

## The Fifth Sunday of Great Lent /

### Venerable Mary of Egypt

23 March / 5 March April



**Resurrection Tropar, Tone 1:** When the stone had been sealed by the Jews; / while the soldiers were guarding Thy Most Pure Body; / Thou didst rise on the third day, O Saviour, / granting life to the world. / The Powers of Heaven therefore cried to Thee O Giver of Life: / glory to Thy Resurrection O Christ! / Glory to Thy Kingdom; / Glory to Thy Dispensation, O Thou who lovest mankind.

**Tropar of St. Mary of Egypt, Tone 5:** Enlightened by the grace of the Cross, thou wast shown forth as a radiant lamp of repentance, dispelling the darkness of the passions, O all-holy one. Wherefore, thou didst appear as an angel in the flesh unto the sacred Zosimas in the wilderness. O Mary, our righteous mother, do thou intercede with Christ for us.

**Resurrection Kondak, Tone 1:** As God, Thou didst rise from the tomb in glory, / Raising the world with Thyself. / Human nature praises Thee as God, for death has vanished. / Adam exults O Master, Eve rejoices, for she is freed from bondage, and cries to Thee; / Thou art the Giver of Resurrection to all, O Christ.

**Kondak of St. Mary of Egypt, Tone 3:** Thou who once of old wast filled with all manner of fornication, art now seen today to be a bride of Christ by thy repentance. Thou didst love and emulate the life of the angels. By the Cross, thou didst annihilate the hordes of demons; for this cause thou art a bride now in the kingdom of the heavens, O Mary, thou all-modest one.

**St. Mary of Egypt** - The recorder of the life of this wonderful saint was St Sophronius, Patriarch of Jerusalem. A hieromonk, the elder Zossima, had gone off at one time during the Great Fast a twenty-days' walk into the wilderness across the Jordan. He suddenly caught sight of a human being with a withered and naked body and with hair as white as snow, who fled in its nakedness from Zossima's sight. The elder ran a long way, until this figure stopped at a stream and called: 'Father Zossima, forgive me for the Lord's sake. I cannot turn round to you, for I am a naked woman.' Then Zossima threw her his outer cloak, and she wrapped herself in it and turned round to him. The elder was amazed at hearing his name from the lips of this unknown woman. After considerable pressure on his part, she told him her life-story. She had been born in Egypt, and had lived as a prostitute in Alexandria from the age of twelve, spending seventeen years in this way of life. Urged by the lustful fire of the flesh, she one day got into a ship that was sailing for Jerusalem. Arriving at the Holy City, she tried to go into one of the churches to venerate the Precious Cross, but some unseen power prevented her from entering. In great fear, she turned to an icon of the Mother of God that was in the entrance, and begged her to let her go in and venerate the Cross, confessing her sin and impurity and promising that she would then go wherever the Most Pure led her. She was then allowed to enter the church. After venerating the Cross, she went out again to the entrance and, standing in front of the icon, thanked the Mother of God. Then she heard a voice: 'If you cross the Jordan, you will find true peace.' She immediately bought three loaves of bread and set off for the Jordan, arriving there the same evening. She received Communion the following morning in the monastery of St John, and then crossed the river. She spent forty-eight whole years in the wilderness in the greatest torments, in terror, in struggles with passionate thoughts like gigantic beasts. She fed only on plants. After that, when she was standing in prayer, Zossima saw her lifted up in the air. She begged him to bring her Communion the next year on the bank of the Jordan, and she would come to receive it. The following year, Zossima came with the Holy Gifts to the bank of the Jordan in the evening, and stood in amazement as he saw her cross the river. He saw her coming in the moonlight and, arriving on the further bank, make the sign of the Cross over the river. She then walked across it as though it were dry land. When she had received Communion, she begged him to come again the following year to the same stream by which they had first met. Zossima went, and found her dead body there on that spot. Above her head in the sand was written: 'Abba Zossima, bury in this place the body of the humble Mary. Give dust to dust. I passed away on April 1st, on the very night of Christ's Passion, after communion of the divine Mysteries.' Zossima learned her name for the first time, and also the awe-inspiring marvel that she had arrived at that stream the previous year on the night of the same day on which she had received Communion—a place that he had taken twenty days to reach. And thus Zossima buried the body of the wonderful saint, Mary of Egypt. When he returned to the monastery, he recounted the whole story of her life and the wonders to which he had been an eyewitness. Thus the Lord glorifies repentant sinners. St Mary is also commemorated in the Fifth Week of the Great Fast. The Church holds her up before the faithful in these days of the Fast as a model of repentance. She entered into rest in about 530.

