



From The Ambvon

ST MICHAEL ORTHODOX CHURCH

512 WINTER ST., OLD FORGE, PA

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FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT — Tone 1. St Mary of Egypt.
Sunday, April 2nd, 2023

Birthdays & Anniversaries for April

Birthdays: Rodion Shepherd (4/6); Maximus Shepherd (4/8); Philip Pecuch Jr (4/17);

Nameday: Rodion Shepherd (4/8);

Anniversary:

Baptism:

Travelers:

Prospora Schedule: Thank you to Emily Krentisky & Sandy Pregman for attending the prospora class and signing up to be on the “Bread Brigade” team. We need more people to bake prospora. The more people who bake, the less times your name comes up in the rotation. Sign up sheet at the candle stand.

Counting: Please sign up to help count the offerings every Sunday with Matushka Emilia. Sign up sheet at the candle stand.

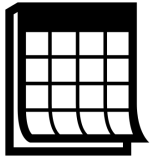
Visitors: PLEASE JOIN US FOR COFFEE HOUR DOWNSTAIRS

Agape Meal: A Light Agape Meal. Thank you to everyone who donated.

All are encouraged to sing the “Lord Have Mercy” & “Amen” responses. And please sing along if you know the other verses, troparions, and kontakions as well.

Service Attendance: 48 Last weekend Divine Liturgy:

DEAR GUESTS AND FRIENDS: *A most sincere and heartfelt welcome to you from our community. According to the ancient traditions of the Orthodox Church, the Sacrament of Holy Communion is to be administered only to Orthodox Christians who have prepared to receive themselves by fasting and a recent (monthly) confession..If you have questions please ask Fr Michael!*



Service Schedule

WEEK of 3Apr-9Apr

WED, Apr 5th: @ 5:00 PM Presanctified Liturgy
 SAT, Apr 8th: @ 5:00 PM Great Vespers w/Litya & Blessing of the Palms
 SUN, Apr 3rd: Hours @ 9:20 Hours, St Mary of Egypt -
 Divine Liturgy @ 9:30 AM

SEE PRINT OUT FOR HOLY WEEK SCHEDULE

*Reminder tonight is Mission Vespers at All Saints in Olyphant beginning at 4pm.
 There will be a meal afterwards. All are invited.*



Announcements

Upcoming Parish & Diocesan Events

Silent Prayers: Every Wednesday 11:00AM - 1:30PM

Church Work Day: Every Friday is Church Maintenance day. Come help!

Catechumen Class: Every Saturday 3:30 PM Catechumen Class - All are invited

First Security: All cameras are installed. Fire alarms have not been installed. The wrong size boom was sent after the original boom ordered broke down and needed parts.

Confessions: As we enter the fifth week of the Great Fast, please be advised I will not hear confessions after this Friday. Confessions are available before and after most scheduled services, and by appointment. It is an experience to be prayerfully prepared for, and should be done with sufficient time and attention, not squeezed in hastily.

Keys: *If you have keys to the church or the hall, the Parish Council and I ask that you turn them in immediately. Only the PC will maintain keys and access to our buildings.*

How Much is my tithe

Weekly	2%	4%	5%	10%
\$200	\$4	\$8	\$10	\$20
\$500	\$10	\$20	\$25	\$50
\$750	\$15	\$30	\$37	\$75
\$1000	\$20	\$40	\$50	\$100
\$1500	\$30	\$60	\$75	\$150

WEEKLY GIVING UPDATE: We thank you for your continued giving in gratitude for all that our loving God does for each of us, for His Holy Church, and all the blessings we receive through her.

