

**FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT  
(CAN YE DRINK OF THE CUP THAT I DRINK OF?)  
ST. MARY OF EGYPT  
MARCH 12/25, 2007**

**HEBREWS 9:11-14**

**ST. MARK 10:32-45**

Fr. Dr. Photios+ (W)

**Gospel:** *And they were in the way going up to Jerusalem; and Jesus went before them: and they were amazed; and as they followed, they were afraid. And He took again the twelve, and began to tell them what things should happen unto Him.*

*Saying, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of Man shall be delivered unto the chief priests, and unto the scribes; and they shall condemn Him to death, and shall deliver Him to the Gentiles:*

*And they shall mock Him, and shall scourge Him, and shall spit upon Him, and shall kill Him: and the third day He shall rise again.*

*And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, come unto Him, saying, Master, we would that Thou shouldest do for us whatsoever we desire.*

*And He said unto them, What would ye that I should do for you?*

*They said unto Him, Grant unto us that we may sit, one on Thy right hand, and the other on Thy left hand, in Thy glory.*

*But Jesus said unto them, Ye know not what ye ask: can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?*

*And they said unto Him, We can. And Jesus said unto them, Ye shall indeed drink of the cup that I drink of; and with the baptism that I am baptized withal shall ye be baptized:*

*But to sit on my right hand and on my left hand is not mine to give; but it shall be given to him for whom it is prepared.*

*And when the ten heard it, they began to be much displeased with James and John.*

*But Jesus called them to Him, and saith unto them, Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them.*

*But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister:*

*And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all.*

*For even the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many.*

...

St. Mary of Egypt (+530):

On the fifth Sunday of Great Lent, we celebrate her memory. Her life records an extraordinary spiritual example for all. The Egyptian Mary began a life of prostitution at the age of twelve, which lasted seventeen years. But everything changed for her upon a trip to the holy city of Jerusalem. After arriving there, she attempted to enter one of the Churches [Church of the Holy Sepulchre, where Christ was buried] to venerate the Precious Cross, but an unseen power stopped her from going in: At the entrance was an icon of the Theotokos. In ‘great fear’, she turned to the icon and begged the holy Mother to allow her to go in, ‘confessing her sin and impurity and promising that she would then go wherever the Most Pure One led her’. Then, she was allowed in, and, after venerating the Cross she went back to the entrance, stood in front of the icon and thanked the Theotokos. She then heard a voice telling her that if she crossed the Jordan, she would find true peace. She bought three loaves of bread, left immediately and got to the Jordan that evening. She received the Mysteries the next morning at the monastery of St. John the Baptist and then crossed the river spending the next 48 years in the desert near the Jordan River.

[St. Nicholas Russian Orthodox Church, *Fifth Sunday of Great Lent – St. Mary of Egypt, Synaxarion* at <http://www.orthodox.net/greatlent/synaxarion-05sungl.html>.]

St. Mary stands out as a shining example of repentance. It’s not too late for us!

## Jesus Prepares the Disciples

Our Lord privately prepares the Twelve for His Passion in order to calm them, thinking that if they hear it before the time they will live though it better. He also tells them these things so they will know He voluntarily suffers them.<sup>1</sup> Christ could have averted His fate at any time because He is God, but we would not have been saved. His mission to die on the Cross for the world's sins could not otherwise have been accomplished. He is unafraid and leads the way, speaking to them away from the crowd:

... by leading the way, He shows that He hastens to His Passion and does not evade His death which is for our salvation.<sup>2</sup>

But, as He points out, there is a silver lining; He will rise on the third day after His killing.<sup>3</sup>

### James & John 'Get It Wrong'

James and John misconstrue the purpose of the Lord's upcoming suffering and Passion:

They thought that His going to Jerusalem meant that he was going to ascend the throne of an earthly kingdom, and that *after* (emphasis supplied) He had become king He would suffer these things which He said He would suffer.<sup>4</sup>

They thought He was going to reign over a visible kingdom.

