



# Fire & Light

## St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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✠ April 10, 2011 ✠

### St. Mary of Egypt

New Hieromartyr Gregory V, Patriarch of Constantinople (1821)



#### ✠ Sixth & Final Week of Great Lent ✠

✠ Wed. Apr 13 – 6:30pm ~ Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts

✠ Fri. Apr 15 – 6:30pm ~ Final Presanctified ~ Lazarus

#### ✠ Palm Sunday Services ✠

✠ Sat. Apr 16 - 10:00am Lazarus Saturday Divine Liturgy

⇒ *Lazarus Saturday Parish Workday*

✠ Sat. Apr 16 - 6:00pm Palm Sunday Vespers ~

✠ Blessing of Palms and Willows ✠

✠ Palm Sunday ~ April 17 – 8:30 Matins /10:00am Divine Liturgy



#### ☼ Holy Week Schedule ☼

✠ April 17 - Palm Sunday Evening ~ 5:00pm First Bridegroom Matins

✠ April 18 & 19 - Holy Monday & Tuesday ~ 6:30pm Bridegroom Matins

✠ April 20 - Holy Wed 6:30pm Holy Unction

✠ April 21 - Holy Thurs 10:00am Mystical Supper Liturgy

6:30pm 12 Passion Gospels

✠ Holy Friday ✠ ~ April 22 10:00am Royal Hours

4:00pm Vespers – Shroud to the Tomb

7:00pm Lamentations at the Tomb

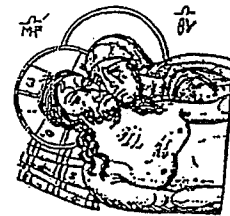
~ All Night Vigil at the Tomb ~

✠ Holy Saturday ~ April 23 10:00am Divine Liturgy – Pascha Prep – helpers!

✠ Holy PASCHA ✠ Begins Saturday, April 23 at 11:30pm ✠

✠ Pascha Sunday April 24 3:00pm Paschal Agape Vespers

✠ Bright Monday April 25 10:00am Divine Liturgy w/ Procession



### Our Venerable Mother, St. Mary of Egypt

St. Mary the Egyptian was born about 520 A.D. in Egypt. She was called Egyptian because of her origin. The beginning of her life was very sinful. From her childhood, she desired to live a sinful life. She didn't choose the difficult and uphill road that leads to Christ, Who is the fountain of life and real joy. She chose the wide and ample road that leads to destruction and death.

The devil, the great enemy of mankind, spread his nets and soon captured her. At the age of twelve, intoxicated by the sweet drink of sin, she



(Cont  
p.3)

left her parents' affection and ran away. She decided to live in the crowded city of Alexandria. In this famous city Mary would live a sinful life as she had dreamed. Parties, dances, entertainment and anything one could imagine constituted for Mary an earthly paradise.

For an entire period of seventeen years, Mary wallowed in sin. She lived without God. The image of God within her was broken into pieces. Her body, the temple of the Holy Spirit, was in ruins. Her angel chased after her and sorrowfully watched her from a distance. But sin had nested firmly within her. The devil had her tied up. Thoughts about repentance, returning to God, Paradise and Hell, or about a virtuous life did not even cross her mind. The goal of her life was the enjoyment of sin--total dissolution. She lived in order to sin. She desired the sinful life of prostitution so much that she reached the point where she gave herself to it without compensation. This way she always had many men at her disposal. She earned her living working at various jobs.

But finally the sinful life could hold her in Alexandria no longer. She had become a famous harlot and drew many people to sin. She decided to establish house of sin somewhere else. One day, while taking a walk outside of the city and going towards the harbor, she saw many people boarding a ship. Asking where they were bound, she was informed that all these people would go to Jerusalem to celebrate the Elevation of the Holy Cross. Mary decided that she also would board the ship to go to Jerusalem. Her purpose, however, was not to venerate the Holy Land but to sin. She thought she would find many followers there. The darkness of her dissolute life blinded her and she could not see the light of heaven.

Her sinful life continued--even on the ship. Mary also spread her sinful nets in the Holy City. Nothing could hold her back, even in the most holy places. She followed the worshippers to the church solemnly to look for more young men.