March Deposits

6th: \$2465 10th: \$5650 13th: \$2345
 20th: \$2111 27th: \$819 Total: \$13,400

March Expenditures: \$16,577.03

Bank Balance: \$32,285.31

Weekly Cost to Keep the Church Open: \$3,225.62

Monthly Cost to Keep the Church Open: \$12,902.49

Parish Prayer List

Please remember in your prayers LIVING

Ill-afflicted Archpriests John Nightingale & Fr Theodore Orzolek

All those caring for the sick and suffering at this time throughout the world, especially our families and friends: Mike Jadick, Bernie Elko, Margaret Pregmon, Marie Buranich, Helen Wytovich, Tammy Wytovich, Rosemary Kuzmich, Sandra Pritchky, Marie Pasternak, Sandy Batton, Paula Stavisky, Al Pritchky, Eli Stavisky, Evelyn Bunevitch, Nadia Macheska, John Pritchky, Paulette Ezbiansky, Andrew Lutzick, Daniel Jones, Charissa Voroziichak, Matushka Paula Soucek; Al Horek

Servants of God Fr Nathan, Mat. Katherine, Micaiah, Evangeline, Gideon, Zacharias, Ignatius, Basil (Clausson), Mat. Emilia, Blaise, Maximus, Rodion, Savina (Shepherd), Barbara Sevensky, Bev Elko, Sandra Condon, Ann Tyrpak, Sandy & Danny Pregmann, Walter Pritchky, Michael & Euphemia (Mia) (Keklak); Amaya Jackson; Robert Kane; Maria & Vitaliy Rakovsky; Ekaterina & Anna; Kelly Cigna; George, Natasha, & Rosa Coyoy; Peter Kesklosky, Paul & Ann Newmeyer;

Catechumens: Jason, Emily, Judah, Nadia, & Silas

DEPARTED

Newly Departed: Matha Matechak (02/21)

Departed: Sonia Schuster (4/24)

VIGIL LIGHTS

From William Wozniak

In memory of: Will & Alice Wozniak

Donations In Memory of

Will & Alice Wozniak †

Easter Flower Donations

Michael & Barbara Grippi

Easter Donations

David & Patricia Peregrim

SUNDAY OF ST. MARY OF EGYPT

This week of Great Lent, the Church celebrates the memory of St. Mary of Egypt. The story of St. Mary is the story of a repentant harlot. Why does the Church find this story so important? Why does the whole Orthodox world remember this woman?

Her life tells us about how, from her early youth, she carried on an extremely debauched life and then, more like a tourist than a pilgrim, decided to go to Jerusalem for the feast of the Exaltation of the Honorable Cross of the Lord. But a mysterious power would not let her into the church until she became conscious of her sins and called out to the Mother of God and to the Lord for mercy. Then she was able to enter the church, and shaken to the core, resolved to spend the rest of her life in prayer and repentance. Many years later, the saintly monk Zosimas met her in the desert; it is from him that we know her story.

What message—across centuries and countries—does her life give us?

It is the story of finding hope. Mary had a reality, which, for the time being, suited her. As the poet said, “wine and men were her atmosphere.” But she had no future; she only had what one prefers not to think about. Soon her charms would wilt—especially soon due to her unhealthy lifestyle—and men would lose all interest in her, turning their attention to new victims with social temperaments, and she would become lonely, cast off, and lacking means for sustenance. But in turning to God she found hope—hope not only that her earthly life would be filled with dignity and meaning, but most importantly that before her is eternal life.

THE MYSTERY OF THE DESERT

Reading the Life of St. Mary of Egypt

Reader Dimitry Tribushny

The Life of St. Mary of Egypt is one of the ascetical treasures of the Orthodox Church, which helps us understand God’s plan for salvation. Like everything that is outside of time, the Life of the Egyptian desert-dweller is contemporary in the true sense of the word—every living soul can recognize its own experience in St. Mary’s experience; the Life of the saint both rebukes and heals.

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According to the [Russian] Bible dictionary, believing means not only, and not so much being sure of something as it means trusting. It means being ready to follow the One Whom you love, with open eyes. To go where He Himself leads you. To the desert. Thus did Abraham leave his house in order to learn the Truth, bringing his own son as a

sacrifice. Thus was Job led to the desert of total loss, and spoke with the unsearchable God face to face. Thus did the Israelites trust in God and through risky wanderings in the desert they obtained the Promise Land for themselves.

The desert is a place of trust, and not surety. There is no guarantee here. How many of the Israelites who followed [Moses](#) actually saw the earthly paradise?

