

# The SUNDAYS OF GREAT LENT



**TEACHING  
PACKET**





# Sunday of Great Lent:

**Today's craft is based on...**

**Today we think about...**

**The Gospel Reading is...**

**Draw a picture inspired by the icon  
or the traditions of this day.**

**A PHRASE FROM  
TODAY'S TROPARION:**

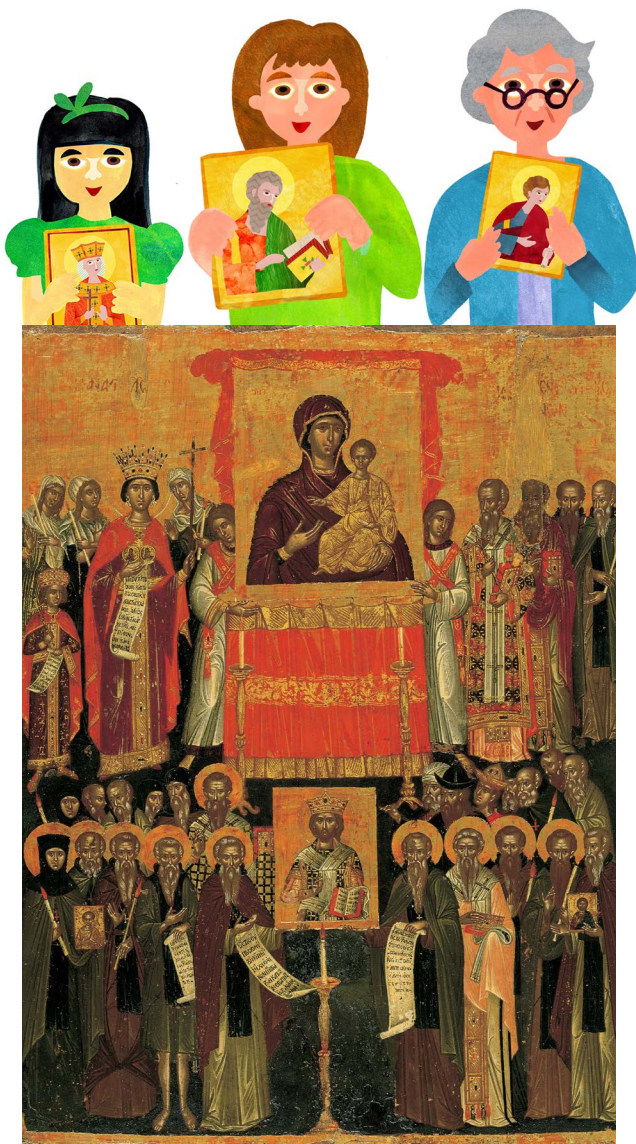
# Sunday of Orthodox

## Today's craft is based on...

The Restoration of Holy Icons.

## The Gospel Reading is...

John 1:43-51



16th-century icon by anonymous artist, Benaki Museum, Athens Greece, photo public domain, via [Wikimedia Commons](#).

Over a thousand years ago, an emperor called Leo decided there should be no icons anymore. He gave orders to his soldiers to remove the icon of Christ from his palace, to erase icons from churches, and to destroy icons in people's homes. He chased after the Christians who loved icons, hurting them and putting them in prison.

All the faithful people kept fighting back. They hid the holy icons in their homes and kept venerating and praying in front of them. Many Saints of our Church defended the holy icons. They spoke to the people and wrote letters to explain why they are important.

Of the kings who came after Emperor Leo, some did not agree with him. In 787 A.D., Queen Irene and priests of our Church assembled in a council and decided holy icons were very important. Later, however, other kings kept fighting the icons. So the struggle went on – and it lasted for over one hundred years.

