



April 1, 2009

**HIS EMINENCE METROPOLITAN ALEXIOS` REFLECTIONS
ON THE SUNDAY OF ST. MARY OF EGYPT**

"Let us give glory to God, the Eternal King, that we may find mercy on the Day of Judgment through our Lord Jesus Christ, to Whom is due all glory, honor, majesty and worship together with the Unoriginate Father, and the Most Holy and Life-Creating Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen." St. Sophronius, The Life of St. Mary of Egypt

We spoke last week about the lessons that we learn from the Sundays of Great Lent. This Sunday, the fifth Sunday of Lent, is dedicated to a great Saint, St. Mary of Egypt. St. Mary was not a faithful Christian, or a brave martyr or a miracle worker – she was not even a believer and she was a terrible sinner. In fact, she was what we would call now a "celebrity," famous (notorious might be a better word) in her world for her sinfulness.

Yet even in her sinfulness, she had a heart, as everyone does, because we are all created in the image of God. His beauty is in everyone's heart, as sensitivity, softness, piety, goodness and compassion. If our hearts have not been damaged by the world or hardened by our sinfulness, to the individual who can still hear, God will find a way to speak to our inner heart, to fill our hearts and lives with His goodness, mercy and love.

This is what happened to St. Mary of Egypt. She went to Jerusalem, on a whim as an adventure, and to look for customers. Instead she found Christian pilgrims, standing in long lines. When she asked what they were waiting for, they told her that they were waiting to venerate the Cross of Christ, who had

given His life out of love for her. At the doors of the church, Mary was held back "by some kind of force". Try as she might, she could not enter, although everyone else went in with no difficulty at all. Suddenly she realized that it was her own self, her way of life that prevented her from going in. She realized how much she had hurt herself by her sinful life.

With all her heart and soul, she prayed for forgiveness to the Theotokos and finally tried again to enter the church. "A great terror and stupor came over me, and I trembled all over, but when I came to the door which until then had been closed to me, it was as if all the force that had previously prevented me from entering now allowed me to go in. So I was admitted without hindrance, and went into the holy of holies and I was found worthy to worship the mystery of the precious and life-giving Wood of the Cross. Thus, I understood the promises of God and realized how God receives those who repent."

At once St. Mary left to live a lonely and ascetic life in the desert beyond the Jordan River, promising to devote her life to striving to live closer to the God who died for love to save her. There she lived a life of extreme asceticism, burned by the sun and eating very little. Eventually she was found by St. Zosimas who heard her confession and gave her Holy Communion, and when she died, he buried her.

It is no accident that as we near the end of Great Lent, the Church provides us with the story of this very human saint. From St. Mary, we learn us that no matter how sinful we are, no matter what dreadful things we have done, no matter how much we have hurt ourselves and others, and no matter how far we have strayed from God, our loving Father is waiting for us with open arms.

Her story teaches us that we still have time, time to be reconciled with God and with each other, time to open our hearts, so that we may truly experience Holy Week and His Passion and glorious Resurrection in our own lives and hearts. Amen.