

SOBORNOST

St. Thomas the Apostle Orthodox Church

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American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese

*ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE
OF CONSTANTINOPLE*

SERVICES

**Wednesday in Great Lent: Liturgy of
Presanctified Gifts 7:00 PM**

**Saturday: Confession 5:00 PM,
Great Vespers 5:30 PM**

Sunday: Matins (Orthros) 8:45 AM

Children's Sunday School 9:30 AM

Divine Liturgy 10:00 AM.

**April 5, 2020 | 5th Sunday of
Great Lent | St. Mary of Egypt**

On the Fifth Sunday of Lent the Orthodox Church commemorates our Righteous Mother Mary of Egypt. The feast day of Saint Mary of Egypt is April 1, however, she is also commemorated on this Sunday due to her recognition by the Church as a model of repentance.

Our holy mother Mary was born in Egypt. She had left her parents at the age of twelve to go to Alexandria, where she spent the next seventeen years in debauchery and the greatest profligacy. Living on charity and linen-weaving, she nevertheless offered her body to any man, not being forced to it by dire necessity as were so many poor women, but as though she were consumed by the fire of a desire that nothing was able to appease.

One day, seeing a crowd of Lybians and Egyptians moving towards the port, she followed them and set sail with them for Jerusalem, offering her body to pay her fare. When they arrived in the Holy City, she followed the crowd that was thronging towards the Church of the Resurrection, it being the day of the Exaltation of the Cross. But, when she reached the threshold of the church, an



invisible force prevented her entering in spite of repeated efforts on her part, although the other pilgrims were able to go in without hindrance. Left alone in a corner of the narthex, she began to realize that it was the impurity of her life that was preventing her approaching the holy Wood. She burst into tears and smote her breast and, seeing an icon of the Mother of God, made this prayer to her: "O Sovereign Lady, who didst bear God in the flesh, I know that I should not dare to look upon thine icon, thou who are pure in soul and body, because, debauched as I am, I must fill thee with disgust. But, as the God born of thee became man in order to call sinners to repentance, come to my aid! Allow me to go into the church and prostrate before His Cross. And, as soon as I have seen the Cross, I promise that I will renounce the world and all pleasures, and follow the path of salvation that thou willest to show me."

She felt herself suddenly freed from the power that had held her and was able to enter the church. There she fervently venerated the Holy Cross and then, returning to the icon of the Mother of God, declared herself ready to follow the path that the Virgin would show her. A voice replied to her from on high: "If you cross the Jordan, you will find rest."

Leaving the church, she bought three loaves with the alms a pilgrim had given her, discovered which road led to the Jordan and arrived one evening at the Church of Saint John the Baptist. After having washed in the river, she received Communion in the Holy Mysteries, ate half of one of the loaves and went to sleep on the riverbank. The next morning, she crossed the river and lived from that time on in the desert, remaining there for forty-seven years without ever encountering either another human being or any animal.

During the first seventeen years, her clothes soon having fallen into rags, burning with heat by day and shivering with cold by night, she fed on herbs and wild roots. But more than the physical trials, she had to face violent assaults from the passions and the memory of her sins and, throwing herself on the ground, she implored the Mother of God to come to her aid. Protected by God, who desires nothing but that the sinner should turn to Him and live, she uprooted all the passions from her heart by means of this extraordinary asceticism, and was able to turn the fire of carnal desire into a flame of divine love that made it possible for her to endure the implacable desert with joy, as though she were not in the flesh.

After all these years, a holy elder called Zosimas (April 4), who, following the tradition instituted by Saint Euthymios, had gone into the desert across the Jordan for the period of the Great Fast, saw one day a human form with a body blackened by the sun and with hair white as bleached linen to its shoulders. He ran after this apparition that fled before him, begging it to give him its blessing and some saving

words. When he came within ear-shot, Mary, calling by name him whom she had never seen, revealed to him that she was a woman and asked him to throw her his cloak that she might cover her nakedness. At the urging of the monk, who was transported at having at last met a God-bearing being who had attained the perfection of monastic life, the Saint recounted to him with tears the story of her life and conversion. Then, having finished her account, she begged him to come the following year to the bank of the Jordan with Holy Communion.

When the day arrived, Zosimas saw Mary appearing on the further bank of the river. She made the sign of the Cross and crossed the Jordan, walking on the water. Having received Holy Communion weeping, she said: "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace according to Thy word; for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation" (Luke 2:29). She then took leave of Zosimas, asking him to meet her the following year in the place where they had first met.