She decided to enter the church to see the Holy Cross for herself. But something strange happened. Even though she tried repeatedly to enter the Church an invisible power held her back and blocked her way not permitting her to cross the threshold. Suddenly, her hard, sinful and devilish heart was changed. God's love and mercy touched her and she realized that her sinful way of life was the obstacle to her entering the Church. Her inner world was shaken and she awoke from the deep sleep of sin. Another world, a beautiful and angelic world began to dawn within in her slowly. After so many years she

came to herself and realized the ugliness of her ways. She realized that the multitude of her sins did not allow her to pass through the door and enter the church. She stood outside the church and began weeping for her condition. Her filthy, dissolute life passed before her like a movie. Her tears of repentance were the only thing she could offer to God. The thought of how she had saddened God made her weep even more--so much so that the very ground was drenched with her tears! As she wept, she lifted up her eyes and saw the icon of the Virgin Mary above the door. Mary then said, with tears in her eyes:

"Virgin Mary, I beg you, help me to enter the church to behold and venerate the Holy Cross, on Which your Son was crucified for my sins and shed His Holy Blood to save all the sinners. I promise you I will never fall into sin again, and I will never return to my previous sinful life!"

With her tears, her fervent prayer, and this heroic decision, she completely repented. Immediately she felt that a heavy burden was lifted from left her. She felt a great relief and peace in her heart. After this prayer, Mary was encouraged and entered unhindered into the church. With the fear of God she tearfully venerated the Life Giving Cross. A voice was heard saying, "You will find great comfort, if you pass over the Jordan River."

After this, Mary took the road towards the desert of the Jordan. There in the deep desert, she lived a great and admirable ascetic life of repentance.

Who can adequately describe the battle against the evil demons and the spiritual struggles of Mary the Egyptian? The desert became a spiritual stadium. The angels, her only audience, watched the great spiritual contest between Mary and the evil spirits.

Seventeen years of sinful life! How can they be forgotten? How much power did she have to gain in order to defeat her old and sinful self? The devil used every device to pull her out of the desert and bring her back to the world. With his constant onslaught of thoughts, he reminded her of all her former sinful actions and continually pushed her to desire once again the sin of fornication. At that crucial time, Mary fell down on the ground weeping and crying. She remained there, sometimes for whole days and nights, until she was able to see the Light that had the power to send away her sinful thoughts.

This incredible spiritual war lasted for seventeen years. Mary fought spiritually in the desert for seventeen years; the same number of years she had spent in the sinful life. The devil tried in vain to destroy this God-planted flower of the desert. Her sincere repentance, her prayers and her struggles made Mary powerful. By God's Grace she always overcame the temptations. Finally the devil left her.

She lived in the desert for forty years. Her only food was such sparse greens as the desert could provide and a little water from the rain. Her clothes were worn out, and finally fell from her body—and thus she suffered in hot and cold weather.

However, God did not abandon her. A holy ascetic and priest-monk, Zosimas, led by an angel in a vision came to the desert of the Jordan river and met the famished and skeleton-like body of Mary. After his fervent entreaties she told him of her life and asked to receive Holy Communion. The following year, Saint Zosimas found Mary dead on the ground with her hands crossed. On the sand was written:

"Father Zosimas, bury the body of unworthy Mary here where you found it. She died in April on the same night she received Holy Communion."

HOLY MOTHER MARY, PRAY TO GOD FOR US!

#### HYMNS TO SAINT MARY OF EGYPT

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

*Thou who once of old was filled with all manner of fornication  
art now seen today to be a bride of Christ by thy repentance.  
Thou didst love and emulate the life of angels.  
By the Cross, thou didst annihilate the hordes of demons;  
for this cause art thou a bride now in the Kingdom of the heavens,  
O Mary, thou all-modest one.*

## **HOMILY ~ About Christ's Prophecy Concerning His Glory**

**"From now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power and coming on the clouds of heaven." (Matthew 26:24)**

He who does not see God as the merciful Samaritan on earth will see Him as the Dreadful Judge in Heaven. So blinded were the leaders of the Jews that they were unable to see in Christ the Lord neither God, nor the Messiah, nor a Prophet, nor even a simple good man. They placed Him beneath ordinary good people. Not only that, they placed Him even lower than the thieves. They released Barabbas and they condemned Christ! In general, they did not even consider Christ a man. They spit upon Him; they mocked Him; they made a masquerade of Him, as some cheap and unneeded thing. Exactly at that moment when the Jews maliciously played with Christ as some cheap and unneeded thing, the Lord suddenly opened His mouth and spoke, "From now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power and coming on the clouds of Heaven." What a distance there is between what Christ is in truth and that which the Jews held Him to be!

