



My Beloved Ones,

This Sunday, we celebrate one of the great saints of our Church, St. Mary of Egypt. She began her life, a great sinner; and on the Feast of the Holy Cross, she went to Jerusalem—not to join the pilgrims, but to find men who could support her sinful style of life. Eventually, this beautiful young woman was curious to enter the Church of the Holy Sepulchere, but found that, unlike the faithful walking past her, an invisible force would not allow her to step inside. Recognizing the seriousness of her sins, she approached an icon of our Theotokos, tearfully repenting, and promising to become an ascetic.

Then, she was permitted to enter the church—and after she venerated a relic of the True Cross, she returned to the icon, and heard a voice say, “If you cross the Jordan, you will find glorious rest.” Obedient, she went to the Monastery of St. John the

Baptist, where she confessed her sins and received the Holy Eucharist. The next morning, she left to live in the wilderness, taking with her only three loaves of bread. After these were consumed, she allowed herself only what she could find in the wilderness.

Before she fell asleep in the Lord, she encountered St. Zosimas of Palestine, and she told him her story. She made one request of him: that on Holy Thursday of the next year, he bring her the Holy Eucharist. As promised, he returned to the desert on the following Holy Thursday and saw her walking on the waters of the Jordan. She requested that he repeat the sacrament for her, the next year. Again, he obliged, but after his twenty day journey from the monastery, he arrived on Holy Thursday, April 1<sup>st</sup>, and found, not only St. Mary’s incorrupt body, but next to it, writing in the sand that explained how she fell asleep the very night after receiving Communion, and how her body was mystically transported to the very same spot in which they first met. St. Zosimas buried St. Mary, passing down her story until it was written by St. Sophronios.

As we honor his repentant saint, both on April 1<sup>st</sup> and this Sunday, April 4<sup>th</sup>, I thought of another story about guarding against the passions. There was once a brother monk who was, like St. Mary, given to the passion of the flesh. Naturally, hearing that this monk was keeping a woman in his cell angered his brother monks very much, and so they asked their *iugmenos*, Abba Ammonas to go with them to confront their fallen brother. When the hermit heard that his brothers were coming to punish him, he quickly hid the women in a barrel he kept in his cell. When his fellow monks arrived, Abba Ammonas knew where the woman was hiding, and so, he sat on top of the barrel, ordering the other monks to search the cell carefully. Of course, having failed to find the woman, the monks were embarrassed, and apologized to their brothers. When they left, Abba Ammonas sent the woman away, and took the monk by the hand telling him, “*Brother,*

*be on your guard; pay attention to yourself.*” “Be on your guard; pay attention to yourself.” St. Mary of Egypt received this warning through the force that kept her away from the Church of the Holy Sepulchere, and she followed the instructions, receiving, as was promised, “...*glorious rest.*”

In these trying times, it is important that we also be on our guard and pay attention to ourselves, regardless of whether we are in our homes, or anywhere else. In this way, we will be truly purified and prepared to experience our Lord’s Entry into Jerusalem, His Passion, and His Life-Giving Resurrection.

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