Faith, or belief, is discomfort, pain, light, and joy. Having faith (believing) means walking on water.

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Why did the Lord call Mary to [repentance](#) in such an unexpected manner? Does this mean that there are on this earth special people chosen by heaven, for whom the path of salvation and [illumination](#) are prepared, and that if you don't belong to their category then there is no point in fleeing your enslavement?

If we suppose that the Creator divided his children from the beginning (not just creatures, but children) into the loved and not loved, then we turn ourselves into marionettes, and the Last Judgment promised in the Gospels is cancelled. The simplest justification for a sinner is, "I was not chosen for salvation, You did not give me the possibility to rise from my knees, so how can I now converse with angels?"

Fatalism says that the Lord gave Mary strength, and therefore the harlot became an angel. First grace, and then labors. But we see it differently. On the earth, time moves from the past to the future, but in heaven there is no past, nor future. Therefore the Lord gives special grace to the one whom His foreknowledge discerns to be a laborer of the spirit. First labors, and then grace. It is a paradox of reverse time.

If a music teacher were clairvoyant and knew how his students would make use of his lessons, he would give more attention to those who truly dedicated themselves to any work and who would in the future "serve the muses."

First (if we can say it this way) the Lord saw Mary, who lived in the desert like an angel, and only then as a harlot.

First the Lord saw Mary's martyrdom in the desert, her absolute dedication to the revealed Truth. Only for that reason was she given such grace.

If a person is ready, like Mary, to wither from heat, nearly die from the cold, starve the body, and war to the utmost with the passions, then the Lord reveals His love, strength, and glory to that person.

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The word "sin" translated from the Greek means, "missing the mark". A sinful person is one who directs the God-given strengths of his soul to the wrong aims. Thus, discernment

that misses its goal becomes judgment, a sense of one's own dignity becomes pride, and emotions become anger.

St. Mary of Egypt received from the Lord the gift of fiery, unquenchable love, and instead of giving her heart to her Creator and His creation, she directed all the force of divine eros on herself. But any talent directed exclusively towards our "Me" not only impoverishes a person—it deprives him of his sanity.

"He was out of his mind" is how the Church hymn describes another gifted egotist—the prodigal son.

When Mary finds herself in Jerusalem, her love returns to its natural course. For the sake of love for the Lord the desert-dweller who had sinned inhumanly accepts the *podvig* of inhuman asceticism and struggles for seventeen years with cold and heat, hunger and demonic thoughts.

* * *

I don't know about you, but I believe in the sincerity of Mary's first repentance; I think that she could have changed her life, gotten married, had children, and become an exemplary Christian. But why does the Lord Whom she trusts lead her to the desert? Weren't her tears enough? Couldn't the Lord just forgive her right away? He can. Abba Sisoës was asked the same question: "If a brother falls, is one year of repentance enough for him?" He answered: "Those are cruel words!" "Are six months enough?" he was asked again. "Too many," the elder answered. They asked again, "Are forty days enough?" "That is also too much," he answered. "Then how many?" they said. "If a brother falls and a supper of love [the Eucharist.—Trans.] is soon held, can he come to the supper?" "No," the elder answered, "he must spend several days in repentance. And I believe that if he repents with all his soul, then God will receive him in three days" (Memorable stories about the ascetic labors of the saints and blessed fathers).

The Life emphasizes that repentance is an ontological event, and not one of ethics. The penitent is redeemed, and now he needs healing of his nature and sanctification.

How often does a newly-converted sectarian feel pleased with himself that he has given up fornicating or drinking. For the Orthodox this is only the beginning, the first step. After that, grace allows him to see his own imperfection. The person enters into a fight to the death with his own self, disclosing more and more new passions.

Thus, in a low-lit room everything seems clean, but when the light is turned on the picture is different—the housekeeper notices every speck of dust. If sectarians knew God and had an authentic experience of grace, they would never stop on the path of repentance.