Another queen, Theodora, did the right thing. In 843 A.D., she called for another council with Patriarch Methodios and many priests of our Church. They all agreed that we should have icons in our churches and homes. They walked around the city of Constantinople holding their icons to show everyone that icons are very important. They explained that we do not worship the icon itself, but we venerate the holy person shown on the icon. We bow and kiss the icon to show that we love the holy person depicted on it. We offer incense and light a candle or a vigil lamp, to show that we honor and respect them.

Every year, on the first Sunday of Great Lent, we remember this story. We hold up our icons and walk around the church to show that, we too, agree that icons are a big part of our faith. We say: "This is the Faith of the Orthodox! This is the Faith that has established the universe!"

## TROPARION:

*We venerate Your most pure image, O Good One, / and ask forgiveness of our transgressions, O Christ God. / Of Your own will You were pleased to ascend the Cross in the flesh / to deliver Your creatures from bondage to the enemy. / Therefore with thanksgiving we cry aloud to You: / You have filled all with joy, O our Savior, / by coming to save the world.*

# Sunday of St. Gregory Palamas

## Today's craft is based on...

The Orthodox practice of prayer taught by St. Gregory.

## The Gospel Reading is...

Mark 2: 1-12

## TROPARION:

*O luminary of Orthodoxy, support and teacher of the Church,  
ideal of monks and invincible champion of theologians,  
O wonderworker Gregory, boast of Thessalonika and herald of grace,  
always intercede for all of us that our souls may be saved.*

St. Gregory Palamas was born in Constantinople in 1296, in a pious and wealthy family. He was very intelligent and highly educated; however, he quickly turned away from the rich life, choosing instead to become a monk at Mount Athos in Greece. He stayed there for a number of years, being guided by important Elders. He very zealously put into practice the fundamental virtues of obedience, humility, meekness, fasting, and vigil. He also learned and practiced the unceasing prayer of the hesychasts.

Because of the threat of Turkish invasions, some years later St. Gregory moved to Thessaloniki, where he was ordained a priest. Later on, he became Archbishop of Thessaloniki. He wrote extensively defending the Faith against false teachings, and he is also known for delivering beautiful sermons.

St. Gregory's time was a turbulent one in Church history, and he endured persecutions, imprisonment, and even torture. Toward the end of his life, he was granted the gift of wonderworking. He reposed on November 14, 1358. Together with St. Demetrios the Myrrh-Gusher, they are the patron Saints of Thessaloniki.

St. Gregory Palamas has been named an Ecumenical Teacher of the Church. His teachings helped establish the hesychastic prayer as the main path to the union with God.



Icon in the public domain, via [Wikimedia Commons](#).





# The Veneration of the Holy Cross

## Today's craft is based on...

The Orthodox celebration of the Veneration of the Holy Cross of our Lord.

## The Gospel Reading is...

Mark 8:34-38; 9:1

## TROPARION:

*O Lord, save Your people and bless Your inheritance; grant victory to the faithful over their adversaries. And protect Your commonwealth, by the power of Your Cross.*



Icon from the festal tier of the iconostasis of St. Nicholas of Myra Russian Orthodox Church in Amsterdam, photo by Jim Forest via [Flickr](#), Creative Commons license [CC BY-NC-ND 2.0](#)

The Sunday of the Veneration of the Cross is wisely and lovingly placed in the middle of the Lenten season to remind us that we are not alone – our Lord is here, with us, and His Cross gives us the strength and courage to continue ‘fighting the good fight’ in anticipation of the Great Feast of Pascha. Our Lord died on the Cross, but then He was resurrected; so the Cross is now the symbol of His Divine Glory, always protecting and strengthening us. We wear a cross around our neck and make the sign of the cross to show that we love Christ and we belong to His Church.

Our Lord said: “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me” (Matthew 16:24). The Cross has true meaning for us when we act in the way Christ teaches us: taking care of others, and being humble, patient, and obedient. The martyr Saints especially show us what it means to carry our own cross; they suffered patiently and were even put to death for the love of our Lord.