## Matins Gospel IX

### Epistle: for Sunday: Heb 9:11-14

But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

### HE ENTERED THE MOST HOLY PLACE ONCE FOR ALL, HAVING OBTAINED ETERNAL REDEMPTION

If the priesthood established by the law has come to an end, and the priest who is 'in the order of Melchizedek' has offered his sacrifice, and has made all other sacrifices unnecessary, why do the priests of the new covenant perform the mystical liturgy? Now it is clear to those instructed in divinity that we do not offer another sacrifice, but perform a memorial of that unique and saving offering. For this was the Lord's own command: 'Do this in remembrance of me' (1 Cor. 11:24). So that by contemplation we may recall what is symbolised, the sufferings endured on our behalf, and may kindle our love towards our benefactor, and look forward to the enjoyment of the blessings to come.

*Theodore of Cyprus. The Eucharist. interpr. in XIV ep. S. Paul in Heb.8.4. B#15, p. 276.*

### for the Saint: Gal 3:23-29

### Gospel: for Sunday: Mark 10:32-45

Now they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was going before them; and they were amazed. And as they followed they were afraid. Then He took the twelve aside again and began to tell them the things that would happen to Him: "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death and deliver Him to the Gentiles; And they will mock Him, and scourge Him, and spit on Him, and kill Him. And the third day He will rise again." Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Him, saying, "Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask." And He said to them, "What do you want Me to do for you?" They said to Him, "Grant us that we may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on Your left, in Your glory." But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" They said to Him, "We are able." So Jesus said to them, "You will indeed drink the cup that I drink, and with the baptism I am baptized with you will be baptized; But to sit on My right hand and on My left is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it is prepared." And when the ten heard it, they began to be greatly displeased with James and John. But Jesus called them to Himself and said to them, "You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

### St. Mary of Egypt: The Battle Against the Passions

As you have been making your journey in life to the Orthodox Church and faith, you have probably encountered in the lives of the saints miraculous things taking place: saints who, while praying, have been lifted off the face of the earth, drawn toward the heavens; saints who have walked on water; saints who have healed the sick; even saints who have raised the dead. You have probably wondered, "What has changed? Why don't these things happen today?"

As you have taken up your cross to follow our Lord Jesus Christ, you have undoubtedly fallen short; and, as you confess your sins, you find that your confession is essentially the same as the one you previously made; and that one was like its predecessor, and so on. You have probably wondered, "Why can't I change? Why are my sins the same today?"

We have reached the fifth Sunday in Great Lent, a day dedicated to St. Mary of Egypt. You are probably familiar with her life, which we read here in the church last Wednesday evening, with the Great Canon of St. Andrew of Crete. She herself tells of her youth, and how she was given over to satisfying the passions of her flesh. There was no form of sexual indulgence that she would restrain herself from practicing; and she took delight in seducing others to join her in the same. This was her way of life until she was prevented from entering a church on the day of the Elevation of the Cross. Given a gift of insight, she repented of her sins, and having faith in the protection of the Most Holy Mother of God, she went into the desert.