When the year was past, Zosimas, going to the agreed spot, found the Saint's body stretched on the ground, her arms crossed and her face turned towards the East. His tearful emotion prevented him from noticing at once an inscription traced on the ground by the Saint, which read: "Abba Zosimas, bury here the body of the humble Mary; give what is of dust to dust, after having prayed for me. I died on the first day of April, the very night of the Passion of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, after having partaken in the Holy Eucharist." Consoled in his grief by having learned the Saint's name, Zosimas was amazed to discover that she had, in several hours, covered a distance of more than twenty days' march.

After having vainly tried to break up the earth with a stick, he suddenly saw a lion approaching Mary's body and licking her feet. On the orders of the Elder, the beast dug a hole with its claws, in which Zosimas devoutly placed the Saint's body.

On his return to the monastery, he recounted the marvels that God had wrought for those who turn away from sin and move towards Him with all their hearts. From the hardened sinner that she had been, Mary has, for a great many souls crushed under the burden of sin, become a source of hope and a model of conversion. This is why the Holy Fathers have placed the celebration of her memory at the end of the Great Fast as an encouragement for all who have neglected their salvation, proclaiming that repentance can bring them back to God even at the eleventh hour.

The feast day of Saint Mary of Egypt is April 1, the day of her repose, however the Orthodox Church also commemorates the Saint on the Fifth Sunday of Lent. As a Sunday of Great Lent, the commemoration is celebrated with the Divine Liturgy of Saint Basil the Great, which is preceded by a Matins (Orthros) service. A Great Vespers is conducted on Saturday evening. Scripture readings for the Fifth Sunday

of Lent are the following: At the Orthros (Matins): The prescribed weekly Gospel reading. At the Divine Liturgy: Hebrews 9:11-14; Mark 10:32-45.

Saint Mary of Egypt is also commemorated on the Thursday before the Fifth Sunday of Lent, when her life is read during the Great Canon of Saint Andrew of Crete. A canon in her honor is read at the end of each Ode. In parish churches the service and the canon is most often conducted on Wednesday evening. (*from goarch.org*)

Today's Epistle Lesson – St. Paul's Letter to the Hebrews 9:11-14

Brethren, 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?

Today's Gospel Lesson – Saint Mark 10:32-45

At that time, 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.”

A Word From the Holy Fathers

‘What else is the feast, but the service of God?’ For the feast does not consist in pleasant intercourse at meals, nor splendor of clothing, nor days of leisure, but in the acknowledgment of God, and the offering of thanksgiving and of praise to Him. Now this belongs to the saints alone, who live in Christ; for it is written, ‘The dead shall not praise You, O Lord, neither all those who go down into silence; but we who live will bless the Lord, from henceforth even for ever (Ps. 114:17, 18 LXX).’ So was it with Hezekiah, who was delivered from death, and therefore praised God, saying, ‘Those who are in hades cannot praise You; the dead cannot bless You; but the living shall bless You, as I also do (Is. 38:18).’ For to praise and bless God belongs to those only who live in Christ, and by means of this they go up to the feast; for the Passover is not of the Gentiles, nor of those who are yet Jews in the flesh; but of those who acknowledge the truth in Christ, as he declares who was sent to proclaim such a feast; ‘Our Passover, Christ, is sacrificed.’

Therefore, although wicked men press forward to keep the feast, and as at a feast praise God, and intrude into the Church of the saints, yet God expostulates, saying to the sinner, ‘Why do you talk of My ordinances?’ And the gentle Spirit rebukes them, saying, ‘Praise is not comely in the mouth of a sinner (Ps. 49:16 LXX; Eccclus. 15:9).’ Neither does sin have any place in common with the praise of God; for the sinner has a mouth speaking perverse things, as the Proverb says, ‘The mouth of the wicked answers evil things (Prov. 15:28).’ For how is it possible for us to praise God with an impure mouth, since things which are contrary to each other cannot coexist? For what communion has righteousness with iniquity? Or, what fellowship is there between light and darkness? So exclaims Paul, a minister of the Gospel. . . .

The bread of Wisdom is living fruit, as the Lord said; ‘I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever (John 6:51).’ For when Israel ate of the manna, which was indeed pleasant and wonderful, yet he died, and he who ate it did not in consequence live for ever, but all that multitude died in the wilderness. The Lord teaches, saying, ‘I am the bread of life: your fathers ate manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which came down from heaven, that a man should eat thereof, and not die (John 6:48–51).’