The Son of Man, Who sits on the right hand of Power, is the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, Who was seen as such soon after that by the Holy Archdeacon Stephen and many, many others. The Son of Man Who comes on the clouds with angels and countless numbers of powers and heavenly hosts is again that same Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, as He was seen in His Revelation, written by St. John, the Theologian and Evangelist.

O my brethren, do not be misled by deluding and illusionary tales of those men who speak, "When we see Christ in the Heavens as God, then we will believe in Him." That faith will be a little too late, and in vain will that vision be. With our faith we must see Christ as God in that humiliated, spat upon, beaten, bloodied, and ridiculed man; in that silent and condemned One in the court of Caiaphas Whom the Jews considered as something cheap and unneeded and Whom they turned into a masquerade. This is the Faith that is valued in the heavens. This is the Faith that is rewarded by resurrection and immortality. This is the Faith which, until now, nurtured and transplanted to Heaven numerous armies of the holiest souls, of the strongest characters, the most forbearing heroes and the most illustrious minds.

***O humiliated Lord, raise us up to this Faith!***

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**WE MUST NOT AVOID COMMUNION** because we deem ourselves to be sinful. We must approach it more often for the healing of soul, and the purification of the spirit, but with such humility and faith that considering ourselves unworthy we would desire even more the medicine for our wounds... It is much better if, in humility of heart, knowing that we are never worthy of the Holy Mysteries that we would receive them every Sunday for the healing of our maladies, rather than, blinded by pride, think that after one year we become worthy of them.

**St. John Cassian (432)**

**By these signs then, carnal pride is shown...** One is utterly lacking in patience, and without charity; impudent in offering insults to others; fainthearted in bearing them himself; troublesome in the matter of obedience; except where his own wishes and likings correspond with his duty; unforgiving in receiving admonition; weak in giving up his own wishes; very stubborn about yielding to those of others; always trying to accomplish his own ends, and never ready to give them up for others; and thus the result is that though he is incapable of giving sound advice, yet in everything he prefers his own opinion to that of others.

**St. John Cassian (432)**

**A mortal sin is that sin for which a person does not repent.** No one is so good and so merciful as God. Yet a person who remains obstinately in sin and will not repent – not even God forgives him. We are deeply sorry when we sin; nevertheless, we gladly embrace every excuse and occasion for sins.

**St. Mark the Ascetic (5<sup>th</sup> C)**

**When we nurture evil thoughts, we become evil.** We may think that we are good, but evil is in us... We, however, have Divine power, Divine life, Divine energy. On the day of the Final Judgment, we shall have to give an answer for the way we have used this Divine power, life and energy, which have been given to us; whether we have contributed to the harmony of the universe, or have sown disharmony.

**Elder Thaddeus of Serbia (+2003)**

## Hymns of Lazarus and Palm Sunday

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O Lord, Thou didst give Thy disciples signs of Thy divinity,  
While concealing Thy majesty from the crowd through humility:  
To Thy disciples Thou didst predict the death of Lazarus,  
Revealing Thy knowledge of future things.  
But in the presence of the crowd at Bethany, Thou didst ask, "Where is my friend buried?"  
For Thou, in Thy compassion for us, Didst take upon Thyself our ignorance.  
Then, Thou didst raise up a man who had been dead four days.  
Through him, Thou hast finally revealed Thy divine power to all.  
O Almighty Lord, glory to Thee!

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Thy voice destroyed the kingdom of hell, O Lord  
Thy powerful word raised from the tomb the one who was four days dead.  
Lazarus became the saving first-fruits of the world's regeneration.  
All things are possible for Thee, O Lord and King of all!  
Grant Thy servants cleansing and great mercy!

