

Sunday October 17, 2010

Saint Mary of Egypt

She grew up as a young woman in the second half of the fourth century in the city of Alexandria. When she was about thirteen years old, her father died, and her youthful energy burst out immersing herself in the worst form of sin and defilement. She indulged in obscene songs, lewd behavior, drunkenness, promiscuous dancing, fornication, and adultery to the lowest level of moral decay.

When she approached the age of thirty, there was a ship traveling to the Holy Land to celebrate the feast of resurrection, so she boarded the ship without having the money to pay for the fare. Nonetheless, this was a minor problem for her because she traded her body with a passenger on the ship, and she seduced many in such a wicked way to the extent that she later said about these days: "I am surprised to how the sea could have withstood such debauchery?! How is it that the earth did not open its mouth and swallowed me as soon as I got off the ship and sent me alive to hell?!"

However, God, in His abundant mercy and being He who does not wish the death of the sinner, was waiting for her. When they arrived at Jerusalem, and she was about to enter the church [of the holy sepulcher] with the crowd, she felt that there was a hidden power holding her back. Everyone was able to enter, but she was unable to pass the door!

After several failed attempts, she backed down and sat outside thinking about the reason why she was unable to go through. It was clear that her defiled life and her sins became a barrier between her and God. She started crying uncontrollably and was beating her chest as her tears were heavily pouring down. When she lifted up her eyes, she found the icon of Virgin Mary in front of her. She asked Saint Mary to help her to repent and vowed before her icon to leave behind her all of her defiled past and to have a new start with Christ. She felt some consolation so she got up to enter the church and did not find any difficulty in entering, so she cried and prayed that God helps her to complete her life in his hands.

She decided not to return back to Alexandria, rather she set out to the wilderness next to the River Jordan after she had confessed all her sins and partook of the holy sacraments. There, she became a hermit living in the open without a shelter for nearly 47 years. She sustained herself on the wild grass of the wilderness, and wet her tongue with the morning dew accumulated on the rocks.

The devils attacked her viciously in the first 17 years of her repentance; they reminded her with the images, the songs, and the defiled actions. Nonetheless, she fought back firmly like a man, bowing down and placing her face in the dust crying out for the help of the Lord Jesus and the intercession of the Virgin Mary. She would remain doing this for days, crying and praying until aid comes from heaven with light and brilliance to banish the demons, thus she tasted victory.

After a bitter fight for a long period, the severity of the demonic attacks started to subside and she started to enjoy a magnificent fellowship with the bridegroom of her soul, *who is wounded for her transgressions and bruised for her iniquities* (Isaiah 53:5).

Her skin scorched from the heat of the sun in the summer, while she froze from the cold of the winter. But the love of Jesus, who reigned over all her emotions, lit her heart with a fervent fire that couldn't be quenched. So she walked the path behind Him in tears and all her desire is to offer herself as a living sacrifice on the altar of His love.

Before departing from this world, God arranged for her to meet with St. Zosima the priest. She recognized him by his name, and told him her story. The following year, he brought to her the Holy Sacrament as she requested and gave her communion. In the third year, he found her reposed as she was kneeling to pray and her face is towards the east, next to her a note that reads: "Bury the body of Mary, the miserable, here and pray for me." His soul was consoled and returned to his monastery in Palestine and wrote her story. Our Coptic church commemorates her departure on 6 Parmouti of every year.

May the blessings of her repentance and purity be with us and protects us in the path of our strife to the last breath. Amen.

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