Here is another analogy: Our own imperfection is clearly seen when coming closer to the center. The top musician of St. Louis gets third place in Chicago, fifth in New York, and seventh in Paris. Why would a woman with so many affirmations that she has been forgiven by God (she walks on water, has the gift of clairvoyance, etc.) sincerely consider herself the worst sinner? Because she was approaching the Center, and was illumined by an unutterable light. The saint leaves the world and there, in the desert, far from the noisy cities and solitary monasteries, she has her first connection with other people. “What is taking place in the empire?” the desert-dweller asks Abba Zosima. Seventeen years ago she was interested only in her body. Now Mary knows that there are other people.

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Repentance is an ontological event, and not one of ethics. Therefore in the sacrament of confession of sins not only is the soul transformed, but also the body.

Here is the recollection of one nun, a spiritual daughter of Fr. Ambrose [of Optina], of how she once confessed in the elder’s cell: “In his cell burned votive lamps and a small wax candle on the table. It was too dark for me to read from a list [of sins], and I had no time. I said what I remembered, and that hastily, then added, ‘Batiushka, what else can I say to you? What should I repent about? I’ve forgotten.’ The elder criticized me for that. But suddenly he rose from his bed where he was lying down. Having made three steps, he found himself in the middle of his cell. I involuntarily turned after him on my knees. The elder straightened to his full height, raised his head and hands upward as if in a prayer position. It seemed to me at the time that his feet left the floor. I looked at his illumined head and face. I remember that the ceiling in the cell was as if gone, it parted, and the elder’s head was as if thrust upwards through it. This appeared very clearly to me. A minute later, batiushka leaned over me, astounded at the vision as I was, and making the sign of the cross over me said these words: ‘Remember, this is what repentance can lead to. Now go.’ I left him, staggering, and wept the whole night through about my stupidity and carelessness. In the morning we were given horses and we left. While the elder was still alive I couldn’t tell anyone about this. He forbade me once and for all to talk about such incidents, threatening, ‘Otherwise you will lose my help and grace’” (from the Life of St. Ambrose of Optina).

The repentant sinner not only receives the gift of clairvoyance, but also walks on water.

Believing means walking on water.



Epistle: Hebrews 9:11-14

Gospel: Mark 10:32-45

From the Saints & Teachers

Hebrews 9:12–14 (ACCS He): Self-Control Means Indifference to Works of Death. Clement of Alexandria: We ought to examine not merely one single form of self-control in sexual matters but the other objects which our soul self-indulgently desires, not content with bare necessities but making a fuss about luxury. Self-control means indifference to money, comfort and property, a mind above spectacles, control of the tongue, mastery of evil thoughts. It actually happened that some angels suffered a failure of self-control, were overpowered by sexual desire and fell from heaven to earth. Valentinus in his letter to Agathopus says, “Jesus showed his self-control in all that he endured. He lived in the practice of Godhead. He ate and drank in a way individual to himself without excreting his food. Such was his power of self-control that the food was not corrupted within him, since he was not subject to corruption.” So we embrace self-control out of the love we bear the Lord and out of its honorable status, consecrating the temple of the Spirit. It is honorable “to emasculate oneself” of all desire “for the sake of the kingdom of heaven” and “to purify the conscience from dead works to serve the living God.” **Stromateis 3.7.59.**

Mark 10:35a (ACCS Mk (Rev)): 10:35a The Sons of Zebedee

The Plea for Privileged Position. Bede: They knew that among the disciples they were warmly loved by our Lord, that together with the blessed Peter they had often been informed of hidden mysteries of which the rest were unaware, as the text of the holy gospel frequently indicates. Thus a new name was given to them, just as it was to Peter. As the one who was formerly called Simon was given the name of Peter on account of the strength and firmness of his unassailable faith, so they were called Boanērges, that is, sons of thunder, because they heard, along with Peter, the voice of the Father honoring the Lord, and they recognized the secrets of the mysteries more than the rest of the disciples. They sensed that they clung to our Lord with their whole heart and embraced him with the greatest love. So they did not disbelieve that it was possible that they would be sitting closely on either side of him in the kingdom, particularly when they saw that John, for his singular purity of mind and body, was held in such great love that he rested on his breast at supper. **Exposition on the gospel of Mark 2.21.**