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As Thou didst tell Martha, O Lord,  
"I am the Resurrection and the Life."  
Thou hast sealed Thy words through Thy mighty deeds:  
Thou hast called Lazarus forth from hell!  
I am dead in my passions; raise me also, O Lord, in Thy tender love for man!

Before Thy voluntary passion, O Lord,  
Thou didst foretell the universal resurrection to all:  
In Bethany, by Thine almighty power,  
Thou didst raise Lazarus who was dead four days.  
Thou didst give sight to the blind, for Thou art the Giver of Light!  
Thou hast entered the Holy City with Thy disciples, seated on the colt of an ass, fulfilling the Scriptures.  
The children of the Hebrews met Thee in thanksgiving:  
Blessed is He Who comes, and will come again, in the Name of the Lord!

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Come forth, all ye nations!  
Come forth ye peoples!  
Behold, the King of Heaven comes to Jerusalem, sitting on a humble colt as though upon a throne!  
O unbelieving and adulterous generation; Come and see the One Whom Isaiah foretold!  
For our sake, He has come in the flesh.  
He takes the new Zion, chaste and pure as His Bride!  
He will crush the evil council like a vessel of clay!  
See how the young and innocent children gather, singing praises as at a marriage feast.  
Let us join them in the angel's hymn:  
Hosanna in the highest!  
Blesses is He that comes, and will come again,  
In the Name of the Lord!

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### "Repent Today" from the Elders - *Evergetinos*

- ✧ One voice should constantly ring in the ears of man:  
"Today, I may be called home."
- ✧ One Elder said that when his thoughts whispered to him:  
"Forget today and repent tomorrow," he would snap back and say,  
"No, I will repent today and leave tomorrow to the will of God."
- ✧ Brother, do not say to yourself that "today" I will commit sin and tomorrow I will repent," for you cannot be sure about the next day; concern for the morrow belongs only to God.



## ON CHANGING OUR LIFE'S PATH...

The crown of true repentance is the *firm intention not to sin any more in the future*. There are people who confess only to be able to take communion. They are led by the thought that the taking of Communion without Confession is a heavy sin for the soul, but they do not make the decision in their hearts *to begin a new life*. They think "I will sin until the next Confession, and I will repent again; if there is Confession the sin is not so frightful." And some even hurry to commit the sins which they desire but have not yet committed before they confess, so that they can report them in the coming Confession. All this is loathsome and base before God! Confession is not beneficial to the one who consciously follows the sinful whimsies of his perverted will and transgresses God's commands on purpose. Such a man who creates sinful habits in himself later wonders in vain why, when he confesses, he cannot correct himself. He cannot correct himself because *he does not want to*.

Saint Basil the Great says: "It is not he who says: "I have sinned," but after that continues to sin that is confessing his sin, but it is he who, according to the words of the Psalm, has seen his sin and hated it. Of what use is the care of the doctor to the sick man when the one suffering from the diseases is holding steadfastly to that which is detrimental to life? In the same way, there is no use in forgiving the injustices of the man who continues to commit them. The one who continues to live in debauchery does not benefit from the loosing of the sin of debauchery. The wisest Home-builder of our life wants the one who has lived in sins and afterwards has given a vow to begin a new life, to put an end to his past and, after the committed sins, lay a beginning as a person ready for a new life through repentance."

In order for us to have true benefit from Confession, we must firmly resolve not to sin anymore in the future. True repentance, according to the Holy Fathers, is in exactly this, not to repeat your sin any more! "Whoever allows himself to sin arbitrarily, with the hope that he will repent," says St. Isaac the Syrian, "deals treacherously with God. Death strikes him unexpectedly, and he does not live to the time which he presumed to devote to virtue."

Again let us stress, in order for us to have true benefit from Confession, we must resolve not to sin in the future. True repentance, according to the Holy Fathers, consists precisely in not repeating the sin anymore. In order for this to happen, in Confession we must wish with all our heart to begin a new life in the future. If we have this saving desire, let us be confident that will help us by all means!