On this day, the Cross is placed in the middle of a tray filled with basil sprigs or flowers, and it is carried around the church in a solemn procession. The tray is then placed on a table, and the hymn “We venerate Your Cross” is chanted. At the end of the service, the faithful venerate the Holy Cross and receive the flowers or basil from the priest.



# Sunday of St. John of the Ladder

## Today's craft is based on...

The Ladder of Divine Ascent.

## The Gospel Reading is...

Mark 9:17-31

## TROPARION:

*Dweller of the desert and angel in the body,  
you were shown to be a wonder-worker, our  
God-bearing Father John.*

*You received heavenly gifts through fasting, vigil,  
and prayer:  
healing the sick and the souls of those drawn to  
you by faith.*

*Glory to Him who gave you strength!*

*Glory to Him who granted you a crown!*

*Glory to Him who through you grants healing to  
all!*



12th-century icon, Monastery of St Catherine, Mount Sinai,  
public domain via [Wikimedia Commons](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:St_John_of_the_Ladder.jpg).

St. John of the Ladder is honored by the Church as a great ascetic and author of the important spiritual book *The Ladder*. He was born around the year 570 A.D., and at sixteen years of age he went to Mount Sinai to devote himself to God. After four years, he was tonsured a monk, and he progressed in the monastic life for nineteen years, obeying his spiritual Father, Abba Martyrius. After the death of Abba Martyrius, St. John became a hermit, living alone in a wild place called Thola. There, he spent forty years in silence, fasting, and prayer, continuously progressing in holiness. Visitors from all walks of life came to him for guidance and spiritual advice. At the age of seventy-five, St. John left the solitary life because he was chosen to become the abbot of the monastery of Sinai, which he governed for four years. Toward the end of his life, the Lord granted him the gifts of clairvoyance and wonderworking.

At the request of the abbot of another monastery, St. John wrote *The Ladder* to teach us how to reach spiritual perfection. The book explains how we can work toward a pure and holy life striving to acquire the Holy Virtues, thus getting closer to God. In that way, our life can become like a ladder leading up to Heaven.





# Sunday of St. Mary of Egypt

## Today's craft is based on...

The icon of St. Mary of Egypt.

## The Gospel Reading is...

Mark 10: 32-45

## TROPARION:

*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, holy mother Mary, Rejoices with the angels!*



St. Mary was born in Egypt, and at age twelve she left her parents' home to go to Alexandria, where she spent the following seventeen years living sinfully and carelessly. One day, she joined a crowd of Christian pilgrims traveling to the Holy Land of Jerusalem. Once they reached the city, they went to the Church of the Resurrection. To her surprise, St. Mary saw that, even though all the other pilgrims were able to enter the church, an invisible force was holding her back. Realizing that the impurity of her life was actually preventing her from entering the church, she greatly repented and prayed to the Theotokos to let her in, promising to change her way of life. Immediately she felt that the invisible wall had disappeared, and with tears she entered the Church and venerated the Holy Cross. Then the Theotokos instructed St. Mary to go to a faraway place, crossing the river Jordan.

St. Mary obeyed. She walked all the way to the river Jordan, crossed it, and, from that time on, lived ascetically in the desert for forty-seven years, without ever meeting another person. After all these years, a holy elder called Zosimas visited the desert. There, he met St. Mary who told him her story, and asked him to return the following year bringing Holy Communion for her. St. Zosimas did so, and when he had reached the Jordan, he saw St. Mary walking on the river waters toward him.

St. Mary received Holy Communion and instructed St. Zosimas to come back the following year. St. Zosimas returned, and found St. Mary's body stretched on the ground. An inscription on the ground nearby let him know that the Saint fell asleep in the Lord after receiving Communion that one time. She was asking St. Zosimas to bury her. Then a lion approached St. Mary's body and licked her feet. The Elder ordered the beast to dig a hole with its claws, in which he devoutly placed the Saint's body.

Photo by Fr. Ted Bobosh, Creative Commons License [CC BY-SA 2.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0/), via [Flickr](https://www.flickr.com/photos/frtedbobosh/).



