

Saint Nicholas Serbian Orthodox Church

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The Fifth Sunday of Great Lent (04.10.2022)

Mark 10:32-45

And they were in the way going up to Jerusalem; and Jesus went before them: and they were amazed; and as they followed, they were afraid. And he took again the twelve, and began to tell them what things should happen unto him, 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: 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. 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. And he said unto them, What would ye that I should do for you? 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. 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? 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: 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. And when the ten heard it, they began to be much displeased with James and John. 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. But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many. *(KJV)*

St. Mary of Egypt Luke 7:36-50

And one of the Pharisees desired him that he would eat with him. And he went into the Pharisee's house, and sat down to meat. 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, 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. 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. And Jesus answering said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he saith, Master, say on. There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most? Simon answered and said, I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged. 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 Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment. 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. And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven. And they that sat at meat with him began to say within themselves, Who is this that forgiveth sins also? And he said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace .(KJV)

The last week of Great Lent has arrived. The time remaining until the arrival of Holy Week is brief and precious. If we are to benefit greatly, we must invest extensively in the remaining days.

The Lord God is good and merciful, Today's Gospel from St. Luke describes the Lord Jesus Christ's willingness and power to forgive sins. Jesus recognized and responded to the repentant woman's great faith.

The remaining time until the arrival of Holy Week is a time for repentance and completely focusing on the Lord Jesus Christ. The arrival of Pascha will soon be with us.

Now is the time to ready ourselves for the arrest, trial and crucifixion of our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus' great and immeasurable love for each person as exemplified on the Cross and merits a central place in the heart, mind and soul.

Today and each day we need to guard our heart, mind and soul that we do not put our soul in peril. Evil abounds in today world. That which appears good may actually be evil.

Serious prayer and fasting keep the believer vigilant and on guard against evil attacks and perilous temptations. The Lord God will strengthen and guide attentive and vigilant believers to the Heavenly Kingdom.

In today's Gospel of St. Mark, Jesus describes His forthcoming arrest, abuse, death and Resurrection. Let us use the days ahead to seriously contemplate all that Jesus has done in love for each of us.

Worldly distractions and events need to be set aside. Jesus deserves our increased focused attention with each arriving moment. Jesus' love will heal our deepest hurts and cleanse our transgressions.

When we repent, we give ourselves to Jesus Christ and become unified with Him. When we repent, Jesus fills our heart, mind and soul and transforms us. The Body and Blood of Christ renews us, guides us and empowers us in Christ.

The Divine services of the Church today and each day strengthen, educate and offer healing. We learn of Christ and draw closer to Christ with each service we attend.

The time of life comes only once. We do well to invest our time wisely, seeking first the Kingdom of God and His righteous. (Mt.6:33) The Church keeps us on the narrow path to the Kingdom, salvation and eternal life.

Let us heed Jesus' lessons on forgiveness and service in the Name of the Lord as recorded in the Gospels for today. May we recognize Jesus' unsurpassed love and humility and make them a part of our daily lives.

Thank God for the Church and the opportunity to repent. Thank God for the Lord Jesus Christ. Let us always be thoroughly mindful of Jesus' suffering, death on the Cross and Resurrection which changed the world forever.

The Fifth Sunday of Great Lent. St. Mary of Egypt. Venerable Father Hilarion the New. March 28/April 10, 2022. Hidden Valley, Pennsylvania. Father Rodney Torbic

The Prologue from Ochrid
St Nikolai of Zhicha
(04.07.2022)

