

Monastic Musings

News and Views of the Eastern Rite Monastics
of the
Ohio Orthodox Catholic Church

April 2012

From the Idle keyboard

by: schema-Archimandrite Barb



Spring has finally arrived! It means Easter is almost here for us. If you remember, I have taught in the past that on the Feast of the Resurrection (Easter Day) we say: Christ Has Risen, He Has Risen Indeed! Easter should be a wonderful celebration of Jesus overcoming death; the “fear of death” was removed for each of us if we live our lives as Jesus has taught.

This month, I am doing a long teaching on a saint that is really not well known by those within the Western Churches. This inspiring saint is someone who can teach us so much. To be honest, she is one of my favorite Saints! Please take the time to read the entire article and see if in some way you can identify with her -- not necessarily with her “chosen” life profession at first, but how she turned her life to one of serving God. She teaches us what God’s forgiveness is and what He can provide you if you only follow his guidance.

I take this moment to send all of you Easter Greetings from the Holy Theotokos of Mercy Community. *Christ has Risen, He has Risen indeed!* Happy Easter to all and may God bless each of you now and always.

“CHRIST IS RISEN! TRULY HE IS RISEN!”

by Rev. Mother Myrella

Having attended Roman Catholic school from September 1954 through June 1963, I thought that I understood what Lent and Holy Week were about. For me, Lent was that long period of time when we fasted from certain foods and abstained from certain behaviors. We would pray the Stations of the Cross on a daily basis. On Good Friday, we went to Confession and then spent most of the day on our knees as penance for our sins. We prayed especially fervently at 3:00PM, the time of Christ’s death hoping to obtain an indulgence which would keep us from eternal damnation. All teachings were focused on Christ’s Crucifixion – and not on what

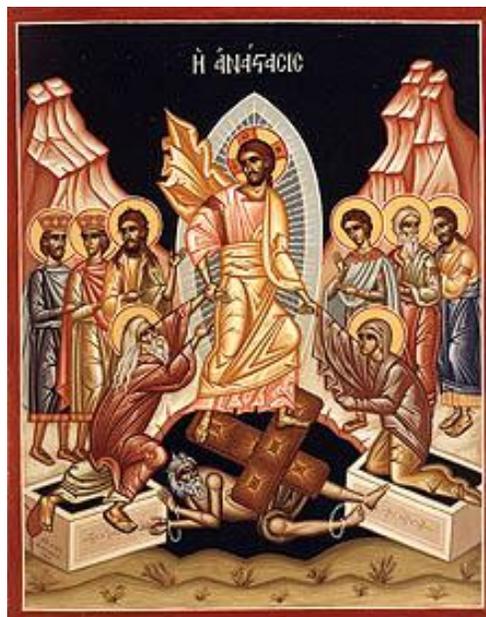
happened afterward. Holy Saturday had very little significance. On Easter, I wore my new “Easter clothes” and went to an especially lengthy High Mass with my family. All of the prayers were in Latin; so, none of us really understood what was being said. All I knew is that as a child, I could not wait to get home to see what the Easter bunny had brought me. Easter was a festive family holiday more along the lines of the celebration of Spring than the celebration of our Salvation, but then the focus of the Roman Catholic Church always was on the Crucified Christ.

Christ’s descending into Hell and rising from the dead were not concepts that I readily understood. In fact, until I began studying Orthodoxy in 1997, I did not fully comprehend what Christ’s Resurrection meant to humanity. I also learned that the Day of Christ’s Resurrection was not called Easter but was called Pascha, which is the Greek form of the Hebrew word “pesah”, which means “passage”:

“On this day we celebrate all the passages granted by God to humanity: the passage from nothingness into being at creation; the passage through the Red Sea; the passage from freedom into slavery; the passage from the Old to the New Covenants in the person of Christ; the passage from darkness to Light; the passage from death to life in the resurrection.” (The Incarnate God, Volume 2, Page 151)

Christ is risen! Truly He is risen! That is how Orthodox Christians greet one another on Pascha, the Feast of Feasts. The Glorious Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is the center of the Orthodox Christian faith. Christ’s defeat of death was our transfiguration – abolishing the death of our souls and promising us eternal life if we but live in Christ:

“People condemned God to death; with His Resurrection He condemned them to immortality. For striking Him, God returned embraces; for insults, blessings; for death, immortality. Never did men show more hate towards God than when they crucified Him; and God never showed His love towards people more than when He was resurrected. Mankind wanted to make God dead, but God, with His Resurrection, made people alive, the crucified God resurrected on the third day and thereby killed death! There is no more death. Immortality is surrounding man and his entire world.” (Meditation on the Resurrection by Saint Justin Popovic)



Christ's Resurrection is also our resurrection if we are willing to accept our transfiguration and spiritual transformation by living an earthly life in Christ and continuing His ministry of love, mercy, and forgiveness.