This is why they privately ask to sit on each side of Jesus. The Lord rebukes them for thinking that His is an *earthly*, not spiritual, kingdom, and they were requesting a special privilege He would not and could not give. He chastises them for seeking earthly things:

You are craving honour and glory, but I am calling you to die. By 'baptism and 'cup' He means the Cross. For a cup of wine is something a man gladly accepts, and it quickly puts him to sleep. And baptism is something which is done to cleanse sins. But James and John, not understanding what he said, gave their promise, thinking that He was speaking of an actual cup of wine, and the washing of the body which the Jews performed before they ate.<sup>5</sup>

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Ye look to *transitory* temporal glory, whereas I call you to suffering loss and death, that I might make you *sharers* in a glory that is *eternal* (emphases supplied).<sup>6</sup>

## Martyrdom Will Be Their Baptism

Jesus promises them they *will* drink of His cup and be baptized as He is:

Martyrdom, He is saying, will be yours, and you will die for Truth's sake.<sup>7</sup>

Martyrdom did occur as James was beheaded in Jerusalem in 45 A.D. and John, after being tortured in Rome, was exiled to the island of Patmos. Christ did not let John die then because he was to live longer than the rest of the Apostles.<sup>8</sup>

## What About Sitting on Each Side of the Lord?

No one is to sit at Christ's right or left. It would not have been just for Him to bestow such an arrangement as an honour:

... this honour has been prepared for those who *have contested and struggled* (emphasis supplied) for it.<sup>9</sup>

Such an honour was not to be granted. They were to be martyrs for His sake:

... but if there is one who, along with martyrdom, exceeds you in every virtue, he shall precede you in honour.<sup>10</sup>

## The Lord Straightens Them Out: We are To Serve Not Strive For Personal Honour

The remaining ten disciples were put out with James and John when they saw them seeking honour [a fit of envy as we would recognize from our own behaviour from time to time]. But see how He straightens their heads; we are not to "grasp for honours" and "desire the chief place" as the Gentiles do:

The leaders of the Gentiles come with power and force, but it is not so with My disciples; rather, let him who would be great among you serve all.<sup>11</sup>

All the disciples are to serve each other; there is to be no *domination*.<sup>12</sup> They are to concede first place of honour to each other:

... for the mark of a great soul is to endure all things and to *serve everyone* (emphasis supplied).<sup>13</sup>

Service is to be reciprocal among and between them.

## Christ Is Our Example

For *even* (emphasis supplied) the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.<sup>14</sup>

Christ heals them, pointing out that this striving for honours is not for His people. Although the disciples acted “imperfectly” at this time, later each was to concede “the first place of honour to the other”. See how the Lord serves as our example; He came to serve, and greater than that, He came to die for us, “as a ransom for many”. He practices what He preaches. He not only serves but dies for those He serves.<sup>15</sup> This humility exalts and glorifies Him and all creation:

For *before* He became man, He was known only to the angels, but *after* His Incarnation and Crucifixion, His glory is even greater and He reigns over all the earth (emphases supplied).<sup>16</sup>

## Can We Drink of His Cup?

We can if we follow His example, serve humbly without concern for our *relative* position to someone else. If others surpass us in virtue, consider that as “good”. If we fast and others don’t, let’s not ‘look down our noses’ at them; for, after all, their souls may be strengthened by our Lord to the point where they surpass our earlier Christian efforts. They can do it “if they so *desire* (emphasis supplied).<sup>17</sup> We need to avoid pride, vanity, and thinking ourselves ‘above’ others:

Let us, then, humble ourselves, I beseech you, brethren, that we may be exalted; for humility is the *door* (emphasis supplied) to the kingdom of heaven. Blessed is the man whose life is so lofty but whose mind is humble; but everyone who is haughty is unclean before God. The Lord resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.<sup>18</sup>

+ In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Bl. Theophylact’s *Explanation of the Holy Gospel According to Saint Mark, Vol. II* in the series, Bl. Theophylact’s *Explanation of the New Testament* (tr. from the original Greek by Fr. Christopher Stade), Chrysostom Press, House Springs, MO, 1997, p. 89.

<sup>2</sup> *id.*

<sup>3</sup> *id.*

<sup>4</sup> *id.*, p. 90.

<sup>5</sup> *id.*

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<sup>6</sup> Hieromonk German Ciuba (tr. from the Slavonic into English; tr. from the original Greek into Slavonic in the year 6851, A.D. 1343), *The Gospel Commentary*, Russian Orthodox Church of the Nativity of Christ (Old Rite), Erie, PA, 2002, p. 120.

<sup>7</sup> Bl. Theophylact, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

<sup>8</sup> *id.* and see fn 14.

<sup>9</sup> *id.*, pp. 90-91.

<sup>10</sup> *id.*, p. 91.

<sup>11</sup> Ciuba, *op. cit.*, p. 122.

<sup>12</sup> Bl. Theophylact, *op. cit.*, pp. 91-92.

<sup>13</sup> *id.*, p. 92.

<sup>14</sup> *id.*

<sup>15</sup> *id.*

<sup>16</sup> *id.*

<sup>17</sup> Ciuba, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

<sup>18</sup> *id.*