1. SAINT MARY OF EGYPT

The biography of this wonderful saint was written by St. Sophronius, the Patriarch of Jerusalem. Once, during Great Lent, a certain priest-monk (heironomk), the Elder Zosimas, withdrew into the wilderness beyond the Jordan, a twenty-day trek. Suddenly, he caught sight of a human being with a withered and naked body, whose hair was as white as snow, and who fled from Zosimas's sight. The elder ran for a long while, until this person stopped at a brook and cried out: "Abba Zosimas, forgive me for the sake of the Lord. I cannot face you, for I am a naked woman." Zosimus then threw his outer garment to her, which she wrapped around herself, and then she showed herself to him. The elder was frightened upon hearing his name spoken from the mouth of this woman whom he did not know. Following his prolonged insistence, the woman related her life's story. She was born in Egypt, and at the age of twelve began to live a life of debauchery in Alexandria, where she spent seventeen years in this perverted way of life. Driven by the adulterous flame of the flesh, she one day boarded a boat which was sailing for Jerusalem. Arriving at the Holy City, she wanted to enter the church in order to venerate the Honorable Cross, but some invisible force restrained her, preventing her from entering the church. In great fear, she gazed upon the icon of the All-holy Mother of God in the narthex (vestibule) and prayed that she be allowed to enter the church to venerate the Honorable Cross, all the while confessing her sinfulness and uncleanness, and promising that she would go wherever the All-pure One would direct her. She was then permitted to enter the church. Having venerated the Cross, she went back to the narthex and, before the icon, gave thanks to the Mother of God. At that very moment she heard a voice saying: "If you cross over Jordan you will find true peace!" Immediately she purchased three loaves of bread and started out for the Jordan, arriving there that same evening. The next day she received Holy Communion in the Monastery of St. John and crossed over the Jordan River. She remained in the wilderness for forty-eight years in great torment and fear, struggling with passionate thoughts as though with wild beasts. She ate vegetation. After she finished her narrative, when she stood for prayer, Zosimas saw her levitate in the air. She begged him to bring her Holy Communion the following year on the shore

of the Jordan, where she would then come to receive it. The following year Zosimas arrived with Holy Communion on the shore of the Jordan in the evening. He wondered how the saint would cross the Jordan. Then, in the light of the moon, he saw her approach the river, make the sign of the Cross over it and walk upon the water as though upon dry land. After Zosimas communed her, she begged him to come the following year to the same brook where they had first met. Zosimas came and discovered her lifeless body on that spot. Above her head in the sand was written: "Abba Zosimas, bury the body of the humble Mary on this site; render dust to dust. I died on April 1, the same night of the saving suffering of Christ, after having received Communion of the Divine Mysteries." From this inscription Zosimas first learned her name and the other and awesome miracle--that the previous year, when she received Holy Communion, she arrived that same night at this brook, which took him twenty days to reach. Thus, Zosimas buried the body of this wonderful saint, Mary of Egypt. When he returned to the monastery, Zosimas related the entire story of her life and the miracles which he had personally witnessed. Thus the Lord knows how to glorify penitent sinners. St. Mary is also commemorated on the Fifth Sunday of Great Lent. The Church holds her up as an example to the faithful during these days of the Fast as a model of repentance. She reposed in about the year 530 A.D.

2. SAINT MELETION, BISHOP OF SARDIS IN ASIA MINOR

Meletion was a celebrated shepherd of the second-century Church. Governing with great ability, he endeavored to gather all the books of Sacred Scripture into a single codex. By his meekness and piety, Meletion also labored to restore peace in the Church of Laodicea, which was troubled by a controversy regarding the celebration of Pascha (The Feast of the Resurrection). Besides this, he defended Christianity against the pagans. He traveled to Rome in about the year 170 A.D., to submit to Emperor Marcus Aurelius a written Apologia (Defense) of the Faith and of the Christian Church. St. Meletion--this learned, pious and zealous man--reposed peacefully in the Lord in the year 177 A.D.

3. THE VENERABLE PROCOPIUS THE CZECH

Procopius was born in Hotish in what is today the Czech Republic. He was ordained a priest, then retreated to a mountain to live according to the model of the Eastern hermits. Herzog Ulrich (the Duke) accidentally came upon Procopius and assisted him in establishing the Monastery of St. John the Forerunner by the Sazava River. This holy man died in the year 1053 A.D.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT MARY THE EGYPTIAN

A wonderful penitent, self-tormentor,
Mary hid herself from the face of men.

Yes, O sinful me,

By passion darkened.

Passions are beasts which eat at our heart;
Like serpents they secretly weave in us a nest.

Yes, O sinful me,

By passion consumed!

In order to save sinners, Thou didst suffer, O Christ,
Do Thou now not loathe me, the impure one!

Hearken to the cry of Mary,

The most-sinful of all!

The Lord showed compassion, He healed Mary;
Her darkened soul He whitened as snow.

Thanks be to Thee, O All-good One,
O Lord most dear!