■ Archmandrite Seraphim Aleksiev (+1993)

### FOR CONSIDERATION...

In all the world, there is nothing more terrifying than man. The philosophy of man is unbearable, even to the mind of the angels, and it provokes sorrow in the hearts of the cherubim! The endlessness of man is bitter. Who is not embittered who has tasted with its senses its bitter knowledge? Let us be honest until the end: If the marvelous Lord and Savior Jesus Christ had not been resurrected, and with the light of His resurrection had not illuminated and given meaning to the endlessness of man, who could not consider the Creator of such a being, as is man, incomprehensible and not a God-man? Only the most Sweet Lord Jesus Christ, with His divine love sweetens the bitter mystery of the human being, filling it with His self, His life, and His endlessness. Where is the center of a human being? In the Resurrected and Ascended Lord Jesus Christ who "is seated at the right hand of God." (Col. 3:1). With the resurrected God-man, eternity became a common attribute of human life. Which human thought, desire, and feeling is now immortal? Only the thought in Christ, the desire and the feeling in Christ is immortal. Man is a Christian only if he thinks through Christ, believes, feels, and desires through Christ (see Phil 2:5).

■ Blessed Elder Justin Popovich (+1979)

Do not say, after spending a long time at prayer, that nothing has been gained; for you have already gained something. And what higher good is there to cling to the Lord and persevere in unceasing union with Him?

■ Saint John Climacos (+603)



## **Lazarus Saturday ~ He That Believeth Shall Live!**

There are no wasted or superfluous motions in God's economy. He never lets even the most seemingly insignificant event or word to proceed without the utmost advantage to us. During our Lord's earthly ministry, His every deed, every action was directed towards our salvation. The healing of the sick, the restoring of sight to the blind, the feeding of the multitudes--all were accomplished with an eternal purpose which far surpassed the immediate benefit conferred on those actually involved. We could derive great profit for our souls if only we would learn to discern the spiritual significance of these events and apply it to our lives. Let us look, for example, at the raising of Lazarus which our holy Church celebrates.

Christ was in Galilee when He heard of the grave illness of His beloved friend Lazarus. He did not pronounce a cure from a distance as He did once before with the centurion's servant (Matt. 8:5-13), and He reached Bethany only after Lazarus had already been four days dead. Why this delay? If Christ is All-powerful, surely He could have prevented the cause of so much grief. Christ did, of course, have this power, but His delay was inspired by a loftier design: to reveal to all men the power of His divine nature as the "Conqueror of death." Just how was this accomplished? If we look carefully, there are several lessons which we can learn from this one event.

Whilst Lazarus was still alive, his sisters Martha and Mary entreated Christ to come and cure their ailing brother (John 11:3). Similarly, through prayer, we ask God to cure our illnesses and to help us in times of misfortune. When He delayed and Lazarus died, what sorrow and despondency overcame the household, Martha even began to blame Christ: "Lord, if Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died" (John 11:21). Do not our hopes and entreaties also suffer when we do not receive what we pray for, especially in times of great sorrow? Here we can see our own natures being revealed, since we too tend to grumble and complain in times of hardship, thinking that God has either forgotten us or is punishing us for something. What is Christ's reply to Martha? "...He that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live." The same was repeated to Mary.

**Here then is the key spiritual lesson that we are taught on Lazarus Saturday: to believe in Christ! Instead of grumbling and losing hope in times of misfortune, we should pay heed to this lesson -- believe, and all the more zealously turn to God in prayer. Then we too shall, as Christ promised Mary, "see the glory of God."**

Here we are likewise given the supreme manifestation of the human nature which Christ took upon Himself in His Incarnation. While He was true God and foresaw the resurrection of Lazarus, as true Man He wept at the death of His friend, sharing the grief of Lazarus' relatives. This shows us Christ's exceeding compassion towards us. Being led to the tomb where Lazarus had been laid, Christ ordered the stone at the entrance to be rolled away and then, raising His eyes, He prayed: "Father, I thank Thee that Thou hast heard Me." Here we witness a great wonder: Jesus Christ, the God Man, praying to God the Father. Surely this is a great example for us His creatures - to pray. Notice the form of the prayer; it is full of absolute confidence that it was heard and, above all, full of thanksgiving. If Christ, Who is God and lacks nothing, gives thanks in His prayer, then should not we, the created and needy, also give thanks in our prayers?

