



## SUNDAY OF SAINT MARY OF EGYPT

### April 21

#### THE GOSPEL READING

##### Mark 10:32-45

[Jesus' Third Prophecy of His Passion]

*At that time, Jesus took his twelve disciples, and he began to tell them what was 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 deliver him to the Gentiles; and they will mock him, and spit upon him, and scourge him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise."*

*And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to him, and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." And he said to them, "What do you want me to do for you?" And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" And they said to him, "We are able." And Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared."*

*And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant of James and John. And Jesus called them to him and said to them, "You know that those who are supposed to rule over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*



GREEK ORTHODOX  
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DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

## THE SERMON

In this Gospel reading, the Lord prepares His disciples for His Crucifixion and Resurrection. The Apostles James and John, who were brothers, come to the Lord and ask to receive a place of special honor in the Kingdom because they did not understand what lied ahead. Like the other disciples, they could not yet fully understand what the Lord came into the world to accomplish.

James and John looked at Christ through the lens of the world around them. They thought that Christ was the Messiah expected by the Jewish people to liberate them from the foreign occupation of the Roman Empire. They thought that Jesus would lead a political uprising and destroy the enemies of Israel to restore the earthly kingdom of David. James and John wanted to secure a preferred status in the Kingdom of Christ, as they were imagining it.

They said, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." The Lord answered them, "What do you want me to do for you?" James and John tried to gain advantage as viewed purely from the perspective of earthly power and glory. They asked the Lord to grant them to sit, one at His right hand and one at His left, in the coming Kingdom. Even though Jesus told them that His path was to voluntarily accept the Cross, the disciples continued to imagine that He would soon be enthroned in Jerusalem.

The symbolism of sitting at the right and left of the King's throne points to the position of the highest honor in the Kingdom. However, as Jesus would answer Pilate, the Kingdom of Christ is not of this world (John 18:36), and its glory is not of worldly power. Therefore, the Lord tells the brothers, "You do not know what you are asking." The brothers did not understand that being followers and disciples of Christ means participating in His sacrifice.

Therefore, Jesus asks them, "Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" The reference to the "cup" points to the Lord's passion which He was to suffer. Likewise, the "baptism" to which He refers means dying to this world before being raised to new life. Our own baptism is a mystical union with Christ, by which we are buried with Him so that we can be raised with Him (Romans 6:3-5). Our own journey in the faith and our own path to the Kingdom of Christ begins with being received into the Church through baptism.

James and John did not yet fully understand what that meant, yet hastily said they were able to drink the "cup" and receive that "baptism." Christ, in His love, responds, saying they would indeed be united to Him by drinking that "cup" and receiving that "baptism." However, the Lord meant that, like Him, they would be martyred. As Saint John Chrysostom explains, "[Jesus] foretold great things for them; that is, you shall be held worthy of martyrdom, you shall suffer the things I have suffered, you shall end your life with a death from violence, and in this also you shall be sharers with me."

Christ says to His disciples that to sit at His right and left hand is not His to grant,

but it is for those for whom it has been prepared. Elsewhere in the Gospels, Jesus says that He does not seek His own will but the will of the Father (John 5:30). It is therefore the Father who “has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name . . . that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:9-11).

To be united with Christ means to suffer and die with Him before being raised to eternal life. As we prepare ourselves for the Kingdom through faith, repentance, and service to others, we draw near to God. And He, through His love, also prepares the Kingdom for us as a fulfillment of our desire to be with Him. The Cross comes *before* the Resurrection, as humility comes *before* grace.

When the other disciples heard about James and John asking the Lord for privileges and earthly glory, they were displeased — not necessarily because they already understood the true meaning of the Cross and the Kingdom — but because they were envious. They wished for the same privileges. The Apostles were still on a journey of discovery. They were still learning that the true glory of Christ is sacrificial love, that is, to dedicate one’s own life for the benefit of others.

The Lord invites us to participate in His struggle and be patient with the challenges in life. In persevering, we may even endure persecution for His name’s sake. Whenever we sacrifice our desires so we can fulfill God’s will or our needs for the needs of others, we undergo a voluntary martyrdom. This is the way to receive grace and to secure our status in heaven. We can be confident that *behind* every challenge and struggle, there is redemption and deliverance. *Behind* the Cross of Christ, and our own crosses, lies *the joy of the Resurrection*. We begin to experience the Resurrection even now, every time we celebrate the Divine Liturgy. The Liturgy is a true foretaste of the coming Kingdom, connecting us to God and to others. We can already experience that joy and hope as we partake of the Body and Blood of the Resurrected Christ.

The Lord teaches that life in Christ is, in many respects, opposed to the values of this fallen world. Christ makes clear that whoever would be great in the Kingdom is called to be humble, and whoever would be first is called to be of service to others. God the Son came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life for many.

We do not expect rewards for our good works, as if God owes us something. We rely entirely on the grace and love of God. We follow Him because we love Him and entrust ourselves completely to His love. As Saint Porphyrios of Kafsokalyvia says, “Whatever you want, my Lord, whatever your love desires. I know I am not worthy . . . There is one thing I want, one thing I desire, one thing I ask for, and that is to be with You, wherever and however You wish.” Our love for Christ is not offered in selfish terms, or in pursuit of personal gain. It is offered for the sake of the One who loved us and gave Himself up for us and for our salvation.

Therefore, as we come to the Lord and ask Him to help us, let us pray that He will teach us how to serve Him and to serve others as He did — with sacrificial love. May all we do be for the glory of God. Let us continue our journey on the path of repentance, humility, peace, and love. By embracing our cross with joy, for the sake of Christ, and with

complete confidence in His love for us. Let us unite ourselves to Him and constantly seek to renew our membership in the Church by doing good works in witness to His Glory. May we continuously seek to become like our Lord, seeking not to be served, but to serve.