

## The Sunday of St Mary of Egypt

*"I will charm her, and bring her into the desert, and speak tenderly to her heart." (Hosea 2:14)*

Wednesday Evening at the canon



encourage those who struggle to overcome them. She felt more present in the room than before. We say many times that Toronto is a real desert, which makes you feel alone more than anything else. The breaking of communion with God in this part of the world left many children orphans, wandering through the desert, with no place to return to, with no place to call home. Like St Mary of Egypt, they would live most of their years in a place where their life is scorched by the sun and devalued by the setting. Where nourishment and fresh water are hard to find. Where mirage is replacing reality, making it possible for many to escape the truth in the most self-harmful way possible. Where the voices of the idols are amplified creating a noise in your head that overcomes the silence of the desert. Self-determination and autonomy help you get lost in the desert, creating the illusion of freedom, bringing more quickly the poor soul closer to her own end. It may even happen in the span of a moment, if you believe the voice that tells you to jump. And some do. Too many these days. The desert is harmful for the human person. St Zosimas went there only for the sake of fasting. So did Jesus, who was led there by the Spirit after His baptism. The desert is a place that shows our vulnerability and our weaknesses in order to make us desire to return to the promised land, to the communion with God and with each other. The desert is not the place one could call home.

And yet, St Mary lived there most of her life. She was led over the Jordan and there she died. We speak many times about the life in the desert and what this life does to us. And this is so true.

Yet, through St Mary of Egypt, we found out that the desert is also a place where the deepest passions of the soul can heal. The solitude of the desert may do for us what a community cannot. The desert is the place where fasting becomes customary and so does the prayer that is nurtured by it. It is the place where, after experiencing complete alienation of the soul, real communion is encountered. The body of Christ is brought to you in a chalice by a priest who sees holiness in you, despite the brokenness of your life. In the desert the confession of sins

happens. It is triggered by the encounter of solitary souls who desire genuine communion because they experienced real forgiveness.

The desert is the place where the gratuity of a kind act is fully experienced within the heart because a stranger covers your nakedness with his own cloak, which will eventually become your burial garment.

The desert is not a place that can be called home. We'll always live in Toronto with the desire to enter the green orchard by the main gate. However, this is the place where God, for the sake of those who are lost, has made his dwelling. For the sake of those who left everything behind and tried to look for Him but got lost in the desert. The desert might not be our real home and yet it is the place where God is our neighbour who visits us day by day and night by night.

### **...a pinch of incense or a tick in a box...**

There are many stories of martyrs being offered a free pass out of death by giving them a way to honor the emperor without professing any faith. 'Just put a pinch of incense in front of his statue, you don't have to say anything, it's just a formality.'

This pinch of incense would appear for many of us today as a good compromise. 'Keep to yourself what you believe and continue to enjoy the benefits of the empire. After all, it's just a pinch of incense; what harm can that do?'



Yet our brothers and sisters in the faith of the early church chose death over the pinch of incense.

A few years ago, churches were also given a choice to either support abortion or lose summer job funding for students. All we had to do was do a tick in the small box at the end of our application. Catholic and Orthodox churches refused. The Mission, after talking at great length with our local MP, decided also to join in this refusal, suffering the consequence that we could not hire any students that summer.

In a few weeks the old government might possibly be again the new government. It is already in the works: a law that proposes revoking the charitable status of “anti-abortion organizations” and seeks to amend the Income Tax Act to eliminate “the advancement of religion” as a charitable purpose. This could mean the loss of our charitable status as a mission and a church.

No pinch of incense or simple tick in the box is possible for anyone professing the Orthodox faith. Yet this will be a challenge, because we will not abandon Christ in the poor who are our masters.

During this Lent, you may want to think of how you can continue to support the work of the church in both its worship and service, even possibly without getting a tax credit. It is also an opportunity to live a new-found freedom....

Let us pray about this. It's very concrete and it affects not only us, but the most vulnerable people of our society.

Christ is among us!



### **Announcements:**

This year, readings will be assigned in advance for Holy Saturday Vespers (Friday night). Fifteen Old Testament readings will be assigned among us to be practiced and prepared for that night. Brother Luke will be approaching each of you with assignments and suggestions in the coming days.

### **Today's gospel (Mark 10:32-45)**

*"Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man will be delivered to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death, and deliver him to the Gentiles; and they will mock him, and spit upon him, and scourge him, and kill him; and after three days He will rise."*

R. got sicker and sicker by the day. His face is skin and bone. This week he also had a few bandages covering both his cheeks. He is always polite, and he knows how to speak. He knows how to use words. He's been around for many years, and he saw some of the changes that the community has gone through recently. This week he wanted to tell us that he was grateful, and that the community was doing these days, in the morning and during the day. There is a flow of goodness that comes through all those who serve at the mission. He thought that this happens because there is a heart that cares in the back. A heart that loves.

R. speaks about the heart of the Father. The one from which the Son is begotten and the Holy Spirits proceeds. In the gospel, this silent love that moves all things, revealed something about himself. We found out in the gospel last week that the Father is not only the one that loves but also the one that cries. His love has a price, his tears. This was revealed in the father whose son was possessed by the evil spirit.

Today, the crying of the Father is revealed by the obedience of his Son. Crying has been heard in the scriptures during the week. It was a time to look for our own tears also. It is the crying that we fail to hear. *"Hear Oh Israel ..."* (Deuteronomy 6:4). Maybe that's why we fail to love God and our neighbour, because we cannot keep the very first commandment.

The love that generates all things and moves all things is not silent, it is us who cannot hear the cry, because we avoid the sorrow of the Father.

It is the Mother of God who listens to Him first. And she becomes the one who shares in the crying by the cross. Because listening moves her to compassion. The Father does not cry alone anymore. His Son is not orphan on earth in his suffering. The Mother of God is close to the cross. By crying, she also learns to forgive like her Son. Or rather learns to forgive like the Father.

When we fail to love we learn to listen. To listen to the One that moves all things and generates all things. Because it is love that speaks directly to us. We learn to love from the One who does not hide from us His Word.

### **Announcements:**

Continuing with the services approaching Holy Week posted on the bulletin board and available on our website. Come join us and take advantage by attending these very special services.

Wednesday, April 9 there will be a Presanctified Liturgy; starting at 6:30pm.

Friday, April 11 in the morning, we have a Presanctified Liturgy beginning at 7am.

Saturday, April 12th is Lazarus Saturday. Orthros will begin at 7am followed by Divine Liturgy beginning at 8am.

Next Sunday is Palm Sunday as we enter into Holy Week. Orthros will begin at 7am with the blessing of Palms and distribution to all. Following will be Divine Liturgy beginning at 8am with a Jerusalem Procession. Please arrive in time for this service as it's a beautiful way to enter into Holy Week on the path towards Pascha.

Sunday evening at 6:30pm will be the Bridegroom service to begin Holy week.

For Holy week, please plan on attending some or all of the services. This is a very special time of year that is foundational to our faith and travelling it together as a community is a beautiful way to bring us closer to Christ.

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Christ is among us!

Φῶτιος.



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We are an apostolate of the ecumenical patriarchate "Mother Church of Christ's poor" under the Omophorion of Metropolitan Gregory of Nyssa