We live in a desert. From what I can tell, the desert in the Holy Land is very similar to what you can see and experience here, once you've left the city behind, and gone out into the wilderness. There's an incredible difference between being alone out there, and our life today. Think of all the distractions available to us: movies; television; books, magazines, newspapers, theaters, to name just a few. We are seldom alone; and even when we are, we usually turn to one of the many forms of entertainment available to us, so that we do not have to confront ourselves and our situation.

This is not how it was for St. Mary. No food, apart from what she could find in the desert; no clothing, as what she had worn when she fled to the desert turned to rags and fell away; no forms of entertainment to ease any boredom or to fill the empty hours; and no one to talk to except God Himself. So it was that she found her desires returning to her again and again, the urge to return to the way of life she had practiced prior to coming to the Cross. She fought these temptations with prayer, unceasing prayer, striking herself on her breast while recalling the vow she had made to the Theotokos; or falling prostrate on the ground with tears and prayer for the temptation to pass away – and not ceasing to weep and pray, even if it meant remaining where she was for a day and a night, until the desire to sin had departed from her, replaced by the peace of God, the calm after a storm.

Who among us has done such battle against the passions? Think of how difficult it is for most of us to keep a simple rule of prayer, taking a few minutes during the day to be with God, to open to Him our hearts and minds. Think of how difficult it is to keep the fast; and how we will indulge ourselves with the glorious Pascha of our Lord. Think of how difficult it is for us to take a portion of what God has entrusted to us in material prosperity and give it away for the work of the church and to help those in need. Rather than confronting ourselves with the asceticism needed for us to become the masters of our passions, rather than the slave of our desires, we do not run to the desert: we run to those things that take our attention away from the kingdom of heaven, and bind ourselves ever more tightly to this world, and to our comfort and ease here.

We are about to start the final week of Great Lent this year. By the grace of God, there is still time for us to take steps toward the transformation of our being, to become a bit more ascetic in our life, to venture just a bit into the desert, leaving the world behind and drawing closer to God. Let us fast; let us pray; and let us ask God to accomplish our transformation from who we are today to being more and more in the likeness of His Son, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Holy mother Mary, pray for us!

*Fr John McCuen*

<https://orthodoxsermonsonline.blogspot.com/2009/04/st-mary-of-egypt-battle-against.html>

for the Saint: Luke 7:36-50

### **Saints of the Week**

**23 March / 5 April — The Hieromartyr Nikon** - Born in Naples of a pagan father and a Christian mother, he was an officer in the Roman army in Naples. He was not baptised, although his mother, unbeknown to his father, had instructed him in the Christian faith. Once, when he was setting off with his company to war, his mother advised him, if he were in trouble, to make the sign of the Cross and call on Christ to help him. And so, when Nikon's company was surrounded during the battle and close to final extermination, Nikon made the sign of the Cross and began to call upon Christ. At that moment he was filled with exceptional strength and rushed upon his opponents, killing some and putting the others to flight. Returning home, Nikon could not stop exclaiming in wonder: 'Great is the God of the Christians!' After he had brought joy to his mother with his report of the victory by the aid of Christ's Cross, he set sail in secret for Asia, where the Bishop of Cyzicus, Theodosius, baptised him. After his baptism, he shut himself up in a monastery and devoted himself to study and to asceticism. However, Bishop Theodosius had a vision before his death, in which he was told to consecrate Nikon as his successor. The aged Theodosius summoned Nikon immediately and ordained him deacon, and then priest and bishop. By divine providence Nikon came soon after this to Neapolis, where he found his mother still alive. On her death, he went to Sicily with nine disciples, one-time comrades in battle, and devoted himself to preaching the Gospel. There was a terrible persecution of Christians at that time, and Prince Quintianus seized Nikon and his companions and gave them over to great torture. One hundred and ninety of his disciples and friends were slain. The torturer tied Nikon to the tails of horses, threw him from a high cliff into a ravine, beat him and flayed him, yet Nikon survived all these tortures. He was finally slain with the sword and his body was abandoned in a field for the birds to eat, but a shepherd boy, possessed by a raging evil spirit, fell on the dead body of Christ's martyr, took hold of it, and was immediately healed. He spread the news about Nikon's body, and Christians came and buried it. St Nikon suffered and went to the Lord in the reign of the Emperor Decius; Our Holy Father Nikon of the Kiev Caves.

