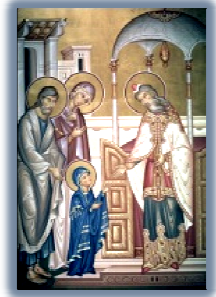


Sunday of St Mary of Egypt and the 10th Commandment

In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Throughout the long history of Orthodox Christianity the Church has known literally thousands and hundreds of thousands of conversion experiences. This remarkable record continues even to this day and in this country. The Church also knows of countless men and women whose former sinful and even degraded lifestyles were completely transformed and healed by submitting to Christ through His Holy Church.



Entrance of the Theotokos to the Temple

By God's grace, former dictators and kings, persecutors of Christians, prostitutes, thieves, and murderers, today make up our canon of saints. This bears witness to the Church's reason for being here on earth and why our Lord established the Church. The Church *is* God's ultimate vehicle for transforming people's lives. The Church's main purpose is to heal, sanctify, and save all believers.

In our the Church is properly called the "redeemed community" of Christ Jesus, a union of sinners constantly struggling and growing toward God's eternal Kingdom. Sometimes I hear people say that they don't go to Church because everyone there, from the clergy on down, are not good followers of Christ. They don't understand that the Church does NOT exist only for people who are holy and that Christ came into this world *precisely to save sinners*. He established his Church in order to continue save sinners.

Today is the Sunday of St. Mary of Egypt, one of the saints most dear to the hearts and minds of Orthodox Christians. She was a public sinner, a prostitute--whose life I won't summarize here because it is so well known to us all. I'll speak instead about the "meaning" of her life.

St. Sophronius of Jerusalem composed her life. He transcribed it from the oral story, which had been passed down. He considered her conversion story to be so important that it should to be set down in writing and carefully preserved and transmitted to the whole Church. St. Mary's story is such a magnificent display of the power of repentance that the church began reading her story during Great Lent, and it is read during Matins on the Thursday of the fifth week--this week just past.

Here is what an Orthodox layman (Paul Fuller) posted about the meaning of St. Mary of Egypt to him; it bears quoting: *"The story of the life of Saint Mary of Egypt is extremely dear to my heart. This story leaves me with a great hope and understanding that some day, by the grace of God, I too can be saved, although I am unworthy. Her story is nothing short of God's miraculous work."*

Two things in St. Mary of Egypt's life stand out and are worth noting. First, Mary's complete and utter immersion in her sins; this made her aware of just how dark her spiritual state was. Second, God's full-force attempt to transform her life made her abundantly aware of just how much God loved her.

Like most prostitutes and others of ill repute in her day, Mary had no time for a spiritual life. She offered herself from client to client, blinded by her transgressions. She did not realize she was spiritually sick, and that there was something really wrong with her. Then her past struck her in the

face like a brick, and her heart was pierced with the pain of knowing how many souls she had led to hell, including her own.

If Mary of Egypt had sinned only a few times, then repented, and again fell into the same sins, her conversion process not only might have been lukewarm, but also might never have occurred at all. As we know, a little sprinkle of rain will not cause a person to run inside for shelter, but a violent downpour will. St. Mary experienced this "downpour" of sins, this unrelenting storm in her spiritual life, and with God's grace, she ran for cover and was saved. (By the way, this is why we must never gossip or condemn or criticize others because, believe it or not, they may very well become tomorrow's saints, like Mary of Egypt.)

Dear Brothers and Sisters, the Church today lifts up St. Mary of Egypt today as a prime example of repentance and conversion. Remember once again the Prodigal Son from the Scriptures. At the lowest point in his life did he "come to his senses" and return back to his father. The road, like the one St. Mary of Egypt traveled, was a long and narrow one, but it turned ought to also be the most direct road to the Kingdom of God.

Each of us is on a road, too. For some of us, it is a very long and narrow one, with many potholes. But for each of this road can turn ought to be a direct road into the Kingdom of Heaven, if only we will look at ourselves and frankly evaluate our present state, and then run to the Lord for forgiveness and healing!

We come now, at last, to the Tenth Commandment and its application in our lives. This commandment reads: "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife; thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house, nor his field ... nor anything that is thy neighbor's."

This commandment instructs us to refrain from envy and avoid all sinful desires, not just in our outward behavior, but in our inner world - our thoughts, feelings and desires. It calls on us to strive towards spiritual cleanliness. It is important to understand that every sinful act starts inside as a sinful temptation or thought. When a person lingers on it, it becomes a desire, and as that desire strengthens and is eventually translated into a sinful action or deed, and envy is a very horrible poison for the soul.

In order for God's commandments to do us any good, it is necessary *to make them ours*; that is, we should actually live them every day and all of every day, both in our minds and in our bodies. The commandments should permeate our consciousness and even our subconscious mind.

By thus protecting our minds and hearts and bodies, we can be true witness of Christ, just as was St. Mary of Egypt in her repentance. May it be so!

In the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.