Thou didst cleanse an impure vessel and gild it with gold;
Thou didst fill it to overflowing with Thy grace.

This is true mercy.

To Thee, O God, be glory!

And Mary became radiant with the Spirit,
Girded by strength as an angel of God,

By Thy power, O Christ,

By Thy mercy, Most-pure!

What is this fragrance in the awesome wilderness,
Like beautiful incense in a temple coffer?

Mary breathes it,

She exudes sanctity!

REFLECTION

Why is it that much is said and written about the sufferings of holy men and holy women? Because the saints alone are considered victors. Can anyone be a victor without conflict, pain and suffering? In ordinary earthly combat, no one can be considered victorious or heroic who has not been in combat, endured much or

suffered greatly. The more so in spiritual combat, where the truth is known, and where self-boasting not only does not help at all but, indeed, hinders it. He who does not engage in combat for the sake of Christ, either with the world, with the devil or with one's self, how can he be counted among the soldiers of Christ? How then is it with Christ's fellow victors? St. Mary spoke about her savage spiritual combat to Elder Zosimas: "For the first seventeen years in this wilderness, I struggled with my deranged lusts as though with fierce beasts. I desired to eat meat and fish, which I had in abundance in Egypt. I also desired to drink wine, and here I did not have even water to drink. I desired to hear lustful songs. I cried and beat my breast. I prayed to the All-pure Mother of God to banish such thoughts from me. When I had sufficiently wept and beat my breast, it was then that I saw a light encompassing me on all sides, and a certain miraculous peace filled me."

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the Lord Jesus in death:

1. How there lay in the grave the lifeless body of Him Who, while living, gave life to the dead;
2. How against Him, even in death, there raged the hatred of His enemies;
3. How His disciples locked themselves in a house *for fear of the Jews* (John 20:19).

HOMILY

on the fulfillment of the great prophecy

"Like a lamb led to the slaughter" (Isaiah 53:7).

Through many centuries of time, the discerning Prophet Isaiah foresaw the awesome sacrifice on Golgotha. From afar he saw the Lord Jesus Christ led to the slaughter as a lamb is led. A lamb permits itself to be led to the slaughter as it is led to the pasture: defenseless, without fear, and without malice. Thus, our Lord Christ was led to the slaughter without defense, without fear, and without malice. He does not say, "Men, do not do this!" nor does He ask, "Why are you doing this to Me?" nor does He condemn anyone. Nor does He protest. Nor does He become angry. Nor does He think evilly of His judges. When, from the crown of thorns, His blood flowed, He was silent. When His face was soiled from being spat upon, He was silent. When His Cross became heavy along the way, He endured. When His pain became unbearable on the Cross, He complained not to men but to the Father. When He breathed His last, He directed His gaze and sighs toward heaven and not toward earth. For the source of His strength is heaven and not earth. The source of

His consolation is in God and not in men. His true homeland is the Heavenly Kingdom and not the earthly kingdom.

Behold, the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world (John 1:29). This was the first exclamation of St. John the Baptist when he saw the Lord. And, behold, now on Golgotha that prophecy was fulfilled. Behold, under the weight of the sins of the entire world, the Lamb of God lay slaughtered and lifeless.

O brethren, this costly sacrifice was made for our sins as well. The blood of this sinless and meek Lamb was destined for all times and all generations, from the first to the last person on earth. Christ also felt the pains on the Cross for our sins, even those of the present day. He also wept in the Garden of Gethsemane for our wickedness, our weakness and our sinfulness. He also destined His blood for us. Brethren, let us not then despise the indescribable costly price by which we have been redeemed. Because of this sacrifice of Christ we, indeed, have some worth as people. Without this sacrifice, or if we disavow this sacrifice, our worth, by itself alone, is equal to nothing. It is equal to smoke without a flame or a cloud without light.

O Lord, unequalled in mercy, have mercy on us also!

To Thee be glory and praise forever. Amen.

Services this Week

- ❖ *Saturday, April 16th – Lazarus Saturday – Vrbica – Vesper Service - Sanctification of pussy willows and procession following Vespers. 06:00 PM*
- ❖ **6th Sunday of Lent (Palm Sunday)** *April 17th – 10:00 AM Divine Liturgy*