**24 March / 6 April — Forefeast of the Annunciation — St Artemon, Bishop of Seleucia;** Our Holy Father James the Confessor; The Hieromartyr Parthenius, Patriarch of Constantinople;

**Commemoration of the miracles at the Monastery of the Caves in Kiev** - Two friends, John and Sergius, swore brotherhood before the icon of the holy Mother of God in this monastery. John was a rich man, with a five-year-old son, Zachariah. John fell ill, and at his death commended his son to the care of Sergius, and left in Sergius's keeping a large sum of silver and gold for him to hand over to Zachariah when he had grown up. When Zachariah came of age, however, Sergius denied receiving anything from the deceased John. Then Zachariah said: 'Let him swear before the same icon of the most holy Mother of God, in front of which he accepted brotherhood with my late father, that he received nothing from John, and then I will seek nothing more from him.' Sergius agreed, but when he had sworn this and went up to kiss the icon, some force held him back and would not allow him to come near. Then, tormented all at once by a demon, he began to cry out: 'Holy fathers Antony and Theodosius, do not let this merciless angel destroy me!' The demon had attacked him by God's permission. He then told them of all the money which John had left. But when they opened the box, they found double the amount. Taking it, Zachariah gave it to the monastery and was himself tonsured as a monk. He lived a long time and was worthy of God's great gifts, entering peacefully into eternity; Our Holy Father Zacharias.





**25 March / 7 April — The Annunciation of Our Most Holy Lady, the Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary** — when the most holy Virgin had lived and served in the Temple at Jerusalem for eleven years, and was by then fourteen years old— when, that is, she was entering on her fifteenth year—the priests informed her that, according to the Law, she could no longer remain in the Temple but must be betrothed and marry. But, to the great surprise of all the priests, the most holy Virgin replied that she had dedicated herself to God and wished to a maiden remain till death and enter into wedlock with no-one. Then, by God's providence and under His inspiration, Zacharias, the high priest and father of the Forerunner, in consultation with the other priests, chose twelve unmarried men from the tribe of David so that they might entrust the Virgin Mary to one of them to preserve her virginity and care for her. She was thus entrusted to Joseph, an old man from Nazareth and a kinsman of hers. In his house, the most holy Virgin continued to live in the same manner as in the Temple of Solomon, passing her time in the reading of the sacred Scriptures, in prayer, in pondering on the works of God, in fasting and in handwork. She scarcely ever left the house, nor took an interest in worldly matters or events. She generally conversed very little with anyone, and never without a particular need. She was close friends only with the two

daughters of Joseph. But when the time prophesied by the Prophet Daniel had come and when God was pleased to fulfil the promise made to Adam when He drove him out of Paradise, and to the prophets, the mighty Archangel Gabriel appeared in the chamber of the most holy Virgin, at the precise moment (as some priestly writers have related) that she was holding open on her lap the book of the Prophet Isaiah and pondering on his great prophecy: 'Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son'. Gabriel appeared to her in angelic light and said to her: 'Rejoice, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee!', and so forth, just as is related in the Gospel of the divine Luke. With this angelic greeting and the descent of the Holy Spirit, the salvation of mankind and the renewal of creation were set in motion. The Archangel turned the first page of the story of the New Testament with the word 'Rejoice!', to show by this the joy that the New Testament signifies for mankind and for all things created. And therefore the Annunciation is looked upon as a joyous, as well as a great, feast;

**Tropar for the Annunciation of Our All-Holy Lady, the Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary, Tone 4:** Today is the crown of our salvation and the revelation of the mystery which is from before the ages! The Son of God becometh the Son of the Virgin, and Gabriel announceth the glad tidings of grace. Wherefore, with him let us cry out to the Theotokos: Rejoice, O thou who art full of grace! The Lord is with thee!

