

## St. Mary of Egypt Sermon 2010

Lord, grant me chastity, but just not yet. This prayer was recited by St. Augustine of Hippo—a Father of the Church. It was shared with us by Dr. George Demacopoulos this past Wednesday evening during his lecture. In his twenties, St. Augustine was discovering Christianity and beginning his journey into the faith, but he had his vices, which he knew he should remove, yet was not ready to do so. Most of us struggle with the reality that there is so much more we should be doing for our souls, so many things we can and should change, and yet, we either put it off for a later date, or we reject making the change all together. Unfortunately, there is often a window of willingness that opens rarely and closes very quickly. When we don't act on it, when we do not make the decision then and there, we may never decide to change.

Today marks the fifth Sunday of Great Lent and the Sunday of St. Mary of Egypt. At the age of twelve, St. Mary of Egypt ran away from her home and began living her life in lustful pursuits, even to the point of being a prostitute. For seventeen years, in the city of Alexandria, she lived this empty life. At the age of 29, she boarded a ship heading for Jerusalem which carried pilgrims who were on their way to visit the Holy Lands. When she arrived there she noticed everyone entering one of the churches which had the actual Holy Cross of Christ. Curious to see what was going on, she walked toward the Church and as she started walking

in, a sort of force field prevented her from entering the church. Several times she tried entering the house of God, but the unseen power prevented her. Frightened by what was happening, she turned to an icon of the Virgin Mary that hanged at the entrance. She asked for forgiveness of her sins and begged the Theotokos to let her into the church so that she might also be allowed to look at and venerate the Holy Cross of Christ. To her amazement, she was able to enter the church with ease. As she was leaving the church, she again went in front of the icon of the Virgin Mary and thanked her for allowing her to enter the church to venerate the Holy Cross. All of a sudden she heard a voice which said, "If you cross the Jordan, you will find true peace." Immediately, with nothing more than three loaves of bread, she set out for the barren desert. For 48 years Mary lived in this desolate land. A couple of years before her death, the monk Zosimas came upon her per chance. Zosimas asked how she had found herself in that desert and she proceeded to tell him her life story. Before he left, Mary asked him to return the following year and to commune her, which he did. Two years after their first encounter, Zosimas returned to commune Mary but found her dead on the spot where he first met her. Next to her body was written in the ground "Abba Zosimas, bury in this place the body of the humble Mary. Give dust to dust."

What would have happened if St. Mary said to the Theotokos, no thanks, I don't really feel like heading out to the desert today, maybe next time. Would she

have repented, would she have saved her soul, would she be a saint today? God enters our lives in profound ways only once or twice in our lifetime, if we ignore those moments, we lose the opportunity to make profound changes and save our souls. There may never be another chance, another moment when we allow God and His saints to intercede in our lives, to change us. St. Mary of Egypt understood this and did not hesitate. St. Peter realized this as well and repented after he denied Christ; St. Paul understood this after Christ appears to him, while he was persecuting Christians, and St. Paul was converted. The prodigal son came to himself and realized this reality as well, St. Constantine encountered this as well when he saw a cross in the sky and the words, conquer in this sign. The woman washing Christ's feet with her tears felt this, and finally, the thief on the cross took advantage of the opportunity of a lifetime by asking to be remembered in the Kingdom of heaven, to which he was responded, today you will be with me in paradise.

Great Lent gives us the opportunity every year to reflect on our lives and make a decision to change certain things, those obstacles, vices and shortcomings, which might prevent us from entering the Kingdom of Heaven, so that we might live good and holy lives, sanctifying others around us. But do we take advantage of these opportunities. I was blessed yesterday to go to the new monastery of All Saints in Calverton with about 20 of our parishioners. What a gift it was to serve

and to hear the novices' angelic voices respond during the liturgy. When I came back from the monastery, I had a peace about me that I rarely feel, and decided to share that peace and wonderful feeling with the rest of my family. About two months ago I decided to make some changes in the way I minister in this community—I became tired of all the attacks from the evil one and even from our own parishioners. I chose peace, love and forgiveness. Yesterday I was reminded of the fruits of peace, love and forgiveness as I was celebrating the service and enjoying the peace out east. I felt God's presence and am deciding to do something about it. I have and continue to decide to choose peace over conflict and love instead of resentment.

The life of St. Mary of Egypt has inspired many people who have at one point or another in their lives felt totally lost and far from God, to repent, turn their lives around, and begin pious and Christian lives. Today the Church commemorates her, and raises her up as an example for all of us. May we take advantage of those moments of willingness, and make serious changes in our lives immediately, not waiting for a later day to change. Christ is coming, He will be entering Jerusalem next Sunday and prepares for His Passion, the Passion, which liberated our souls. Christ also did not wait to be crucified, but offered Himself without delay, when the time came. May we not delay in removing those obstacles and begin our journey into His Kingdom.