

# GREAT LENT

## Fifth Sunday - Saint Mary of Egypt



"There is no saint without a past, no sinner without a future."

*Blessed Augustine, bishop of Hippo*

Imagine someone who seems totally lost, living in a way that's the opposite of what God wants. But then – a complete change! For the Fifth Sunday of Lent, we dive into the transformative journey of Saint Mary of Egypt. Her story of transformation from a life of sin to a life fully devoted to God is way more relevant to us than we might think. Get ready to discover how her story challenges us to change our own hearts.

### Introduction to Saint Mary of Egypt

Saint Mary of Egypt, who lived during the 4th and 5th centuries, is an amazing example of personal transformation. She started off in Alexandria living a wild life, doing whatever she wanted without thinking about the consequences. However, everything changed when she was 29 and went on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. There, a surprising event prevented her from entering a church, prompting her to reflect on her actions and decide to change her ways.

She chose to leave her old life behind and moved to a desert beyond the Jordan River, where she spent the next 47 years alone. During this time, she focused on praying and deeply reflecting on her past, enduring tough living conditions with very little to survive on.

Her story from a life of sin to one of deep spirituality shows that even the most difficult change is possible, inspiring anyone wanting to reshape their life.

## Gospel Reflection: Luke 7:36-50 and Mark 10:32-45

In the Gospel of Luke, we learn about a woman with a troubled past. She shows deep regret for her mistakes by washing Christ's feet with her tears, then drying them with her hair, and anointing them with expensive perfume. This act of humility is not just saying "sorry," it's a public promise to change her ways. This event is complemented by Christ's teachings in Mark 10:32-45, where he explains to his disciples that true greatness is about putting others first and even sacrificing yourself to help those in need. Christ pledges to show the ultimate example of this by giving up his life for everyone.

What do these stories teach us? That no matter what we have done wrong, faith can change our lives. We can ask for forgiveness and get a fresh start. And if we truly want to be great, we should live to serve others, not ourselves.



### The Life of Saint Mary of Egypt

Saint Mary's life before her transformation was filled with indulgence and sin. Previously living for pleasure without regard for consequences, her pilgrimage to Jerusalem became a turning point. It was like a lightbulb went on, and she suddenly realized she had been making bad decisions that took her away from God. This made her want to change.

So, she did something radical: she left her old life behind and went to live alone in the desert. She spent years there praying, fasting, and repenting. This part of her story shows us what real repentance looks like, and how much strength it takes to stop bad habits and dedicate yourself to spiritual growth and personal transformation.

## Lessons for Life from Saint Mary of Egypt

- **Change is Always Possible:** Saint Mary's story proves that anyone can radically transform their life through sincere repentance. Deciding to leave her past behind, she embraced a life of solitude, showing that if you truly decide to change, you can.
- **Alone Time Can Be Powerful:** Saint Mary's time in the desert was not easy, but it helped her reflect, pray, and grow closer to God. Sometimes, stepping away from distractions helps us find clarity and strength.
- **The Power of God's Mercy:** Despite her notorious past, Saint Mary was embraced by the Church, showing God's endless mercy. This reminds us that God's love and forgiveness are always there for us.
- **Challenges Make You Stronger:** The desert life was tough, but it made Saint Mary incredibly strong spiritually. This teaches us to face our own life challenges with courage and view them as opportunities to forge our character and faith.
- **Living with Purpose:** Saint Mary's radical lifestyle change highlights the importance of living purposefully. Her journey encourages us to think critically about our life choices and make sure our choices reflect our values and spiritual goals.



### Conclusion: Embracing Our Spiritual Journey

Saint Mary of Egypt's story is a powerful reminder that we are never too far gone to start over. She inspires us to be honest about our mistakes, find quiet time for reflection, and trust that God's love is always there for us. Like Saint Mary, we are challenged to transform our lives and deepen our relationship with God during this Lenten season.

## Troparion — Tone 8:

The image of God was truly preserved in you, mother, for you took up the Cross and followed Christ. By so doing, you taught us to disregard the flesh, for it passes away, but to care instead for the soul, since it is immortal. Therefore your spirit, venerable Mary, rejoices with the angels!

## Discussion Questions:

1. Have you ever had a "lightbulb moment" where you realized you needed to apologize for something or make a big change in your life? What happened, and how did that decision affect your relationships and your spiritual understanding?
2. Saint Mary went to the desert, but we all need moments of peace and quiet. Where can you go, or what can you do, to escape the noise of everyday life and connect with something deeper?
3. Imagine someone spreads a rumor about you. How can the unconditional love and forgiveness in the stories of Christ in the Gospels and Saint Mary's life change how you react? Would you be more likely to forgive or hold a grudge? Why or why not?
4. How can traditional practices like prayer and fasting be adapted to fit into your modern life? What other practices could help you focus on your faith and grow spiritually?
5. Have you ever experienced a pivotal moment of spiritual awakening or a significant shift in your beliefs? What sparked this change, and how has it influenced your journey thus far?

Published with the Blessings of  
+ IRINEJ  
Bishop of Eastern America SOC

Diocesan Education Commission

Great Lent, 2024

