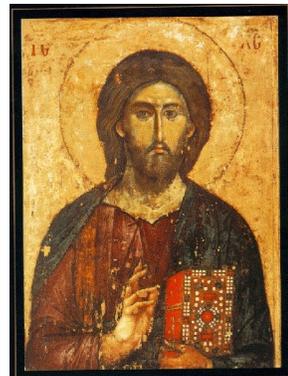
On our part, what's required for the remission of our sins is repentance. Repentance means that we humbly accept that we're to blame for what we've done, that we're guilty, that we shouldn't have done it and that, if we're tempted again in similar circumstances, we won't do it again. As we can see, repentance requires humility, because egotists can't say '  
*(continued p.2)*

We invite all to worship in our services. Sunday Divine Liturgy begins at 9:30 AM

If you have any questions about the church or would like to speak with our pastor, please call Fr.

Matthew at 607-280-1586

Glory be to Jesus Christ. Glory be Forever.





Troparion to St. George

As the deliverer  
of captives  
and defender  
of the poor,  
healer of the infirm  
and champion of kings,  
victorious great  
martyr George  
intercede with Christ  
our God  
for our souls  
salvation.

**News and Notes**

We welcome all who are worshipping with us today. Because of COVID-19, our social hour has been canceled until we receive further instructions from the Department of Health.

**Pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5.17)**

Please keep the following in your prayers: Esther, Clement John, Mother Onufria, Meg, Larissa, Jack, Stephen, Louise, George, Evan, Ryan, Sandy, Samuel, Anatoly, Alexey, Abraham, Susan, Jenny, Deb, Dan, Bob, Catherine, Skip, Doug, Heidi, Laura, Elizabeth Matthew, Corella, Ron, Daniel, Frankie, Pat, Kathleen, Terena, Loretta, the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, & those persecuted for their faith in Christ.

**From the Great Canon of St. Andrew**

The Lord once rained fire from heaven and consumed the land of Sodom. Seek salvation on the mountain as did Lot, O my soul, and find thy refuge in Zoar.

Flee from the flames, O my soul, flee from the burning heat of Sodom, flee the destruction of the divine fire.

I alone have sinned against Thee, I have sinned above all men; reject me not, O Christ my Savior.

Thou art the Good Shepherd: seek me, the lamb that has gone astray and do not forsake me.

Thou art my sweet Jesus, Thou art my Creator, and in Thee shall I be justified, O Savior.

I confess that I have sinned, I have sinned against Thee, O Savior. But in Thy compassion absolve me and forgive me.

Arise, O my soul and consider all the deeds which thou hast done, and set them up before thine eyes.

Now pour out the drops of thy tears and boldly confess to Christ of thy deeds and thoughts, and so be thou justified.

In life's course, O Savior, there has been no sin, no deed, no wicked thing, that I did not commit.

I have sinned as no one has ever before, in mind, word and intent, in purpose, deed and thought.

I offer to Thee in purity the tears of mine eyes and the sighs from the depth of my heart, crying: O God, have mercy on me.

**On Repentance, continued from p.1**

I've sinned'. But repentance isn't 'OK, I sinned'; it's a feeling of profound pain at having broken God's law, at the fact that God told us not to do something and we went ahead and did it anyway, in direct opposition to His all-holy will. That's a terrible thing! And this feeling makes us shed tears, the blessed tears of repentance.

But the kind of repentance we see in the lives of the saints, with sighs and groaning doesn't exist among us today, or is very rare. And so, my friends, what will happen? Without repentance we won't be saved? No. Because without repentance, the fact that Jesus Christ was crucified isn't enough. Our repentance is essential. As someone so beautifully and correctly put it, the flinty hardness called 'sin' is eroded by a mixture of two drops: one drop is the blood of Christ; the other is a tear of the sinner.

Since repentance is so necessary for our salvation- and our salvation is everything- let's make sure that we repent, truly and properly. Let's not

delude ourselves and take care of other things while ignoring the main issue, which is repentance for our sins. Lots of Christians today experience utter exhaustion from their missionary work, from their pilgrimage trips, from carrying out charitable works,



but it appears from their disappointing behavior that they haven't learned the lesson of repentance at all. It's obvious from their demeanor and even their words that they haven't learned, that is, that they don't live their repentance.

In the first place, those who really live their repentance, not merely in a superficial way, never condemn another person. The pain over their own sins prevents them from judging others. Besides, those who are really living their repentance don't talk about their activities, advertising them in bulky tomes in which they present themselves to the best possible advantage. And, to tell you a third characteristic, those who are truly repentant continually condemn themselves for their actions. They aren't upset when others condemn them even if they do so on the basis of lies. Because they say: 'Even if the charges are lies, we have so many other, secret sins that other people don't know about. It's good that they condemn us: we do one thing and are punished for another'.

