

From the Unnatural to Repentance

Sermon of the Metropolitan of Morphou, Neofytos

*at the Divine Liturgy on the 5th Sunday of Lent (of St. Mary of Egypt),
which was held in the holy church of Agios Dimitrianos
in the community of Flasos, in the metropolitan region of Morphou (18.4.2021)*

Ἀπὸ τὸ παρὰ φύσιν στή μετάνοια

Κήρυγμα Μητροπολίτου Μόρφου κ. Νεοφύτου

*στή Θεία Λειτουργία τὴν Ε΄ Κυριακὴ τῶν Νηστειῶν (ὁσίας Μαρίας τῆς
Αἰγυπτίας), ποὺ τελέσθηκε στὸν ἱερὸ ναὸ Ἁγίου Δημητρίου τῆς κοινότητος
Φλάσου, τῆς μητροπολιτικῆς περιφέρειας Μόρφου (18.4.2021).*

an English transcription of the video from ΟΜΙΛΙΕΣ ΜΗΤΡΟΠΟΛΙΤΟΥ ΜΟΡΦΟΥ



*The icon of St. Mary of Egypt gifted
to the Metropolitan of Morphou by his spiritual children.*

MANY BLESSED YEARS. The Saint we celebrate today, St. Mary of Egypt, lived for many years. Most of her years, the Saint lived in the desert, where the hyenas reside, beyond the Jordan. A woman just by herself with the companionship of lions. She lived [there] more than 40 years.

*Transcription of the RumOrthodox video of the Sermon
of the Metropolitan of Morphou on St. Mary of Egypt*

At the time she was alive, she went to venerate the Holy Tomb of our Lord. She was Egyptian from Alexandria. Her profession was the most ancient one, prostitute. Moreover, this Saint had a passion that surpassed prostitution. When she saw a beautiful man, if the man was modest and did not want to fornicate, she went to him and offered him money to sleep with her. In the language of medicine, this is called nymphomaniac.

When one loves the passion too much, the passion becomes mania. In the order [that they appear], [first] is desire. When we do not tame [this desire], it becomes yearning. The yearning, when it increases with the help of Satan and some external conditions, it becomes passion. When we practice passion in exaggeration, always with the synergy of the evil one, the passion becomes mania. Mania is “mixed with” certain mental and physical illnesses.

St. Mary of Egypt, before she became a Saint, had this mania, nymphomania. One day, she saw a boat that was headed to Jerusalem.

“Where is the boat headed,” [she asked].

“To Jerusalem.”

“Why?”

“People go there to venerate the Tomb of Christ.”

She saw that the boat had beautiful sailors. She thought I will travel with the ship and I should be able “to win” someone with my beauty.

When the time came for her to pay the fares, she said to the ship owner, “I do not have money to give you, but I have my body.” And the ship owner slept with her.

Her biographer, who is also a Saint, St. Sophronios, Patriarch of Jerusalem, and a student of St. John the Merciful of Cyprus, says that she “infected” the whole ship with her fornication.

They reached Jerusalem. The people who “were infected” with the carnal sins that she [St. Mary of Egypt] caused, out of shame they did not go to venerate [the Tomb]. They thought, “How can we go venerate with the things we’ve done.”

She [proceeded] shamelessly, as the maniac she was. The person with mania loses shame. Shame is the brake God puts into man’s conscience so he can maybe limit sin, so he can maybe come sometime to repentance and heal his personality. The healing of human personality, by definition, takes place through repentance.

If your little kids ask, “Why were we born?” Why did we come to life?” “What did God want from us [when he] brought us into life?”

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These kids did not necessarily have to live, like so many others, but they did. We too, we live and we were once kids.

The answer is one: we live to learn repentance. Meaning, how we will fix our nous [the heart of the soul, the eye of the soul], how we will “transform” it. That is what repentance [μετάνοια] means, to change our nous. When the nous changes and the Holy Spirit comes and cleanses him [the nous] and the Christ, who is the True Light, comes, what happens to this child? What happens to this lady? What happens to this gentleman who repents? No matter how many sins one has committed, St. Mary of Egypt is an example, one becomes a Saint. We come to life in order to become Saints.

Either we will become Saints or, as I jokingly say sometimes, we “will melt.” St. Mary of Egypt was not for becoming a Saint but for “melting.” But our Virgin Mary understood that she [St. Mary of Egypt] could “turn the switch” towards the love of Christ. The shameless prostitute Mary went to enter the church of the Holy Tomb [of Christ]. An invisible angel of God was blocking her. Imagine coming to the church of St. Dimitrios and everybody is entering the church, while you feel someone pushing you back. This happened to St. Mary. Her guardian angel was sending her back [so she could] not enter the church, because he was seeing her uncleanness, her unrepentance.

Three times she tried to enter and three times the angel sent her back. She realized. “I am not properly dressed in soul and in body to enter the church of God.”

