

Sts. Peter and Paul Albanian Orthodox Church

First-enthroned of the apostles, teachers of the universe: Entreat the Master of all to grant peace to the world, and to our souls great mercy!

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April 14, 2019

FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT: ST MARY OF EGYPT

TONE 5

Today	10:00am	Divine Liturgy Sunday School Lenten Vespers
Wed. 17	7:00pm	Presanctified Liturgy Pot-luck dinner
Sat. 20	10:00am	Divine Liturgy
	6:00pm	Vespers
Sun. 21	10:00am	Divine Liturgy Sunday School

One must be baptized and chrismated an Orthodox Christian to receive Holy Communion. Guests are invited to receive a blessing at the chalice and partake of the post-Communion bread (Antidoron).

Fast Days: Strict fast all week.(fasting from meat, fish, eggs, dairy, oil, wine and hard spirits as you are able.) Wine and oil allowed on Saturdays and Sundays.

Troparion – Tone 8 (*St Mary of Egypt*)

The image of God was truly preserved in thee, O Mother, for thou didst take up the Cross and followed Christ. By so doing, thou taughtest us to disregard the flesh for it passeth away; but to care instead for the soul, for it is immortal. Therefore thy spirit, O holy Mother Mary, rejoiceth with the angels.

Kontakion – Tone 5 (*Resurrection*)

Thou didst descend into hell, O my Savior, shattering its gates as Almighty, resurrecting the dead as Creator, and destroying the sting of death. Thou hast delivered Adam from the curse, O Lover of man, and we cry to Thee: O Lord, save us!

Welcome to all visitors! Please join us upstairs in the church hall for coffee hour after liturgy.

Prayers for those in our Sts. Peter and Paul community (parishioners, family, friends) can be listed for remembrance in our litanies during the Liturgy. Feel free to give names to Fr. Nicholas - please indicate how each person listed is connected to us (parishioner, family, friend, etc.), as well as why we are praying for them (health, memory, travel, etc.).

Confessions can be heard by appointment. If you need, I will come to you during the week. Please do not hesitate to call for a time to drop by the church or to have me visit you.

Remembrances for both the living and the dead during the prayers of preparation of the Eucharistic Lamb and during the Augmented Litany should be given the week before the desired remembrance so that the names can be put into the bulletin and given to the Deacons for the prayers. Any names of the living that are not marked as sick or traveling will be listed under general prayers.

SCRIPTURE THIS WEEK

Church Lectionary

Today

Hebrews 9:11-14
Mark 10:32-45

Monday

Isaiah 48:17-49:4
Genesis 27:1-41
Proverbs 19:16-25

Tuesday

Isaiah 49:6-10
Genesis 31:3-16
Proverbs 21:3-21

Wednesday

Isaiah 58:1-11
Genesis 43:26-31, 45:1-16
Proverbs 21:23-22:4

Thursday

Isaiah 65:8-16
Genesis 46:1-7
Proverbs 23:15-24:5

Friday

Isaiah 66:10-24
Genesis 49:33-50:26
Proverbs 31:8-31

Saturday

Hebrews 12:28-13:8
John 11:1-45

Reading the Bible in a Year

Apr 14: Nehemiah 5-8
Apr 15: Nehemiah 9-13
Apr 16: Esther 1-4
Apr 17: Esther 5-8
Apr 18: Esther 9-10
Apr 19: Job 1-4
Apr 20: Job 5-8

Special Prayers

Ill/Home-bound:

Virginia Rifkin, Ruth Rifkin, Virginia Daka, Emmelia Stone, Liam, Denise Gormley, Victor, Sonya, Anna, George, Lyanna, Barbara, Katelyn, Margarita, Annmarie, Shpresa, Ralph John, Christina, Mary, Alexandra, Matthew, Fran, Sophie Plasari, Donna, Michael, Fr. Gregory & Mat. Linda DuDash, Leon, child Luka, child Makayla, Rhonda, Ashley, CJ, Elizabeth, Rebecca, Lev, Margarita, Rachel

General:

Michael Peterson, John, Darian, Tammy, Jean Dimitri, Cheryl Dimitri, Jason, Anna, George, Sonya, Catherine, Alisha, Sasha, Joseph, Kimberly, Niko, Kristin, Robert, Jerry, Pina, Jerry, Chris, Matt, Gianna, Menina, Eugenia and the child to be born of her, Evgenia and the child to be born of her

Memory Eternal:

Milto



“Why do you increase your bonds? Take hold of your life before your light grows dark and you seek help and do not find it. This life has been given to you for repentance; do not waste it in vain pursuits.”

