

Koinonia Year One—April
Content from *Growing Faithful*
Scripture from the NRSV Bible

Fifth Sunday of Great Lent
Sunday of Saint Mary of Egypt
Hebrews 9:11-14 Mark 10:32-45

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

LIVING LENT—
Sunday of St. Mary of Egypt

St. Mary was a runaway child who went to Alexandria and became a prostitute. In the course of her life, out of curiosity, she once joined a throng of pilgrims who traveled to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross (September 14) and there she did not cease to lead others to sin. However, when she tried to enter into the Church of the Holy Resurrection, an unseen power prevented her from doing so, once, twice, three times, while others around her entered freely. Taking this as a personal sign to her from God, she was cut to the heart by a profound awareness of her own sinfulness. She immediately repented and decided to change her life, embracing the monastic life for over four decades and becoming a saint of the Church. From harlot to saint by the grace of God! Her Feast is set on the Fifth Sunday of Lent, "while the end of Lent is near, so that idlers and sinners may be aroused by repentance, having as an example this saint" (Festal Commemoration, Fifth Sunday of Lent). (Father Theodore Stylianopoulos, *A Year of the Lord: Liturgical Bible Studies, Volume 3: Triodion & Lent*)

Apolitikion on the Fifth Sunday of Great Lent, of St. Mary of Egypt

In you, Mother, was preserved unimpaired that which is according to God's image;
for you took up the Cross and followed Christ,
and by your deeds you have taught us to despise the flesh, for it passes away,
but to care for the soul, which is a thing immortal.
And therefore your spirit, holy Mary, rejoices with the Angels.

HEAR the Word of God—

Hebrews 9:11-14

11But when Christ came as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation), 12he entered once for all into the Holy Place, not with the blood of goats and calves, but with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption. 13For if the blood of goats and bulls, with the sprinkling of the ashes of a heifer, sanctifies those who have been defiled so that their flesh is purified, 14how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to worship the living God!

Mark 10:32-45

32They were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them; they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. He took the twelve aside again and began to tell them what was to happen to him, 33saying, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death; then they will hand him over to the Gentiles; 34they will mock him, and spit upon him, and flog him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise again."

35James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to him and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." 36And he said to them, "What is it you want me to do for you?" 37And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." 38But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" 39They replied, "We are able." Then Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; 40but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared."

41When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John. 42So Jesus called them and said to them, "You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. 43But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, 44and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. 45For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."

SHARE thoughts and insights—

The first three questions are very suitable for sharing if you have children in your group because there is a 'me first' attitude that children pass through. Some people never outgrow this stage, but it usually evolves into more of a 'give me priority/privilege' way of thinking. It's still 'me first', but with a slightly more discreet edge!

- This is an excellent Gospel passage to act out because it brings to light our natural "me first" way of thinking.
- When have you really wanted to be first?

- What did you do?
 - Then what happened?
 - How did you feel?
 - How do you think the other people around you might have felt?
- Have you ever been told to go to the back of the line or to take a different seat? If so, how did you feel?
 - If you have ever been angry or resentful when someone else tried to be first, tell about your experience.
 - Why do you/we/I like to be first?
 - Why is it sometimes hard to wait one's turn, be it in line at a supermarket or in traffic, or whatever/wherever?
 - How and when do you seek priority and/or privilege? How do you feel and what do you think when you see others seeking priority and privilege? What is the message here?
 - Making people feel privileged and pampered is big business. Why? What 'need' in people is this catering to and cultivating?
 - What's wrong with being last? Where does patience fit in here?
 - If you had been one of the people in the Gospel passage, would you have been more like James and John, or more like the other ten?

GROW in faith—

- We read in the passage from Hebrews that Christ... offered himself... to God. Have you offered yourself to God? If so, how have you offered yourself?
- Remember and grow in the JOY priority—
Jesus
Others
Yourself

always keeping in mind the order—

Jesus first

Others second

Yourself last

SERVE one another in love—

- Think of ways you like to be served and serve others in the same way.
 - Do you like a back rub? Give one.
 - Do you like a compliment? Give one.
 - As you like to be served, serve.

- Serve those who serve you by making it easier and more pleasant for them to do so. Don't be fussy, and remember to express your gratitude and appreciation.

PRAY—

Lord Jesus, we confess we often want to be first and to be served. Help us to seek more to serve than to be served, to be content to be last, and to find joy in following your example. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

The Lenten Prayer of St. Ephraim of Syria

Lord and Master of my life,

Give me not a spirit of idleness, vain curiosity, lust for power, and idle talk.

But rather give to me your servant a spirit of purity, humility, patience, and love.

Yes, Lord and King, grant me to see my own sins, and not to judge my brother and sister; for you are blessed to the ages of ages.

Amen.