My Christian brothers and sisters, let us ask Our Lady the Mother of God to give us repentance. We should certainly go to a confessor to confess our sins and feel the Lord's mercy and forgiving love for us.

*(Homily on St. Mary of Egypt cont'd from p.1)*

of the second century that original zeal had already begun to show signs of weariness. And what was first a thing of splendor and glory was now becoming traditional, half-hearted and nominal.

As a result, the standards demanded by Christianity were considered to be a burden and an obstacle. Persons did not want to differ from others - as expected by the Christian ethic. There has always been a distinct separation between the Christian and the world. As foretold by our Lord in the Gospel of St. John (15.19): "If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you."

All this involved an ethical demand. It demanded a new sense of morality, a new kindness, a new service, a new forgiveness - far above the standards of the world. And it was difficult. Once the first zeal and enthusiasm were gone, it became harder and harder to stand up against the enemies of the Church - both from within and from without - and to refuse to conform to the generally accepted standards and practices of the world.

The world, as used in the scriptural reference just quoted, is hostile to the Christian; it is a world without God. It does not know the Christian, because it does not know Christ crucified. Because the world is in collaboration with the evil one, the Christian must overcome it. In this struggle, the Christian's primary weapon is faith embodied in the power of the Cross. Hostile as the world is, it is nevertheless doomed and will one day vanish with all its evil. That is why it is folly to identify with the world and to be captivated by its allurements.

The message we are called upon to spread to others is simple yet profound. We live in an evil and hostile world. However, the person committed to Christ possesses what is needed to overcome it. When the destined end of the world comes, therefore, that person is safe because he/she is a member of the body of Christ, His Church, the kingdom of God on Earth. Nevertheless, the more dependent we are upon the things of the world - its material goods, as well as its fleeting pleasures and fascinations - the less free we are and the more distant from

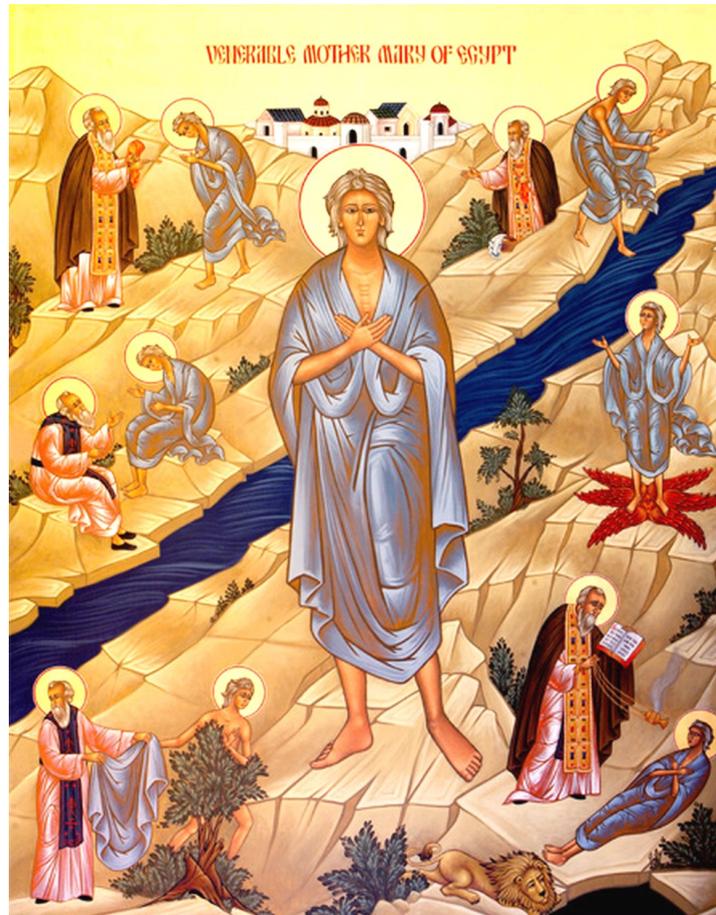
God's kingdom.

How can this theology be translated into practice? What practical things are there to say about the Church and the Christian way of life that can be applied to our daily life? One must first be strenuously and consistently engaged in Christian fellowship. This means that we must not only be bound to God, but we must also be bound to each other. God has loved us. By His terrible death on the Cross, He showed the length to which God's love will go and that there is no limit to what His love will do for us. That, then, is the best reason for loving each other. Consequently, the person who loves God must also love his neighbor. Love of one's neighbor, however - and this is most important - must not be only a sentimental emotion but a dynamic towards practical help. Just as a tree is known by its fruit, there is no better way to know a person than by his conduct, since deeds speak louder than words.