**Kondak for the Annunciation of Our All-Holy Lady, the Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary, Tone 8:** To thee, the champion leader, we, thy servants, dedicate hymns of victory and thanksgiving, as ones delivered from evils, O Theotokos; but in that thou hast invincible might, free us from all misfortunes, that we may cry to thee: Rejoice, O Bridge unwedded!

**Patriarch Tikhon** (in the world, Vassily Ivanovich Bellavin) was born in 1865 in the district of Pskov. He was very religious and a good pupil, always willing to help his fellow students. When he entered seminary at the age of 19, his fellow students prophetically nicknamed him "the patriarch". He was tonsured in 1891, and in 1898, at the tender age of 33, he was consecrated Bishop of the Aleutian-Alaskan Diocese in North America. He laboured tirelessly for his flock, earning their great love and respect. In 1907 he was recalled to Russia and raised to the rank of Archbishop. When war broke out Archbishop Tikhon was based in Vilno, Poland. He participated eagerly in all organisations which helped soldiers and the wounded, and visited the injured and dying at the front lines. In 1914 he was elected Archbishop of Moscow and in 1917 he was raised to the rank of Metropolitan. Shortly thereafter he was chosen by lot to be the first patriarch for 217 years. The consecration was performed in the ancient Patriarchal Cathedral. What a burden the new patriarch had to bear! Patriarch Tikhon was probably the greatest martyr of the Russian Church during the period of its persecution by the communists. As Patriarch of All Russia for eight years, he was invested with tremendous power and consequent responsibility. During that period he lived a selfless life, scarcely a free man, and in the end became another victim, for the sake of his faith and the whole Russian Church. He died on March 25, 1925. Holy New Martyr Tikhon, pray for us!

**Our Holy Father Justin, Abbot of Chelije Monastery in Valjevo, Serbia** - was born into a pious & priestly family on the Feast of the Annunciation, 1894. His name in the world was Blagoje. A church-minded youth, he entered seminary at the age of 11, where he studied under the then Hieromonk Nikolai Velimirovic, who was also his Father Confessor, and who was the most influential person throughout his life. After his graduation, the young Blagoje served as a student nurse during WW1. He was tonsured in 1916, receiving the name Justin. He then studied in Russia, forming a great love for Russian spirituality and piety, especially that of the common people. He then studied at Oxford, England, afterwards returning to teach in Seminary in Serbia, and undertake further study in Greece. He was ordained deacon in 1920 and priest in 1922. Many were attracted to this humble priestmonk, coming to him for confession and spiritual guidance. Father Justin had close contact at this time with two luminaries of the Russian Church: Metropolitan Anthony (Khrapovitsky) and the then Bishop John Maximovitch. A great intellect and ascetic, his labours enriched the Serbian Church. Worthy of special mention is his three volume exposition of the Orthodox Faith in Serbian, *The Dogmas of the Orthodox Church*, published in 1932. After WW2, Father Justin was exiled from Belgrade by the communists. He lived in several monasteries before settling in Chelije in 1948., where he remained until his repose on March 25, 1979. This women's monastery flourished under his guidance. Many pious people travelled from all over the world to hear him preach and teach the correct Orthodox Faith. He was a pillar of Orthodoxy and a true Holy Father of the 20th Century.