"Yesterday I was crucified with Him; today I am glorified with Him.

Yesterday I died with Him; today I am made alive with Him.

Yesterday I was buried with Him; today I am raised up with Him.

Let us offer to Him Who suffered and rose again for us ... ourselves, the possession most precious to God and most proper.

Let us become like Christ, since Christ became like us.

Let us become Divine for His sake, since for us He became Man.

He assumed the worse that He might give us the better. He became poor that by His poverty we might become rich. He accepted the form of a servant that we might win back our freedom.

He came down that we might be lifted up. He was tempted that through Him we might conquer. He was dishonored that He might glorify us. He died that He might save us. He ascended that He might draw to Himself us, who were thrown down through the fall of sin.

Let us give all, offer all, to Him who gave Himself a Ransom and Reconciliation for us. We needed an incarnate God, a God put to death, that we might live. We were put to death together with Him that we might be cleansed. We rose again with Him because we were put to death with Him. We were glorified with Him because we rose again with Him."
(St. Gregory the Theologian, Easter Orations)

No matter what you call the day of Christ's Resurrection, *Christ is Risen! Truly he is Risen!*
Allelulia!

St. Mary of Egypt

by: schema-Archimandrite Barb

Saint Mary of Egypt is a very unique saint of the church. Part of what makes her so unique is that she was a newly baptized Orthodox Christian when she traveled to the desert to live out her life. She did not have the advantage of learning about her faith in the church over many years like most of those who moved to the desert as monastics. I will try to bring forth the story of Mary so that you can learn that God does forgive us for our past if we are willing to just ask and follow his instructions! Her feast day is April 1st and is celebrated in both the Eastern and Western Churches.

Saint Mary, also known as Maria Aegyptica, was born somewhere in Egypt. At the age of twelve, she ran away to the city of Alexandria where she lived an extremely dissolute life, prostituting herself. It is said that she often refused the money offered for her sexual favors as she was driven "by an insatiable and an irrepressible passion," and that she mainly lived by begging,

supplemented by spinning flax. As you can see she was a woman that did not live her life in way that was what the church taught. But it became a tool to move her toward God!

After seventeen years living as a prostitute, she travelled to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. She undertook the journey as a sort of "anti-pilgrimage," saying that she hoped to find in the pilgrim crowds at Jerusalem even more partners in her lust. She paid for her passage by offering sexual favors to other pilgrims, and she continued her habitual lifestyle for a short time in Jerusalem. She tells the story that when she tried to enter the Church of the Holy Sepulcher for the celebration, she was barred from doing so by an unseen force. Realizing that this was because of her lifestyle, she was struck with remorse; on seeing an icon of the Theotokos outside the church, she prayed for forgiveness and promised to give up the world and live as a monastic. Then she attempted again to enter the church, and this time was permitted in. After venerating the relic of the true cross, she returned to the icon to give thanks, and heard a voice telling her, "If you cross the Jordan, you will find glorious rest and true peace." She immediately went to the monastery of St. John the Baptist on the banks of the River Jordan, where she received absolution and afterwards Holy Communion. The next morning, she crossed the Jordan and retired to the desert to live the rest of her life as a hermit in penitence. She took with her only three loaves of bread, and once they were gone, lived only on what she could find in the wilderness.

The whole time she lived in the desert, she was never in contact with anyone. Over time her skin was burned black, she lost lots of weight, and no longer had any clothes. What shelter she lived in was never located. She even tells that she never saw any wild animals throughout her life in the desert.

About 2 years before her death, a priest/monk (St. Zosimas of Palestine) who was questioning his priesthood, monasticism and life as a whole went into the desert searching. There he "stumbled" upon Mary and ran after her. He gave her his cloak and spent time talking with her, learning about her and her life in the desert. He learned that she manifested marvelous clairvoyance. At the end of the visit, Mary had a special request of him. She wanted him to meet her by the Jordan River on Holy Thursday of Lent the next year and bring her communion. He promised to do so and began the journey back to his monastery.

The next year he returned to the spot where he met Mary the first time. She made the sign of the cross over the River and walked on the water to St. Zosimas. There they prayed together, talked and Mary received Holy Communion. She then requested that St. Zosimas return again the following year on Holy Thursday and bring her communion again. She then made the sign of the cross over the river, walked on the water to the other side and disappeared. St. Zosimas again returned to his monastery, though he wanted to stay with Mary.