Now wicked men hunger for bread like this, for effeminate souls will hunger; but the righteous alone, being prepared, shall be satisfied, saying, ‘I shall behold Your

face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when Your glory is seen by me (Ps. 16:15).’ For he who partakes of divine bread always hungers with desire; and he who thus hungers has a never-failing gift, as Wisdom promises, saying, ‘The Lord will not slay the righteous soul with famine.’ He promises too in the Psalms, ‘I will abundantly bless her provision; I will satisfy her poor with bread.’ We may also hear our Savior saying, ‘Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled (Prov. 10:3; Matt. 5:6; Ps. 131:15 LXX).’ Well then do the saints and those who love the life which is in Christ raise themselves to a longing after this food. And one earnestly implores, saying, ‘As the deer pants after the fountains of waters, so pants my soul after You, O God! My soul thirsts for the living God, when shall I come and see the face of God?’ And another; ‘My God, my God, I seek You early; my soul thirsts for You; as often does my flesh, in a dry and pathless and waterless land. So did I appear before You in holiness to see Your power and Your glory (Ps. 41:1; 42:1, 2 LXX).’

Since these things are so, my brethren, let us mortify our members which are on the earth (Col. 3:5), and be nourished with living bread, by faith and love to God, knowing without faith it is impossible to be partakers of such bread as this. For our Savior, when He called all men to him, and said, ‘If any man thirst, let him come to Me and drink (John 7:37),’ immediately spoke of the faith without which a man cannot receive such food; ‘He that believes on Me, as the Scripture says, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water (John 7:38).’ To this end He continually nourished His believing disciples with His words, and gave them life by the nearness of His divinity, but to the Canaanite woman, because she was not yet a believer, He deigned not even a reply, although she stood greatly in need of food from Him. He did this not from scorn, far from it (for the Lord is loving to men and good, and on that account He went into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon); but because of her unbelief, and because she was of those who had not the word. And He did it righteously, my brethren; for there would have been nothing gained by her offering her supplication before believing, but by her faith she would support her petition; ‘For He that comes to God, must first believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that seek Him;’ and that ‘without faith it is impossible for a man to please Him (Heb. 11:6).’ This Paul teaches. Now that she was hitherto an unbeliever, one of the profane, He shows, saying, ‘It is not meet to take the children’s bread, and to cast it to dogs (Matt. 15:26).’ She then, being convinced by the power of the word, and having changed her ways, also gained faith; for the Lord no longer spoke to her as a dog, but conversed with her as a human being, saying, ‘O woman, great is your faith (v. 28)!’ As therefore she believed, He forthwith granted to her the fruit of faith, and said, ‘Let it be as you desire. And her daughter was healed in the self-same hour.’

...Judas to wit, though he came to the supper, because he despised it went out from the presence of the Lord, and having abandoned his Life, hanged himself. But the disciples who continued with the Redeemer shared in the happiness of the feast. And that young man who went into a far country, and there wasted his substance, living in dissipation, if he receive a desire for this divine feast, and, coming to himself, shall say, 'How many hired servants of my father have bread to spare, while I perish here with hunger!' and shall next arise and come to his father, and confess to him, saying, 'I have sinned against heaven and before you, and am not worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired servants (Luke 15:17);'—when he shall thus confess, then he shall be counted worthy of more than he prayed for. For the father does not receive him as a hired servant, neither does he look upon him as a stranger, but he kisses him as a son, he brings him back to life as from the dead, and counts him worthy of the divine feast, and gives him his former and precious robe. So that, on this account, there is singing and gladness in the paternal home.

For this is the work of the Father's loving-kindness and goodness, that not only should He make him alive from the dead, but that He should render His grace illustrious through the Spirit. Therefore, instead of corruption, He clothes him with an incorruptible garment; instead of hunger, He kills the fatted calf; instead of far journeys, the Father watched for his return, providing shoes for his feet; and, what is most wonderful, placed a divine signet-ring upon his hand; while by all these things He begot him afresh in the image of the glory of Christ. These are the gracious gifts of the Father, by which the Lord honors and nourishes those who abide with Him, and also those who return to Him and repent. For He promises, saying, 'I am the bread of life; he that comes to Me shall not hunger, and he that believes on Me shall never thirst (John 6:35).' We too shall be counted worthy of these things, if at all times we cleave to our Savior, and if we are pure, not only in these six days of Easter, but consider the whole course of our life as a feast, and continue near and do not go far off, saying to Him, 'You have the words of eternal life, and whither shall we go (John 6:68)?' Let those of us who are far off return, confessing our iniquities, and having nothing against any man, but by the spirit mortifying the deeds of the body (Rom. 8:13). For thus, having first nourished the soul here, we shall partake with angels at that heavenly and spiritual table; not knocking and being repulsed like those five foolish virgins (Matt. 25:1–12), but entering with the Lord, like those who were wise and loved the bridegroom; and shewing the dying of Jesus in our bodies (2 Cor. 4:10), we shall receive life and the kingdom from Him. . . . Let us at all times worship the Father in Christ, through Whom to Him and with Him be glory and dominion by the Holy Ghost for ever and ever. Amen.