-St. Isaac the Syrian



March/April Events

April

14 – 10:00am Divine Liturgy
Sunday School
4:00pm *Lenten Vespers*
17 – 7:00pm Presanctified Liturgy
Pot-luck dinner
20 – 10:00am Divine Liturgy
6:00pm Vespers
21 – 10:00am Divine Liturgy
Sunday School
4:00pm *Bridegroom Matins*

23 – **Holy Tuesday**
7:00pm Bridegroom Matins
24 – **Holy Wednesday**
7:00pm Holy Unction
25 – **Holy Thursday**
9:00am Vespers with Liturgy of St. Basil
Egg dying and pot-luck
7:00pm Matins of Great and Holy Friday

26 – **Great and Holy Friday**
3:00pm Vespers of Great and Holy Friday
7:00pm Matins of Great and Holy Saturday
27 – **Great and Holy Saturday**
10:00am Vespers with Divine Liturgy
11:30pm Nocturne with Procession
28 – **Great and Holy Pascha**
Midnight Matins and Divine Liturgy
1:00pm Vespers

Coffee Hour

Today: Memorial for Milto

Next Week: Donna Bacon

Birthdays/ Anniversaries

Margaret Vesho B – 4/18

Belinda Mentzer B – 4/20

We are collecting donation items to go to Albania with Fr. Dennis Rhodes!

Our parish will take donations of all sizes and types of clothing for both boys and girls, sizes infant to teenagers, including dress clothes for church as well as casual everyday wear, socks and tights, shoes and sneakers, underwear, jackets, sweaters and sweatshirts. If the clothes cannot be used by the children at the orphanage he visits, they will be given to other needy children in the village.

2019 Mission Vespers

**April 14 – Sunday of St. Mary of Egypt – Mother of God Church (Georgian)
412 Philmont Avenue, Feasterville, PA 19053**

Hebrews 9:11-14 (Epistle)

But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

Mark 10:32-45 (Gospel)

Now they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was going before them; and they were amazed. And as they followed they were afraid. Then He took the twelve aside again and began to tell them the things that would happen to Him: "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death and deliver Him to the Gentiles; and they will mock Him, and scourge Him, and spit on Him, and kill Him. And the third day He will rise again." Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Him, saying, "Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask." And He said to them, "What do you want Me to do for you?" They said to Him, "Grant us that we may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on Your left, in Your glory." But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" They said to Him, "We are able." So Jesus said to them, "You will indeed drink the cup that I drink, and with the baptism I am baptized with you will be baptized; but to sit on My right hand and on My left is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it is prepared." And when the ten heard it, they began to be greatly displeased with James and John. But Jesus called them to Himself and said to them, "You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

Children's Word

Can you think of somebody you really trust? When you trust somebody you've heard what he or she has said in the past. You believe him, because what he said was true!

In today's Gospel reading, we hear about a time Jesus was with His disciples, walking to Jerusalem. As they were walking, Jesus "began to tell them what was going to happen to him, saying, 'Behold we are going up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man will be delivered to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death,...and they will mock him, and spit upon him, and scourge him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise.'"

Jesus was telling His disciples what was going to happen to Him.

Starting next week, with Holy Week, we will hear about all these things that really happened to our Lord. We will hear how Jesus was condemned to death, about how they made fun of Him, how they beat Him, and killed Him. Then on Pascha (Easter), we will hear about how He rose from the dead!

Our Lord Jesus Christ knew that all these things were going to happen to Him. We trust His words when we read the Bible, because we know that He told the truth then. We can read His words in the Gospels, and we can trust that they are true!

EVEN SAINTS CAN MAKE MISTAKES: ST. MARY OF EGYPT

Did you know that even saints can make mistakes? Today we remember a very special saint who made A LOT of mistakes.

When Saint Mary of Egypt was a young woman, she did not even try to be a good person. She had many, many sins and didn't even care. But one day, she tried to go into a holy church in Jerusalem, and she felt a force that would not let her go in! She couldn't see anybody pushing her out, but as hard as she tried, she still could not enter the church.

St. Mary then knew that she had to change her life. She left Jerusalem to live in the desert, where she lived for 48 years! She spent her time there praying and asking God to forgive her. Finally, before she died, she received Holy Communion from a priest who found her in the desert.

Sometimes, when we think of the saints, we might think they were born perfect and were perfect all their lives! But then we know that only Christ lived a perfect life! Today, let's all remember that nobody is perfect. But God still wants us to try to be perfect, like He is! St. Mary of Egypt is a great example of somebody who changed her life so she could follow Christ.

We celebrate St. Mary today, the fifth Sunday of Lent.

