My Beloved Ones,

In the Epistle for the Sunday of St. Mary of Egypt, St. Paul writes that “...when Christ came as a high priest... he 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. For if the blood of goats and bulls... sanctifies those who have been defiled so that their flesh is purified, how much more will the blood of Christ...purify our conscience from dead works to worship the living God!” (Hebrews 9:11-14) Indeed, this Epistle demonstrates the importance of purifying our conscience through the virtue of humility, something that St. Mary of Egypt learned herself.

On the Feast of the Holy Cross, St. Mary went to Jerusalem to find men who could support her sinful lifestyle. She was curious to enter the Church of the Holy Sepulchre but found that an invisible force would not allow her inside. After promising to repent, she was permitted to enter, and heard a voice say, “If you cross the Jordan, you will find glorious rest.” She went to the Monastery of St. John the Baptist, where she confessed her sins and received the Holy Eucharist before she left to live in the wilderness for 47 years. After many years alone, she encountered St. Zosimas of Palestine and requested that he bring her Communion on Holy Thursday of the next year. When he returned, he saw her walking on the waters of the Jordan. She asked that he repeat the sacrament for her, and after his twenty-day journey, he arrived on Holy Thursday, April 1st, and found St. Mary’s incorrupt body.

In this Sunday’s Gospel, though our Lord reminds the Twelve of His coming Passion & Resurrection, James and John request that He “[g]rant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.” (Mark 10:37) Knowing that the Disciples still do not understand, He, “The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant...” (Mark 10:39-40) The other Ten are scandalized, but they still do not see that to be a follower of Christ means being humbled instead of rewarded.

As we prepare to venerate the tomb of our Lord, we must carefully examine whether His words are written on our hearts: “...whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:43-45) If St. Mary could turn from a life lived for pleasure alone, may we use her as an example that it is never too late to crucify our passions through service to our brothers and sisters, and so for the glory of God.

+ALEXIOS
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