— St. Athanasius the Great, *Festal Letter 7* (335)



Office of the Metropolitan

*312 Garfield Street
Johnstown, PA 15906*

March 31, 2020

Protocol No. 10/2020

God is with us!

Dear Reverend Clergy and Faithful Laity of the Diocese,

The Summer Season at Camp Nazareth is just around the corner. We are looking forward to the Summer and getting the Camp facilities ready. We are ever hopeful that we will be able to proceed with our Camping Program and are making the usual preparations.

However, we are living in UN-usual times. We are monitoring and paying very close attention to all the research that is being done regarding the Coronavirus. We are listening to the CDC, the federal, state, and local governments, and other sources, to get the latest information on how to be responsible and prudent during the upcoming weeks and months. As Individuals, families, parishes and as a Diocese we must adjust our plans accordingly.

Please be advised that the following events that were scheduled at Camp Nazareth are either ***postponed or cancelled*** altogether. The ones postponed have the new date of the event at Camp Nazareth listed next to it.

Clergy Convocation, April 28 – May 1, 2020 – ***Postponed*** – New Date: October 20 - 23, 2020

Diocesan Seniors Retreat, May 12 - 14, 2020 – ***Postponed*** – New Date: October 13 – 15, 2020

Family Camp, June 5 – 7, 2020 – ***Cancelled***

Family Day, June 7, 2020 – ***Cancelled***

Clergy Family Week, June 8 – 13, 2020 – ***Cancelled***

If you have already signed up and paid for any of these events, your money will be refunded to you in total. Information about the rescheduled events will be sent to our parishes in the coming weeks. Please mark your calendars with the new dates for the rescheduled events. I am looking forward to our time together. Please know that I am praying for you, your families, our Diocese and the world.

Working in His Vineyard with much agape,

+Metropolitan Gregory

+Metropolitan Gregory of Nyssa

The American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese of North America

ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE OF CONSTANTINOPLE

March 2020 Treasurer's Report

Glory to Jesus Christ. Thanks to God's mercy and our generous and dedicated community, March saw contributions of \$13,503.00, against expenses of \$11,800.00. Your continuing support in these challenging times is much appreciated!

Herman, Treasurer

Follow Our Diocese On-Line

Diocesan Website: <http://www.acrod.org>

Camp Nazareth: <http://www.campnazareth.org>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/acroddiocese>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/acrodnews>

You Tube: <https://youtube.com/acroddiocese>

In Your Prayers – Please Remember... His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch BARTHOLOMEW, His Eminence Metropolitan GREGORY, Fr. Joseph & Family, Greek Orthodox Archbishop Paul Yazigi of Aleppo, Syriac Orthodox Archbishop Yohanna Ibrahim of Aleppo, His Grace Bishop Neofitos of Nyeri and Mt. Kenya, Fr. John & Pani Betty Jean Baranik, Presbytera Katie Baker and family, Dn. Steve Hall, Santiago Alzugaray, Jeffrey Carey, Tatyana and Slava Chumak & family, Xenia Chilkowich, Jon Church, Ramius Connour, Curtis Cooper, Luke Cooper, Tina Crull, Mary Diane David, Ron Domieniecki, Linda A. Georgiev, Heather Himler, John Homick, Cameron Houk, Howl Family, Helen Janowiak, John M. Janowiak, Tucker Karl and family, Robert & Pam Karpin, Andrew Kinn, Kopan family, Brian, Helen, and Luke Mahony, Valentina Makowelski, Susan Matula, Anna Meinhold, Dn. Henry Middleton, David & Kathryn Newman, Bobby Nutter & Family, Henry & Lisa Osborne, Westin Perry & Parents, John Reece, Mary Reed, Chris & Kaitlin Rixey, Jerry Von Ronne, Anne Rosario, James, Theodore and Christina Ristas, Robinson Family, Samson Family, Sharon Sheptak, Bernie Takabayashi & family, Dawn & Faith Ulmschneider, Lydia Vita, Christine, Marshall, Nathaniel, Dcn. Nectarios and Ia, the Syrian Christians displaced by war, Mother Virginia Marie and the Carmelite Nuns of Port Tobacco, and all those in need of our prayers. (Please advise Fr. Joseph of changes.)