

The Memory of the Blessed Mary the Egyptian (Nektarios Thanos)

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“... her many sins have been remitted, because she loved greatly” Luke 7, 47.

On the Fifth Sunday of Lent, the Church honours the memory of a “street-walker”, a woman who led such a dissolute life that the word “prostitute” is more of a euphemism rather than an exact description of the depth of her sinfulness. The figure of Blessed Mary is highlighted on the last Sunday of Great Lent: on the one hand, to strike at our Churchy prissiness, since a common harlot is presented as a model of life; and, on the other, to provide an example and a ray of hope for repentance for all those who are slaves to their passions and continue to struggle to find ways to free themselves of them.



It would be possible to claim that the turbulent life of Blessed Mary was heavily involved with love. Both the sinful side of her life and the years of her repentance have love as their common axis. Love of the flesh and her legion of

lovers at the beginning; complete love for Christ the Bridegroom thereafter. It's easy to blame people for sinful love, for giving themselves up entirely to a prodigal life-style. And, obviously, love for the Lord of Glory is laudable. Yet the Blessed Maria was **one** person and her love was **one**. What does this mean?

This means, in practical terms, that **people who don't pursue their choices, won't obtain any joy from ephemeral things nor from those which are eternal**. An outspoken spiritual guide used to say to those who confessed to him: "enjoy even your fall". A really dangerous sentiment and one which is apparently frivolous, if not downright sinful in itself. Nevertheless, apart from settling spiritual responsibility on the person concerned, this saying of the spiritual father clarifies something very important for the course of our lives: obviously, we can't afford to be lukewarm. As the Lord says to the angel, that is the Bishop of Laodicea: "*I know your works and you are neither cold nor hot*" *Would that you were either cold or hot. So because you are neither cold nor hot, I will spit you out of my mouth* " (Rev. 3, 15-16)

If people are inhibited far from God, they'll be just as inhibited close to Him. Let's be bold enough to say that people who find no joy in their sinful lives, won't find any in their life in Christ either. People who don't pursue their choices enthusiastically will be bland towards the so-called spiritual life, too.

Blessed Mary lived her life to the full, in love. In the beginning she was mortally sinful. Later, however, she bowed down to Christ her Creator, Who, in mystical fashion revealed to her the superiority of the life which is communion with Him. The decision to walk with Him is a conscious one; it doesn't change our passion for and disposition towards life; it doesn't change our character. It does change our impetus and criteria, but not the character of the person within the Church. All it does is change our course from sinfulness to sanctity.

It goes without saying that Christians love life. It's obvious that they live their everyday routine to the full. They rejoice even in their stumbling. They learn to love. Love is the only way, and the only language that God can understand us in. Love- the greater, the better- is our only hope of remission for our sins, as was the case with the Harlot in the Gospel, and also the Fifth Sunday in Lent, dedicated to Blessed Mary- women who "loved greatly".

[Another age, another Mary, who led a very active life, full of love: Saint Mary Skobtsova († 1945). In her youth, she was a firebrand radical and married a Bolshevik. Divorcing him, she then married a former teacher (but not before plotting to assassinate Trotsky!). This marriage also collapsed and she became a nun in Paris- on condition that she did not have to live in a monastery. Instead, she

turned her rented accommodation into a shelter for the weak and needy, including many Jews. This was too much for the German occupying forces and the Gestapo arrested her. She was sent to the gas chamber on Great Saturday, 1945, in Ravensbrück, apparently choosing to take the place of a Jewish woman who had been sentenced to this death. Metropolitan Anthony Bloom said of her that "it offended me then that she liked to sit in Paris bistros in her nun's habit, smoking cigarettes, drinking beer and talking with simple workers". But he came to realize that she "is a saint of our day and for our day; a woman of flesh and blood possessed by the love of God..."].