FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT

The Annunciation of our Most Holy Lady, Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary . St Mary of Egypt.

Dear brethren, we have reached the fifth Sunday of the Great Lent. Today the Holy Church offers us St. Mary of Egypt as a supreme example of repentance. Not everyone is able to understand why, precisely, the Church has chosen her. “She led a most sinful life,”“she was a terrible sinner.”

Let us first look at how it is revealed to us in the example of the venerable Mary. St. Mary of Egypt led a dissolute way of life. Arriving in Jerusalem, even there she continued to engage in debauchery. But when she wanted to go into the church and venerate the Lord’s precious Cross, she was barred from entering. Gradually she understood why that was happening and began weeping bitterly. Catching sight of an icon of the Mother of God, she prayed to it, repented her way of life and vowed, under the guidance of the Holy Virgin, to reform her life.

At first glance it may seem an easy thing to do. However, let us think, dear brethren: how many of us have truly repented our sins? The Church calls us to penitence and communion. And so we go, and we confess our sins, and we partake of the Holy Mysteries. But… during confession, do we truly repent?

At the end of confession the priest asks us: do we repent of our sins? Note the question, dear brethren! We are not asked: have you confessed your sins? But – do you repent of your sins? And when we answer: yes, I repent, – we must feel complete remorse in our hearts and truly repent, repent in the same way that Mary of Egypt repented her sinful life.

At least once in our lifetime we receive encouragement towards penitence. Mary of Egypt was barred from entering the church. She understood the reason and spent the following 47 years in penitence. For us the doors of the church are not closed; however, we close them ourselves. “How is that?” – you may well ask. – “I go to church, I confess, I take communion.” If we, knowing that a service is going on in church, go out to amuse ourselves instead, or sit around the house in idleness, or if we, having taken communion, immediately begin to pass judgment on others and commit anew the sins that we have just confessed, – we close the doors of the church upon ourselves. Even if we enter the church physically, our constant and unrepented sins bar from our souls the grace, the purity, the comfort which we expect to receive in church.

We must understand the sacrament of penitence and immerse our-selves fully in it. After St. Mary of Egypt realized her sins and her guilt, the Holy Virgin led her out of society into the desert, where she became completely immersed in repentance and spent many years in this spiritual labor. For her absolute repentance, her soul was totally healed and she ascended to a level of absolute sanctity.

Five weeks of the Great Lent have passed already, dear brethren. Let us ask ourselves: have I begun to repent as Mary of Egypt once repented? Have I become aware of my sins? Have I truly understood them and have I repented of them with a sincere intention of reforming myself? let us purify our hearts, so that we could truly sing: **“The angels sing in the heavens of Thy Resurrection, O Christ our Saviour, and may we on earth glorify Thee with a pure heart.”**Amen.