Having prayed, Christ with great boldness commands: "Lazarus, come forth!" The great miracle is manifest in front of many witnesses: Lazarus, dead for four days and already decomposing and stinking, now comes out of the tomb perfectly whole and alive. Here is our assurance that Christ truly does have power over life and death. Here is our sure hope that at the general resurrection of the dead all people will be raised with renewed bodies. At the same time, Christ reveals a greater mystery in the words: "He that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live," This applies to our souls.

**If we believe in Christ and live according to His commandments, then even though our bodies may die, our souls will live.** A "dead soul" is one which has been corrupted by sin, for death is the direct consequence of sin. A "live soul" is one which has been cleansed and restored by faith, prayer, repentance, by partaking of Communion and abstaining from sin; in short, by living according to God's commandments. Such a soul truly never sees death but lives always fruitfully here on earth, awaiting a still more perfect life in the eternal Heavenly Kingdom.

The late Archbishop Andrew of New Diveyevo adds yet another dimension to the meaning of Lazarus' death and resurrection. Speaking about the death of the soul, he refers also to the two other incidents recorded in the Gospels - examples of Christ's power to resurrect the dead: the raising of Jairus' daughter (Luke 8:53-55) and the raising of the son of the widow of Nain (Luke 7:14-15).

"Sometimes it happens that a sinful thought darts into your mind and awakens a sinful feeling, but the soul catches itself and calls to the Lord in repentance. And the Lord, as with the daughter of Jairus, will as if stretch out His hand and say, 'Soul, arise!' And life will return to its joyous flow. But sometimes it happens that we do not catch ourselves in time and sin enters more deeply into our soul (like going out from the house) and the result will be full acceptance of the sin, and turmoil. But also here, by the prayers of our Mother, the Church of Christ, who cries before the Lord for her children, we can be alerted and the Lord will tell us, as He did the son of the widow of Nain: 'Soul, I say unto thee, Arise!' This is salvation.

"But what shall we do if sin completely enslaves our soul, as if covering it with a tombstone, and so day after day goes by and passions start to exude their sinful stench, just as with Lazarus? What should we do then? Well then we need confession, the Sacrament which Christ established after His Resurrection, when He said to His disciples, 'Receive ye the Holy Spirit; whosoever sins ye forgive, they are forgiven; (John 20:22-23).

See how all this is reflected in the resurrection of Lazarus. Lazarus, on his own, could not go out from the tomb because it was blocked by a stone. He couldn't even walk because he was bound hand and foot with a funeral shroud. And here Christ said to His disciples, 'Loose him.' In application to us, this means that the Lord orders our clergy, who have received in the Sacrament of the Priesthood the gift of the Holy Spirit, to loose our sins. What a joy!" [From The One Thing Needful, Novo-Diveyevo Convent, 1979]

The resurrection of Lazarus teaches us yet another lesson on faith and belief. How often have we said to ourselves or to others: "If only I could see a sign or a miracle then I would believe"? True, we learn from Scripture that many of the people who witnessed the resurrection of Lazarus became believers. But among these same witnesses were those who left and plotted to kill Christ.

To what envy, hatred and degradation they stooped. Before their very eyes a dead man is raised and instead of rejoicing, they plot murder. What could be more senseless?! After seeing such a miracle and knowing that it was no mere illusion, do not these plotters of hatred deserve the greatest of punishments? **We should beware of asking God for signs lest, if they be granted and we still disbelieve and do not make an effort to change our sinful ways, we condemn ourselves all the more.** Instead, we should strive to follow God's Commandments and pray that our faith be strengthened. We must pray as Christ did and entreat God to grant us our desires according to His will (Matt. 26:39). We are told to pray with thanksgiving in everything (John 11:41); to pray with full confidence and hope that our prayers will be heard and answered (Luke 11:9-10). If we do not receive the answer as quickly as we would like, or in the way we expect, we should not grumble or become despondent. Rather, we should remember that just as with Lazarus, God is delaying so that we may be led to things far more beneficial for our soul's salvation. If we approach our spiritual lives in this way, then God will give us the grace to be patient, persistent in prayer, righteous in our deeds, and joyful in our hearts. ✕ ✕ ✕