**26 March / 8 April — Synaxis of the Archangel Gabriel —Wine & Oil allowed** - The Holy Archangel Gabriel - The herald of the incarnation of the Son of God, he is one of the seven great angels who stand before the throne of God. He revealed to Zacharias the birth of the Forerunner, and said of himself: 'I am Gabriel that stands in the presence of God' (Lk. 1:19). His name, Gabriel, signifies 'man of God'. Speaking about the Annunciation, the holy Fathers comment that an angel with such a

name was sent to signify who He was, and of what nature He was, who would be born of the most pure Virgin. He would be the Man of God, the Man-God, the strong and mighty God. Others have found that it was this same Gabriel who announced the conception of the Virgin Mary to Joachim and Anna, and that it was he who taught Moses in the wilderness to write the Book of Genesis. The holy Fathers considered that Gabriel belongs to the foremost and highest order of the heavenly powers, the seraphim, since the seraphim stand closest to God. And so he is one of the seven seraphim closest to God. The names of these seven are: Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, Uriel, Selathiel, Jegudiel and Barachiel. Some would add Jeremiel to this number. Each has his own particular service, but all are equal in honour. Why did God not send Michael? For the reason that Michael's service is the suppression of the enemies of God's truth, while Gabriel's is the annunciation of the salvation of the human race;

**The Hieromartyr Irenaeus, Bishop of Srem** - It is thought that Irenaeus was a Slav. He was married and had children prior to becoming a bishop. He suffered for Christ during the reign of Maximian. At the time of horrible sufferings, his relatives stood around him crying and begged him to spare himself and them [that is, to deny Christ]. But this wonderful priestly-martyr loved the wounds of Christ more than all the riches of this world. At the same time Seren, a certain gardener in Srem, also suffered at the hands of Prince Probus, as did Afrius suffer in Regia. Because Irenaeus did not want to deny his faith, Prince Probus ordered that he be hurled from a bridge into the Sava river, where this shepherd of Christ's flock died and took up habitation among the citizens of heaven. He honourably suffered in the year 304 A.D.;

**27 March / 9 April — The Holy Martyr Matrona** - She was an orphan, and a servant in the house of a certain Jew in Salonica. The wife of this Jew constantly derided Matrona for her faith in Christ, and urged her to cast Christ aside and go to the synagogue. But the humble Matrona went about her work conscientiously, not replying to her mistress and secretly praying to Christ our God. On one occasion the Jewess discovered that Matrona had gone to church unbeknown to her, and demanded, in a great rage, to know why she had gone to the church and not the synagogue. 'Because God is alive in the Christian Church, but He has departed from the synagogues of the Jews', replied Matrona. Enraged by such a courageous answer, the Jewess thrashed her and locked her in a dark chamber, and in addition to that had her bound. But the next day she found her unbound by the power of God and kneeling in prayer, praising God. Then she locked her up again for the second time until she died of hunger. Then that wicked woman took the body of the holy maiden and threw it to the ground from the top of her house. Christians took the body of the martyr and buried it, and the bishop, Alexander, when he had learned of the many miracles worked by the holy martyr, built a church over her grave. As for the evil Jewess, she soon received her just reward, when, standing on the same spot from which she had thrown Matrona's body, she slipped and fell onto the cobbled pavement and was smashed to pieces; Our Holy Father John the Seer; Our Holy Father Paphnutius.

**28 March / 10 April — Our Holy Father, the Martyr Eustratius of the Kiev Caves** - He was very wealthy, but, moved by the love of Christ, gave away all his goods for His sake, entered the Monastery of the Caves and became a monk. When the Polovtsians conquered Kiev in 1097, they looted the monastery, slew many Christians and monks and gave Eustratius and other of the faithful to a certain Jew in the town of Khorsun as slaves. This Jew mocked the Christian faith and tried to compel the Christians to convert to the Jewish faith. Seeing that they had no other alternative, they all decided to starve to death rather than deny the true Faith. Eustratius encouraged the Christians in this decision. They all perished from hunger, some after three days, some after four and some after seven days. Eustratius, accustomed to fasting, remained the only one alive, and survived fourteen days without food. Infuriated that he had lost the money he had paid for the slaves, the Jew took his revenge by having Eustratius nailed to a cross. But Eustratius gave thanks to God from the cross and predicted an imminent and vicious death for the Jew. Possessed by a furious anger, the Jew stabbed him with a spear. And thus the holy man of God gave his soul to his Saviour. They cast his body into the sea, but it rose to the surface and many were the great miracles performed over it. Soon after this, the Byzantine Emperor commanded that the Jews in Khorsun be punished for their wickedness towards the Christians, and the torturer of the Christians was hanged on a tree and received the wages of Judas. Our Holy Father Hilarion the New; Our Holy Father Hesychius of Jerusalem; The Holy Martyr Boyan; The Miraculous Experience of Taxiotis.

