



# Changing Your Ways

## *Glory to Jesus Christ!*

☞ Going to church is a good thing. In fact, it's a great experience for us.

How would you react if you were prevented from going to church?

Would you be mad? Demand justice? Complain that your rights were being denied?

When would you begin to wonder the reason why this was happening to you?

## *Self Reflection*

This is what happened to Saint Mary of Egypt when she was 29 years old. She was in Jerusalem, attempting to enter a church, but **felt an invisible power** preventing her from going in.

After thinking about what this could mean, Mary saw an icon of the Theotokos, and began praying, **asking the Virgin Mary to entreat God's mercy**, allowing her to enter the church.

## *Facing Reality*

Mary had realized that her life, filled with sinful acts, was preventing her from encountering God. Her prayers turned inward, taking on new meaning. Like the Prodigal Son, she resolved to change her ways.

Mary promised that in exchange for being **allowed into the church**, she would spend the rest of her life in **repentance for her sins**.

## *A New Life*

**God answered Mary's prayers**, and the invisible power allowed her entry into the church. **Mary bowed before the Cross** of Our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Her repentance was changed to gratitude, making good on her promise to God. Leaving behind her sinful ways, Mary left the church and immediately went to live in the Palestinian desert for the next 46 years!

## *Be Serious*

We don't need to run to the desert, we need to think seriously about our way of life.

The journey through Great Lent is nearly over, and we can still **be like St. Mary of Egypt**, leaving behind the things which separate us from God, approaching the church in humility and repentance.

Changing our ways can transform us into the people God created us to be: Saints!

## ☞ **Scripture Readings**

for the Fifth Sunday of Lent:  
St. Mary of Egypt

Epistle: **Hebrews 9:11-14**

Gospel: **Mark 10:32-45**



## ☞ **Hymns of the Day**

for the Fifth Sunday of Lent:  
St. Mary of Egypt

### **Troparion/Apolytikion — T8 (PI 4)**

The image of God, was faithfully preserved in you, O Mother.

For you took up the Cross and followed Christ.

By Your actions you taught us to look beyond the flesh for it passes, rather to be concerned about the soul which is immortal.

Wherefore, O Holy Mary, your soul rejoices with the angels.

### **Kontakion — Tone 3**

Who once was filled with every carnal sin has become today, through repentance, the bride of Christ.

She desired the company of angels. She trampled upon demons with the Cross as her weapon.

This is why, O Glorious Mary, you became a Bride of the Kingdom.

*Parents, Church School Teachers & Youth Directors:*  
Watch for the ☞ to indicate topics/questions you can use to inspire conversations with youth. Or use the corresponding study guide for this resource.



*Sing or pray these hymns to St. Mary before her icon.*

### **Troparion/Apolytikion — Tone 8 (Plagal 4)**

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.

### **Kontakion — Tone 3**

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!

## **☞ Six Ideas for the Last Six Days of the Great Fast**

1. Read the full life of St. Mary of Egypt: <https://bit.ly/stmary-egypt>
2. Keep saying St. Ephraim's Prayer every day
3. Read from the Book of Proverbs (chapters 19-31)
4. Forgive those who offend you, repent if you offend someone
5. Go to confession (if you haven't already)
6. Pray to St. Mary of Egypt for humility and repentance

**ST. MARY OF EGYPT** was born in Alexandria, on north African coast of Egypt, in 445 AD.

Mary was raised as a Christian, but at the age of 12 she discovered boys and soon became obsessed with a passion-filled life of sensuality and lust. Mary lived like this for seventeen years.

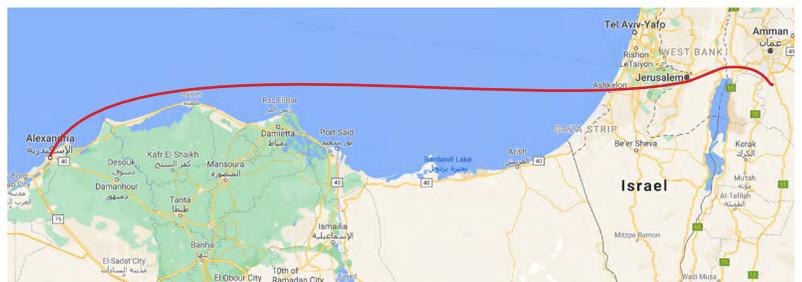
Then, one summer, she joined a group of pilgrims on a ship heading to Jerusalem to see the Precious Cross of Jesus Christ. Although poor, Mary was able to make the voyage by leading some of the men into sin, giving Mary money for time spent with her.

