



My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

This Sunday, 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... For if the blood of goats and bulls... sanctifies... how much more will the blood of Christ... purify our conscience from dead works to worship the living God!” (Hebrews 9:11-14) Indeed, it is fitting that the Church has chosen this Epistle because St. Mary of Egypt shows us the importance of purifying our hearts.

On the Feast of the Holy Cross, Mary went to Jerusalem to fund her sinful life. She was curious to enter the Church of the Holy Sepulchere, but an invisible force would not allow her inside. After promising to repent, she entered, 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.

In this Sunday’s Gospel, our Lord tries to prepare the Twelve, telling them how “...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 they will mock him, and spit upon him, and flog him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise again” (Mark 10:33-34). Even after this, James and John ask Him, “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory” (Mark 10:37). Even with this prophecy, the Disciples still do not understand.

“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, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared” (Mark 10:38;40). The Ten are upset, but they do not see that to be a follower of Christ means not to be rewarded, but to be humbled: “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. But it is not so among you; but 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 10:42-45).

In two weeks, we will offer lamentations at the tomb of our Lord. As we continue to prepare ourselves, we must consider what it means to be a true follower of Christ. If we, with our obligations to our livelihoods and families, can see St. Mary as someone who changed her life for God, then we, who are fasting these 40 days, can find comfort in her example. Let us use the penitential spirit of St. Mary of Egypt to find the strength to complete the Fast, and to prepare ourselves for the great events of Holy Week, and our Lord’s Resurrection!

**+SEVASTIANOS
Metropolitan of Atlanta**