**29 March / 11 April — Lazarus Saturday - St Mark the Confessor, Bishop of Arethusa** - St Gregory the Theologian and Blessed Theodoretus have given us an account of his sufferings. According to these accounts, Mark destroyed some pagan temples and brought many to the Christian faith during the reign of the Emperor Constantine. But when the Emperor Julian came to the throne and quickly became an apostate from the Faith, some of the inhabitants of Arethusa renounced Christ and lapsed into paganism. They rose up against Mark because he had demolished the temple and demanded that he either rebuild it or pay them a very large sum of money. As Mark refused to do either the one or the other, he was flogged and flayed and dragged through the streets. They then cut off his ears with strong, fine threads, stripped him naked, smeared him with honey and left him bound to a tree in the summer heat for the wasps, mosquitoes and hornets to eat. The martyr of Christ endured all this without complaint. He was quite old, and his face shone like an angel of the Lord. The pagans lowered the price of their temple again and again, finally demanding a quite insignificant amount which Mark could easily have given. But he refused to give even a single coin for that purpose. His endurance made a great impression on the citizens, and they began to admire him for it and to feel sorry for him, and gradually reduced the price of their temple to nothing just to allow him to remain alive. Finally, they let him go free and, one by one, all came to him to receive instruction and become Christians again. A deacon, Cyril, also suffered at this time for a similar cause in Heliopolis at the foot of mount Lebanon. He had broken some idols at the time of the liberation of Christianity and was cruelly tortured under Julian for this. The pagans were so enraged with him that, after they had killed him, they tore out his teeth and ripped open his stomach. Many others suffered on the same day as St Cyril. The evil pagans cut their bodies into small pieces, coated them with barley and fed them to the pigs. But retribution came swiftly upon them; all their teeth fell out and their mouths emitted an unbearable stench; Our Holy Father John the Hermit.



Lazarus Saturday is a paschal celebration. It is the only time in the entire Church Year that the resurrection service of Sunday is celebrated on another day. At the Liturgy of Lazarus Saturday, the Church glorifies Christ as "the Resurrection and the Life" who by raising Lazarus has confirmed the universal resurrection of mankind even before His own suffering and death.

At the Divine Liturgy of Lazarus Saturday, the baptismal verse from Galatians ("As many as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ" **Galatians 32:27**) replaces the Thrice-Holy Hymn, thus indicating the resurrectional character of the celebration, and the fact that Lazarus Saturday was once among the few great baptismal days in the Orthodox Church Year.

Because of the resurrection of Lazarus from the dead, Christ was hailed by the masses as the long-expected Messiah-King of Israel. Thus, in fulfillment of the prophecies of the Old Testament, he entered Jerusalem, the City of the King, riding on the colt of an ass (**Zechariah 9:9; John 12:12**) the crowds greeting him with waving branches and shouts of praise: Hosanna! Blessed is He Who comes in the name of the Lord! The Son of David! The King of Israel! Because of this glorification by the people, the Jewish priests and scribes were finally driven "to destroy Him, to put Him to death." (**Luke 19:47; John 11:53, 12:10**)

*Taken from The Orthodox Faith, Vol. II: Worship, by Fr. Thomas Hopko.*

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