



My Beloved Ones,

This Sunday, we celebrate one of the great saints of our Church, St. Mary of Egypt. She began her life, as a beautiful young woman, but also a great sinner; indeed, on the Feast of the Holy Cross, she went to Jerusalem—not to join the pilgrimage, but to find men who could support her lifestyle. Eventually, she was curious to enter the Church of the Holy Sepulchere, but found that, unlike the faithful, 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, where she lived for the next 47 years.

It was after these many years that she encountered St. Zosimas of Palestine and told him her story. She made one request of him: that on Holy Thursday of the next year, he would bring her Holy Communion. 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 1st, and found St. Mary’s incorrupt body, with 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 same spot where they first met. St. Zosimas buried St. Mary, passing down her story until it was written by St. Sophronios.

The Church has already honored St. Mary of Egypt on April 1st, the date on which she fell asleep in the Lord. Why then, is she given such a place during the Great Lenten Fast? The truth remains, that like St. Mary of Egypt, we are each subject to the temptations of the Devil. However, if St. Mary could be turned from a life which she lived for pleasure alone, then we too can learn from her struggles. We must remember that her temptations did not cease when she came to the desert; in fact, the Devil battled with her even more, to convince her to turn away. Therefore, as we approach the end of the Fast, and the observance of our Lord’s Passion, may we use St. Mary of Egypt as an example that it is never too late to turn to God, so long as we seek Him, and, like St. Mary, take up our own Crosses to serve Him, rather than ourselves.

+ALEXIOS

Metropolitan of Atlanta