It says that she saw a mosaic of the Virgin Mary and she went and told her, “My Panagia [Virgin Mary], help me to repent. Help me to change my life. Let me enter the church of your Son to venerate his Holy Tomb. And I promise you, I will not return again to fornication. I will go to the desert and there I will weep for all the people I ‘infected’ but also for my soul and my body, the temple of the Holy Spirit, that I infected.”

Our merciful Panagia and her merciful Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, allowed Mary the prostitute, after she had this confession and gave this promise, to enter the church. She venerated in tears. She went to the baker and asked him for two loaves of bread. With these two breads, she lived for 43 years in the desert. The angels were helping her to live a long time with only a little.

She reached such heights of Sainthood that once when an ascetic, Fr. Zosima, went to the desert, he saw her “flying.” She was not touching the ground. The one who was so deep into sin was elevated by the Grace of God above the ground, above the gravity of the human body. When Abba Zosima saw her, he thought that it was some male ascetic. From the many years in the desert, she was all-naked, her clothes had melted, and she had turned completely black.

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When he went to approach her, she said, “Fr. Zosima.” She called him by his name. “I am a woman. Do not approach. Throw me your upper garment.”

He threw it, she wrapped herself in it. Then she approached him and she confessed to him her whole life. This is how we know the life of St. Mary of Egypt. The next year, St. Zosima went and gave her Holy Communion. He then found her dead body and with the help of lions, it is said, he dug a pit and buried St. Mary of Egypt.

If, we, men, have as a role model of spiritual bravery, St. John the Forerunner, the Baptist, [you], women, have St. Mary of Egypt. She is that high [in rank] in the heavens, that of all the women Saints, the church picked her and “gave” her this Sunday. The 5th Sunday of the Great Lent is always [in memory of] St. Mary of Egypt. A former prostitute.

This is how powerful Christ is. We only have to love Him and tell Him, “Come my Christ, make me worthy of Your love.” “Come my Christ so I can know you. Help me change, I cannot [change] by myself.”

He, Himself, said it, “for without Me you can do nothing.” [John 15:5]

Without Christ we are nothing. Everybody will forget us. With Christ, we will [be in] eternal memory. For this, have in mind the example of St. Mary of Egypt.

Today, we came to the blessed community of Flassou [Cyprus] for two reasons. I brought with me the holy icon of St. Mary of Egypt. Do you know who gifted me this holy icon? You will lose it when you hear it.

Do you remember two years ago when I made some homilies and I mentioned something about homosexuals and the whole universe “rushed” to blame me? There are homosexuals who are people of prayer, who wish to change, who want to transform just like St. Mary of Egypt wanted, but they cannot. Either due to bad heredity, either due to bad habit and passion which becomes a mania, as I told you, they fail to change. Some of the homosexuals who were blaming us went online on [our] Youtube [channel] and listened to the homilies. Not just excerpts, but entire homilies.

[They said], “Those are serious things that he [Metropolitan Neofytos] says. His homilies are not a reason to fight him or mock him.”

They started coming to Evrychou [Cyprus] to confess. One by one, [they arrived] even from Greece.

I told them, “Alone, you cannot correct yourselves. I will give you a Saint and when the difficult desire arrives, you will beg her to put [on] a brake.”

Which Saint did I give them? St. Mary of Egypt.

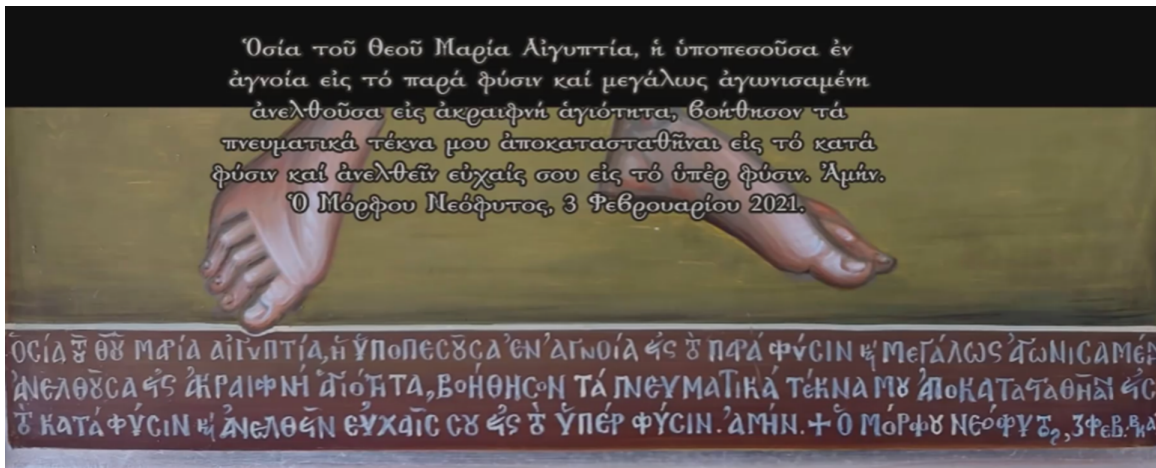
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Two years have passed since then. These people, men and women, witnessed a lot of help not by me, but from St. Mary of Egypt and, especially, from the Virgin Mary. I told them hold onto the Virgin Mary. Every time you fall into whatever sin, do not despair. “My Virgin Mary, help me stand up.” “St. Mary of Egypt, give me something from your repentance.”