# Palm Sunday

## Today's craft is based on...

The Gospel story of the **Triumphant Entrance of our Lord into Jerusalem**.

## The Gospel Reading is...

John 12: 12-18

## TROPARION:

The troparion is the same for Lazarus Saturday and Palm Sunday morning:

*By raising Lazarus from the dead before Your passion, You did confirm the universal Resurrection, O Christ God!*

*Like the children with the palms of victory, We cry out to You, O Vanquisher of death; Hosanna in the Highest!*

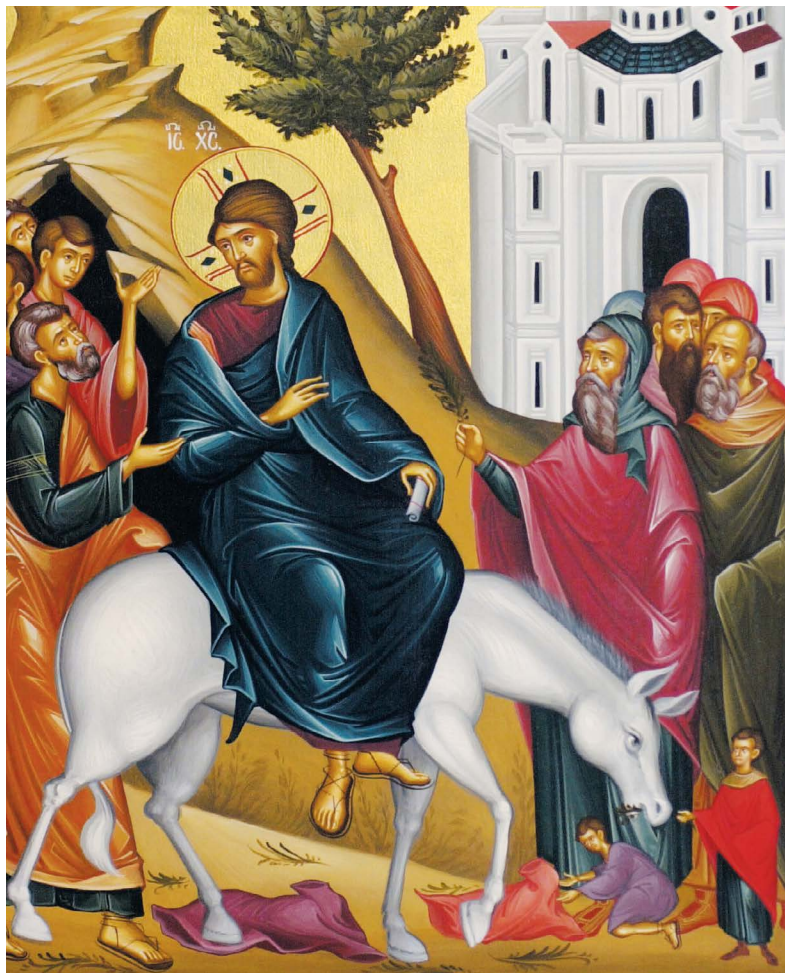
*Blessed is He that comes in the Name of the Lord!*



Icon by Athanasios Clark, [tomclarkicons.com](http://tomclarkicons.com),  
courtesy of the Department of Religious Education,  
Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America.

Five days before the Passover, our Lord entered the city of Jerusalem sitting on a donkey. On the previous day, He had raised his friend Lazarus from the dead, so he had become even more famous among the people. Large crowds went out of the city gates to meet Him as King and Savior, waving palm branches, laying their garments on the ground before Him, and shouting "Hosanna!" - which means "Glory to God!"

On this day, we glorify Jesus Christ like the people of Jerusalem, recognizing Him as our Lord and Savior. We cry out: "Hosanna! Blessed is He that comes in the Name of the Lord, the King of Israel!" . The priest offers us a blessed cross, made out of a palm leaf, to remind us of the importance of this celebration.









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our budding rocks of faith

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