

St. Michael Ukrainian Orthodox Church
Homily on the Fifth Sunday of Lent (St. Mary of Egypt)
St. Mark 10: 32-45; Hebrews 9: 11-14

Hebrews 9:11-14

But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us. For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

Mark 10:32-45

And they were in the way going up to Jerusalem; and Jesus went before them: and they were amazed; and as they followed, they were afraid. And he took again the twelve, and began to tell them what things should happen unto him, Saying, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be delivered unto the chief priests, and unto the scribes; and they shall condemn him to death, and shall deliver him to the Gentiles: And they shall mock him, and shall scourge him, and shall spit upon him, and shall kill him: and the third day he shall rise again. And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, come unto him, saying, Master, we would that thou shouldest do for us whatsoever we shall desire. 36 And he said unto them, What would ye that I should do for you? They said unto him, Grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand, in thy glory. But Jesus said unto them, Ye know not what ye ask: can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? And they said unto him, We can. And Jesus said unto them, Ye shall indeed drink of the cup that I drink of; and with the baptism that I am baptized withal shall ye be baptized: But to sit on my right hand and on my left hand is not mine to give; but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared. And when the ten heard it, they began to be much displeased with James and John. But Jesus called them to him, and saith unto them, Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.

ST MARY OF EGYPT

Troparion Tone 5

Enlightened by the grace of the Cross,/ thou wast seen to be a bright light of repentance,/ dispelling the darkness of passions, O all holy one./ thou didst appear as an angel in the flesh/ to holy Zosimas in the wilderness./ Intercede with Christ for us, O Mary our righteous Mother.

Kontakion Tone 3

Thou who wast once obsessed with fornication/ by repentance art now the Bride of Christ./ Thou didst lovingly imitate the life of the Angels/ and annihilate demonic hosts by the Cross;/ thou art now a Bride in the Kingdom of heaven, O most chaste Mary.

Another Kontakion Tone 4

Having escaped the fog of sin,/ and having illumined thy heart with the light of penitence,/ O glorious one,/ thou didst come to Christ and didst offer to Him/ His immaculate and holy Mother as a merciful intercessor./ Hence thou hast found remission for transgressions,/ and with the Angels thou ever rejoicest.

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This has been a busy week. On Monday we celebrated the Annunciation of Christ, on Wednesday – the Presanctified Liturgy, on Thursday – the Great Canon of St. Andrew (along with the reading of the Life of St. Mary of Egypt), and on Friday – the Akathyst Hymn to the Birthgiver of God. All of these are designed to prepare us for Holy Week:

- The Annunciation and Akathyst prepare us by reminding us of the wonder of God’s Incarnation, of His Condescention. His humility. And of His coming sacrifice (for He was born to die).
- The Great Canon, with all of its Scriptural references and prostrations, encourages us to look inward to recognize our shortcomings. It is a living Bible study that provides copious examples of both righteousness and sinfulness, reminding us that we have constantly eschewed righteousness in favor of sin.
- We read the life of St. Mary during the Great Canon. She was a sex-addict who repented, and through the prayers of the Birthgiver of God, changed her life to one of chastity and virtue. Her life demonstrates that forgiveness, healing, salvation, and sanctification are offered to all of us, despite the depth of our sin.
 - For most of us, sex provides a way for us to understand our own fallenness. As St. Paul writes: “the marriage bed is undefiled” (Hebrews 13:4). There is a context in which sex is salvific. But even the married among us must admit that their sexual activities and thoughts are not always devoted to God’s glory. Like the early life of Mary, in today’s world, sex is usually about something other than a demonstration of a couple’s flesh becoming one (Genesis 2: 24; Ephesians 5:32). Any act that does not reflect God’s glory, that is not an acceptable offering to His Perfection and Love, is sin. This goes for sex as everything else.
 - If you are one of few that is not tempted by sexual sin, or if you are one of the few that has mastered this temptation, you must admit that there are other actions that fall short of perfection. This temple is full of wonderful people, but, as St. Paul says “all fall short of the Glory of God” (Romans 3:23). If you believe yourself to be sinless, you are either a living saint, or (more likely) deceiving yourself. And this is an easy thing to do. Objective introspection is not a skill taught in the world. When God tries to teach it to us in the Church, it seems jarring. But this only shows how far the world has moved away from its purpose of building up saints and moved into a fitting instrument for building up sinners.
- We all fall short of the Glory of God. We have a loooooong Lenten season because it is only in realizing our shortcomings that we can truly be prepared to understand our Lord’s Passion. It is only by recognizing our own unworthiness to receive an everlasting inheritance in Paradise, that we can appreciate the gift God has given to us in the form of His Son. As St. John writes: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life... He who believes in Him is not condemned: but he who does not believe is condemned already” (St. John 3:16 & 18).
- In today’s Gospel reading, Christ reminds us that He did not come into the world for Himself. He did not come to judge or to be served, but to serve and “to give His life as a ransom for all” (St. Mark 10: 45). As a ransom for all. God would not need to ransom us if we were not enslaved to sin. In order to be saved, we must (like St. Mary) recognize our bondage to this world. Christ died for all, but only those who believe in redemption through His suffering and Resurrection **and their need for it** will enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Great Lent prepares us for the Holy Pascha by showing us how much we need God’s grace. The Lord is offering Himself to you. The blood of Christ is the most perfect gift (Hebrews 9: 14) – the thing everyone needs (even the “man who has everything”). Cleanse your heart in repentance so that you can completely open your heart to His Grace. Do not leave the gift of redemption unopened.