In this way, little by little, they started healing themselves. Mania became a passion, the passion became a yearning, the yearning became a desire, and “as the teacher on the back, who realized the pedagogical method, says,” they reached a point where they desired more the repentance of St. Mary, the purity of the Virgin Mary [than anything else].

And, always with the help of God, others managed to reduce the passion and others eliminated it. Each one in his powers. Christ watches the effort. He will judge all of us in the Second Coming. Until then, as St. Paisios used to say, “Hades, my son, is open!” [That is, souls can still be saved.]

This is why we perform Memorial Services, this is why we pray – so that the icon of God inside the man is cleaned. These young people made me a gift. It is the holy icon I brought you today to venerate. They sent it to me from Greece. [It is] the holy icon of St. Mary of Egypt, because they say [that] they saw a lot of help from this Saint. The following the inscription beneath the icon that was gifted.



O Saint of God, Mary of Egypt, the one who fell unknowingly into the unnatural, who fought greatly and rose to pure sainthood, help my spiritual children to be restored back to the natural [state] and [help them] rise, through your blessings, into the [state which is] above nature. Amen. Morphou Neofytos, 3 February 2021

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All of us are in need of the intercessions of Theotokos and the blessing, the example and the repentance of St. Mary of Egypt. Pray for us. I pray for you too.

Today, we are here for the Memorial Service of many people of Flassou, especially, of Presbyteria Maria, a person who was meek and humble in heart. Most simple, without any care for herself. She thought nothing of herself. She would talk to you only if you talked to her first. Otherwise, she would pass in front of you unobserved. Fr. Michael is favored that God made him worthy of having such a woman, such a wife, such a presbyteria. A good priest means an impeccable, humble presbyteria.

The second reason we came aside from the Memorial Services is to announce that we will be here on June the 6th, Sunday of the Blind Man, a little before Pentecost to ordain Emmanouil who chanted together with your left chanter. Here he is! He is not too tall but he has a strong voice. And a strong heart and a strong yearning for priesthood. He is from Trimiklini [Cyprus], he has been a spiritual child of mine for many years now. He always wanted to come to our Metropolis and become a priest. With the blessings of the Metropolitan [of his place of origin], he comes to us, following a lot of thought, following illumination that was given by blessed Presbyteria Maria. [And also] because I would hear Fr. Michael during the last years telling me, “We became old, my bishop. We need a helper.” Although I might need a helper more than Fr. Michael does – but those are the luxuries that priests enjoy, while the bishop as you know does not have a helper. All of you are my helpers.

For this, with much gratitude to the family of Fr. Michael and, especially, to the blessed Presbyteria, God allowing, we will ordain him first as a deacon and then as a presbyter so he can be his helper and, if God allows, his successor. In this way, Flassou continues to be a functional community.

[This is] a big gift from our Saints. When we fixed almost all of their churches, in the whole of the Metropolis, in Marathasa, in Solia, in North Pitisilia, in the valley, even in the occupied parts [of Cyprus], I told the Saints, “I will rush to fix your churches, but I want an antidoron. Send me good priests, and let there be not a village left without a priest.”

I believe that a village without a priest to liturgize is not a village. A village, even with 5 people, is a community if it has “a shared Cup.” “With the fear of God, faith, and love, draw near.” [Liturgy of St. John the Chrysostom]

If there is a Liturgy, there is a community, a common faith, a common life. It cannot be that Flassou with such rich history does not have its own priest. And when Fr. Michael feels the old age approaching and everything that comes with it, we have an obligation towards him.

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My dear Fr. Michael, I wish that you find in the face of Emmanouil, the man that you were looking for. We make this proposal to you. We will expect experience, the experiment, and when it succeeds, we will proceed with priesthood. God before anything else.

May St. Mary of Egypt be an inspiration of repentance in these difficult years we have entered with the whole world, in fear and horror and with many more difficult things to come. But we have learned how to deal with the difficult. Christians are for the difficult. St. Mary of Egypt is a testament. A tough life, a tough repentance, but great her sainthood as well.

Apolytikion of St. Mary of Egypt

In thee, the image was preserved with exactness, O Mother;
For taking up thy cross, thou didst follow Christ,
and by thy life, didst teach us to overlook the flesh, for it passeth away,
but to attend to the soul since it is immortal.
Wherefore, O righteous Mary, thy spirit rejoiceth with the Angels.