The Ladder of Divine Ascent and Moral Improvement

April 4, 2019 · Fr. Stephen Freeman

The Fourth Sunday of Great Lent in the Orthodox Church, is dedicated to St. John Climacus, the author of the ancient work, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*. It is a classic work describing “steps” within the life of the struggling ascetic. There is an icon associated with this work, picturing monastics climbing the rungs of a ladder to heaven, battling demons who are trying to pull them off. However, ladders are dangerous things to put in the hands of a modern Christian.

Modernity likes ladders. We like the idea of upward mobility, of continuing improvement, of moral progress. We speak of “career ladders” and the “ladder of success.” It is the myth of personal power. Modernity is a cultural phenomenon created by the theology of the Reformation and the philosophy of the Enlightenment. Freed from the constraints of inherited tradition (such as the Catholic Church) and the royal state (hurrah for democracy), modernity is a story told to individuals that they can now become whatever they want. Freedom and personal industry are the twin rails supporting the rungs of progress. As a philosophy, this idea and its associated notions are the bedrock of free-market capitalism. As theology, it is the foundation for self-help Christianity and the positive, motivational preaching of contemporary religion. “Be all that you can be, and Jesus can help!”

Nurtured in this culture, contemporary Orthodox believers are not immune to its allure, particularly if the images appear in the guise of desert monasticism and Byzantine/Russian-style striving. More than once I have heard the sad confession, “I don’t feel like I’m a very good Orthodox Christian.” Implied in this statement is that Orthodox Christians should, somehow, be better than other Christians. Some foolish people even call us the “marines” of the spiritual life. Of course, all of this, particularly when applied to writings such as St. John’s Ladder, is pure distortion and delusion. Its most subtle and seductive version is that of moral progress. I wrote a series of articles last year denouncing the concept of moral progress, identifying it as largely a modern notion and not consistent with the mind of the fathers. Here, I reaffirm that without equivocation.

We simply are not saved by getting better. It is a false image and a false goal. Of course, critics will charge that I’m being defeatist and suggesting a path devoid of moral effort. I am doing nothing of the sort. Everyone should, at all times, struggle against sin. But measuring, even watching for improvement can be not only self-defeating but sinful in itself. The Ladder points to a very different path:

“You cannot escape shame except by shame,” St. John says (4.62).

We do not gradually improve and thereby leave our shame behind us. The way down is the way up. The ladder of divine ascent is actually a ladder of divine descent. The path to union with God is only found in making the descent with Him. “Lo, if I descend into hell, Thou art there” (Ps 139:8). St. Gregory the Theologian says, “If He descends into hell, go with Him” (Oration 45).

The path of modernity carries no humility. It breeds pride, and frequently contempt. Failure is its nemesis. We blame ourselves for laziness and sloth, certain that a little more effort will make the difference. Like a child given a bad grade, we plead that we’ll try harder. Confession is seen as the Second Chance, the opportunity to pull up our grades. “Loser!” is the taunt of the modern world (a word spawned in the pit of hell).

But St. John points us towards our shame. He does not describe a path of moral improvement. His path follows the Cross, which is the descent into Hades. My failure, not sought for its own sake (we do not sin in order to gain grace), is always and immediately the gate of Hades and the gate of Paradise. When I acknowledge my failure and refuse to hide from its shame, we can call out for Christ to comfort us. “I did not turn my face from the shame and the spitting” (Is. 50:6). He will meet us in our shame, and takes it upon Himself. My failure becomes the failure of God (2 Cor. 5:21). It does not separate me from Christ, but, ironically, unites me to Him in the paradox that is at the very heart of our salvation. God became what we are, that we might become what He is. God does not meet us in the middle. He meets us at the bottom and asks us to meet Him there as well.

It is within that place that true humility is born. Judgment ceases. If I accept my shame in union with Christ, how can I judge another? Indeed, it is largely my efforts to avoid my shame that makes me judge my brother. We can only avoid judging if we “see our own transgressions” (as we are taught in the Prayer of St. Ephrem).

Modernity loves excellence. The moral improvement pitches of the motivational preachers love the drive for excellence. Our bosses and the owners demand that we strive for excellence. God is not our boss, nor does He place us in His debt (“freely you have received”). The constant nagging voice demanding improvement and excellence is not the voice of God. It is often nothing more than the neurotic echo of modernity sounding in our brains. It drives us with the threat of shame. However, Christ has trampled down shame by shame and invites us to do the same thing. “You cannot escape shame except by shame.”

Become a Christian who follows Christ. We do not seek to please Him with our excellence. We seek to imitate Him by going where He has gone.