When St. Zosimas traveled the next year on Holy Thursday to the spot where he was to meet up with Mary, he found her body lying in the sand. In the sand was a note written by Mary to him: "Abba Zosimas, bury on this spot the body of humble Mary. Return to dust what is dust. Pray to the Lord for me. I reposed on the first day of April, on the very night of the saving Passion of Christ, after partaking of the Mystical Supper."

St. Zosimas was glad to finally learn her name. He then realized that St Mary, after receiving the Holy Mysteries from his hand last year, was transported instantaneously to the place where she died, though it had taken him twenty days to travel that distance.

Glorifying God, St. Zosimas said to himself, "It is time to do what she asks. But how can I dig a

grave, with nothing in my hands?" Then he saw a small piece of wood left by some traveler. He picked it up and began to dig. The ground was hard and dry, and he could not dig it. Looking up, St. Zosimas saw an enormous lion standing by the saint's body and licking her feet. Fear gripped the Elder, but he guarded himself with the Sign of the Cross, believing that he would remain unharmed through the prayers of the holy woman ascetic. Then the lion came close to the Elder, showing its friendliness with every movement. Abba Zosimas commanded the lion to dig the grave in order to bury St Mary's body. At his words, the lion dug a hole deep enough to bury the body. Then each went his own way. The lion went into the desert, and St. Zosimas returned to the monastery, blessing and praising Christ our God.

The story of St. Mary of Egypt has been passed down by mouth for many years. It is a story in which the sinner (St. Mary of Egypt) knows the heart of the saintly monk (St. Zosimas), in which a humble woman gives blessing to the worthy priest because he has seen that her own gifts of the Spirit exceed the ranks of ecclesiastical office, in which sanctity is found outside the monastery more than within; in which the desert, the place of death, becomes the place of life; in which the peace of God's kingdom is restored as the lion and the man become partners in piety. It is a breathtaking story, and it moves us accordingly.

May we learn that God is full of forgiveness if we are just willing to reach out and ask! God is always with us even when we don't seem to want Him with us. God waits patiently for us to reach out and ask for his help which is freely given. May we learn how to live our lives in a way that we can magnify God's love and forgiveness in this world.

Orthodox Hymns for the Feast of St. Mary of Egypt

The image of God was truly preserved in you, O mother,
For you took up the Cross and followed Christ.
By so doing, you taught us to disregard the flesh, for it passes away;
But to care instead for the soul, since it is immortal.
Therefore your spirit, O holy Mother Mary, rejoices with the Angels.
-- Troparion

Having been a sinful woman,
You became through repentance a Bride of Christ.
Having attained angelic life,
You defeated demons with the weapon of the Cross;
Therefore, O most glorious Mary you are a Bride of the Kingdom!
-- Kontakion



The icon to the left shows an icon of St. Mary of Egypt in the center with many small icons around the large one. Each small one depicts something in her life. It is fairly common to see icons done in this manner. Remember, icons tell a story about the person/event. If you take time and look at each of the small icons, you will be able to see what it is saying given the information I have already told you above.

The icon to the right is also one of St. Mary of Egypt. If you look at this icon, you see 5 small areas that depict parts of her life.

1. the top is Jesus,
2. the left is St. Zosimas,
3. the right is the Holy Theotokos,
4. the bottom left is St. Zosimas giving his cloak to St. Mary,
5. the bottom right is the burial of St. Mary.



Call to Action

*“The world is my cloister, my body is my cell, and my soul is the hermit within.”
-- St. Francis of Assisi*

St. Francis really could not have said anything more true today. That is how the monastics of the Ohio Orthodox Catholic Church feel each and every day. Whether it be the Franciscan Order or the Eastern Rite Order, all have been called to serve God in the place they are living at the moment and in a way that will help the community they live in. No, our monastic orders do not have physical monasteries and the monastics have to provide everything for themselves, but they live their lives as monastic hermit! Have you felt the call to be a monastic or hermit? If so, why not explore this calling with Archbishop Charles (chancery@ohioocc.org) and see just where it might lead you.

Prayer Requests

Mom LeClair
Bill and Monica
Br. Yossi and Jim
Linda and Wayne
Carol and Leonard
Fr. David and family
Fr. Rick Hobbs
Our Archbishop -- +Charles Smith, OSF

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**Holy Theotokos of Mercy Community
for the
Ohio Orthodox Catholic Church**

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