The social Gospel of Christianity calls for our active participation in alleviating the pain and suffering of others. The Gospel teaches us that there are many opportunities to display the love of Christ in everyday life. To follow Christ means extending a helping and sympathetic hand to our neighbor who is suffering or in pain; it means giving of what we have to our neighbor who has not; it means feeding the

hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, clothing the naked, and visiting the sick and the imprisoned. To shut our heart and refuse to give to our neighbor in need is to show that the love of God has no place in us.

This reflection began with the unsettling reminder of the dangers that surround us in our struggle to live the life in Christ - the danger of slipping back into our old ways and of allowing our practice of faith to become a thing of habit. That certainly is the case when it is limited to ritual piety. The practice of faith that does not issue forth in acts of love remains a dead letter. Similarly, fine words will never take the place of fine deeds; and no amount of talk of Christian love will take the place of a humane and kindly action to our neighbor in need, involving some small sacrifice. For in that action of love, the principle of God's love for us as manifested by His Son's death on the Cross is operative again.



## St. Mary of Egypt by Fr. Timothy Pavlatos

One of the most prominent figures we find in Great Lent is a woman whose very life epitomizes the most important theme during this period of time, and her name is St. Mary of Egypt. She is an icon of repentance, a depositor of hope, and an evangelist like few others because, after fleeing into the desert, she hardly spoke at all, and to only one person at that! Nevertheless, though she had renounced the world, and detached herself from living among people, her love for God and her silent yet harsh ascetic struggle in the desert became the catalyst for many people since her time to bear her name and strive to follow her example of repentance.

St. Mary of Egypt's life story, as recorded by St. Sophronius, is one of the most profound and inspirational stories one will ever hear. It is impossible to begin reading about her journey and not yearn to know the end. The very first words you read when you encounter her story speak to the timeless value and absolute need to pass down the events about her life from one generation to the next.

While there are literally hundreds of stories of various Saints in the Church, I cannot think of one that has had such an impact on the lives of others, outside of the life and trials of Job. If St. Mary's life were not of such noteworthiness, then why would the Church appoint her as the person to emulate, giving her the distinction of occupying the 5th Sunday of Great Lent? Not only this, but the Church believed her life to be of such significance to the faithful, who are collectively called to deepen their own life of repentance, that the reading of her entire life was assigned during the service of the Great Canon of St. Andrew of Crete.

The greatest takeaway from her life is that salvation is possible for anyone who truly repents. This may not sound like a profound statement, until you realize that her adult life was spent as a prostitute. We do not know her upbringing, her family of origin, what she had encountered by way of abuse, neglect or abandonment. But we could surmise that her upbringing was not ideal, otherwise, why would she "choose" such a path as prostitution? This is not for us to know, at least at this time. If this information were important she would have revealed these details. What is of importance are the details of her

life that she gave to Zosimus the priest, information that she dreaded sharing. What courage it took for her to expose the depth of her sin and the shame that accompanied her actions to the priest Zosimus. "I am ashamed, Abba, to speak to you of my disgraceful life, forgive me for God's sake!"

Through these words, St. Mary was exhibiting some very powerful feelings and emotions: shame, fear and also courage. St. Mary had never shared her story prior to the day she met Zosimus the priest and thus we take the narrative she shared as her confession to this man of God. Here too lies a very important lesson for all of us, and that is, do not allow shame to stand in the way of courage when it comes to approaching our Lord Jesus Christ in the

mystery of Holy Confession. Well-known researcher, speaker and author, Brene Brown defines shame as, "the intensely painful feeling or experience of believing that we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love and belonging—something we've experienced, done, or failed to do makes us unworthy of connection."

Shame is a very powerful thing and can prevent us from connecting with others, including God. Shame is also painful. We are all flawed and we do things we are not proud of, and yet, we are loved and we do belong to the One Who has given us life. Being flawless or sinless has never been a prerequisite for being loved by God for "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). God's love for us is not "contingent" on anything because God is Love (cf. I

Jn.4:8), and He cannot "not" love us, no matter what we do.

God loved Mary of Egypt even when she was a prostitute, and His love for her was perfect and complete. He loved her just the same as He loved Peter, John the Baptist and His own mother. Through her deep repentance, bearing the shame of her deeds, and turning her life toward God, St. Mary of Egypt experienced the love of God in a most transformative way. Though she bore the scars of her transgressions, and painfully related them to Zosimus the priest, she knew she was forgiven and loved by God. May we all carry with us the life of St. Mary of Egypt all the days of our life and hold it up as an example of what is possible for those who love God.

