

Feast of St. Mary Magdalene

On July 22, the Church keeps the Festival of St. Mary Magdalene, Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. There is much that might be said about who she is; particularly if you have paid attention to popular books and movies of the last thirty years, because a person named "Mary Magdalene" has often been a major character in such works. And so, who is Mary Magdalene, this woman weeping outside the tomb? In general, she is the example of a notable sinner who became a great saint. The three most important things to say about her is that, *one, she is here weeping*, as if we might weep when our life feels completely lost, confused, and hopeless; *two, that she is a Saint*, and *three, before she was a Saint, she was a sinner*.

Why she is a Saint has everything to do with why she was a sinner. She was a sinner because we are told clearly by Saint Luke 8:1-3 that she is a woman from whom seven demons had gone out. "Seven" both in ancient culture as well as the Church is a symbol of perfection—think of the seven days of creation, the seven churches in the Book of Revelation, the seven Sacraments, the seven Capital (or Deadly) sins, and a whole lot more. So, for Mary Magdalene to have been possessed by seven demons meant she was not merely a garden-variety sinner, but a perfect sinner, or a total example of how not to live. And "Charity shall cover the multitude of sins." Probably she is to be identified with that sinful woman who crashed the Pharisee's banquet with an alabaster box of ointment and anointed Jesus' feet, and received forgiveness of sins. "I tell you", says Jesus, "her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much". St. Mary Magdalene is a witness to the triumph of love and charity. We should find in ourselves the courage and the strength to do as St. Mary Magdalene had done, in her desire to love and to follow the Lord with all of her heart. We should be sincere and genuine in our faith, not just through mere words alone, but indeed through actions and deeds. We must seek out the Lord with all of our hearts and with all of our efforts. We can hardly mention the word "Charity" without recalling St. Paul's great hymn of charity in the 13th chapter of 1st Corinthians, one of the best-known and most loved passages of scripture.

True charity is to know and will the eternal good, to see beyond this or that particular earthly thing. Without charity, says St. Paul, all our gifts are worthless.

And the Scripture lessons will have to do with her place as a witness to Jesus' Resurrection. Just what her earlier life had been, we do not know precisely. And she witnesses to his Resurrection, not just because she was present at the empty tomb on Easter morning, and met the Risen Christ in the garden, but also surely, because she was one whose life was made new in Jesus Christ. By her conversion of life, she witnesses to the Resurrection, and proclaim new life to all who follow Jesus. "Go and tell my brethren", he bids her.

In the words of Saint Paul, Mary was now fully in Christ, and because of that, she was a new creation. All the old in her past away, and the new had come. She was still passionate, emotional, and embodied, but now her formerly sinful desires were rightly ordered to God, rightly ordered to her Maker, her Lover, her Keeper. With what passion, charisma, and presence must she have proclaimed to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord!" For this, her whole journey from perfect sinner to perfected apostle to the apostles, she is venerated and celebrated as a Saint—an example for all time.

We must pray and work for clearer vision and more steadfast will, that the new life of Jesus' resurrection may be perfected in us, that we with Mary, may be witnesses of that resurrection. God has given us many opportunities in order to redeem ourselves and find our way back to Him. He has shown Himself to St. Mary Magdalene first before all other of His disciples, in a very deeply symbolic meaning of the resurrection, which He shares with all of us who have decided to leave behind our life of sin and darkness behind, and embrace the new light of Christ, His love and mercy.

Saint Mary Magdalene, restored to health of body and mind and first witness of the resurrection, pray for us. Amen. **Be Blessed and Be a Blessing.**
Fr. Arul Yagappan, MSFS.