When she arrived at the Church in Jerusalem with the others, they entered it, but an invisible force prevented Mary from going in to see the Cross. She tried multiple times, getting frustrated and eventually physically exhausted.

Mary began to realize it was her sinful way of life which prevented her from entering the church. In her unworthiness, Mary looked above the door of the church and saw the icon of the Theotokos.

She dropped to her knees and began to pray with a great intensity, asking for God's mercy, repenting of her sinful life. Mary then arose, and again tried to enter the church. This time, she was able, venerating the holy Cross. Mary then returned to the doors of the church, kneeling before the icon of the Theotokos in gratitude.

Mary heard a voice telling her, "If you cross the Jordan river, you will find glorious rest." Mary did just that, leaving Jerusalem, she walked to the Jordan River, crossed it, and left the world and her former way of life, focusing on repentance through prayer and strict fasting.



We know of Saint Mary's radical change of lifestyle thanks to a monk named Saint Zosimas who lived at a monastery not far from Jerusalem. Years after Mary had left Jerusalem, he had gone to pray in the desert during Great Lent where he encountered Mary.

At first, St. Zosimas thought he was seeing a spirit, but then realized Mary was a real person. They spoke, and Mary eventually shared her life story with St. Zosimas. He was amazed at her holiness, and how through her personal struggles to repent for 46 years, alone in the desert, she tamed her physical passions and acquired spiritual holiness.

St. Mary of Egypt is an example and inspiration for us, showing how God loves and forgives us of our sins when we repent. Christ encourages us to live a life of humility with prayer and fasting, caring for our soul so we can one day stand with the Venerable Mary of Egypt and all of the other saints before God in Paradise.

# THE *PASSIONS* OF YOUR LIFE

The Orthodox Church doesn't shy away from talking about the life of Saint Mary of Egypt. In fact, the Church celebrates Mary's repentance and turning from a sinful way of life to become one of the most revered saints we can know.

As human beings, we all have physical desires to varying degrees, but the devil distorts sex and love in ways which separate us from God and each other.

The Church reminds us that when we allow desires to control us, they can lead to destructive passions, further isolating us from those around us, and most importantly, apart from God.

St. Mary of Egypt is an example of how we can make a radical change from our passions and return to God.

Passions can come in many forms in our life. Whether physical, emotional, or compulsive, passions can only be uprooted from our life through prayer and fasting. (Mark 9:28-29)

## Directions

- Review the list of topics in the center of the page, thinking honestly about where there might be an imbalance of time and attention given to one of these or something else in your life.
- Choose one topic, writing a self assessment of how it controls your life, potentially becoming more important than your relationship with God.
- Then use the word list at the bottom of the page, identifying ways you can use the gifts of the Church to return to God. How can God help you make meaningful and lasting change during Great Lent and after Pascha?
- After completing this exercise, discuss your thoughts with your parish priest or father confessor.

**Note:** Making a genuine spiritual effort to turn from temptations and passions is part of personal growth as Orthodox Christians. It should always be done in consultation with your parish priest or father confessor.

Even the most holy saints (like St. Zosimas) had a father confessor who talked with them, helping them through intense struggles, ensuring they were not led astray by temptations of pride from the devil.

Food  
Hoarding  
Laziness  
Anger  
Jealousy

Gossip and Idle Talk  
Sex and Romance  
Sports Fanatic  
Programs on TV  
Alcohol and Illicit Drugs

Social Media  
Greed  
Competitiveness  
Religious Fervor  
Judging Others

*In my life, I struggle with:*

*How it takes control of my life:*

*I can use \_\_\_\_\_ to help free myself from this by:*

Prayers to God  
Fasting  
Confession  
A School Counselor

The Eucharist  
Talking with my priest  
Prayers to my patron Saint  
Acts of Charity

A Therapist  
Prayers to the Theotokos  
Talking with my Parents  
Attending Divine Services