

SAINT MARY OF EGYPT

A TREASURE HIDDEN IN THE WILDERNESS

It was sthe pious custom in one of thr monasteries of the East in the 6th century to have the monks gather at the beginning of the Great Fast and then to disperse into the desert. The monk Zosimos went forth with the rest. There in the wilderness he came across a strange form. He then heard a voice:

“ I am an old sinful woman.”

During the conversation, the woman told her amzing story: “I was born in Egypt, and at the age of 12 left my father’s house and ran off to Alexandria. For 17 years I led a shameful life. One day I saw people going to Jerusalem for the feast of the Holy Cross, so I boarded the boat.”

“I went with the others to the church, but some strange power held me back. I cowered in shame and terror, realizing that my sins prevented my entry. I cried out to the Holy Virgin in desperation, and the silent barrier was gone . . . After kissing the Cross, I passed over the Jordan and sought peace in the desert.”

“For 47 years I have lived here alone . . . How I had to struggle against the temptations of the flesh . . .” Zosimos, who had been proud of his monastic life, was now humbled to tears. He came back the following several years, bringing the Eucharist to her. But one time he went into the desert and he could not find the woman. After some searching, he saw here body lying in the sand. Her hands were cossed over her heart, her face was turned toward the East. As he recited the prayer of the dead over her, the monk noticed these words traced in the desert sand: “Bury here the body of the sinner, Mary.”

Zosimos brought out of the desert a story of a truly penitent soul. Her story lives on to this day as the Church observes St. Mary of Egypt’s memory.