

## **Women of the Church Study**

Month 2 (April 2019)

### **Mary Magdalene**

Mary Magdalene is an interesting woman to study. There appear to be some misconceptions about her identity and her character—and we are able to learn some things from these!

Mary Magdalene, from the town of Magdala in Galilee is believed to have been a Jewish woman living among Gentiles. She is often remembered as being a sinful woman. She is first mentioned in Luke 8:2 where she is introduced as a woman “from whom seven demons had gone out”. We do not know what these demons were, but can surmise that they were part of a troubled and sinful nature. Mary Magdalene is traditionally thought of as the unnamed sinful woman who washes and anoints Jesus’ feet in Luke 7:36-50. Others associate her as Mary of Bethany (sister of Martha and Lazarus) as in Luke 10:38-42 and John 11. Although different sources and scholars have differing perspectives on all of these identities, what is common to all and what is most remarkable is that Mary Magdalene had a personal encounter with Jesus which transformed her life. From that time forward, Mary became a devoted follower of Christ, who accompanied and ministered to him (Luke 8:2-3). Mary Magdalene was with Jesus throughout his earthly ministry and was present during the crucifixion of Jesus, and at his burial and his grave. She is a legendary example of God’s mercy and grace.

Mary is also famously known and remembered (without dispute) as the first recorded witness of the resurrection. Mary’s great love for Jesus is shown in the account of John 20:1-18. Upon seeing the empty tomb she “stood outside weeping”. After Jesus called to her and she recognized him, Mary likely longed to stay with him. Yet Mary did as Jesus requested and returned to the disciples to announce the message of the resurrection, becoming the first person to know and spread the joy of the Good News.

Following the ascension, Mary stayed with the early Christians for years and continued ministry, serving children as well. She later was sent off with others in a boat by Jews; she landed in France where she reportedly lived the rest of her life in solitude.

Mary became one of the most prominent women mentioned in the New Testament, being mentioned a dozen times in the Gospels. Pope Paul II called Mary Magdalene “the apostle of the apostles” and Pope Benedict XVI referred to her as “a disciple of the Lord who plays a lead role in the Gospels”. Mary Magdalene is a saint. Her feast is celebrated on July 22. She is the patroness of converts, repentant sinners, temptation and women, along with many other places and causes.

Resources: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0eGG0fPoDDU> (A concise video of her life)

*Courageous Women* by Stacy Mitch

*Who Does He Say You Are?* by Colleen Mitchell

### **Reflection Questions**

Our study of Mary Magdalene gives much “food for thought”.

When we think of Mary Magdalene, we often remember her negative “reputation” (before she knew Jesus). Yet in reality, Mary is much better known for her positive attributes and virtues, her great love for Jesus and her ongoing ministry in sharing the Gospel.

--What does this tell us about judging others or relying on “hearsay” about others?

--What does this tell us about a person being able to change for the best?

Mary Magdalene was healed of seven demons and her sins forgiven. She became a changed person, from that of a sinful woman to one of Jesus’ most loyal and famous followers.

--How has your life been changed or transformed through your relationship with Jesus?

--In what ways has Jesus healed and/or forgiven you?

When Mary recognized Jesus at the tomb, she called him “Rabboni” or Teacher (John 20:16)

--If you were to personally encounter Jesus in real life, how would you address Him?

--Who is Jesus to you?

--How would you like to deepen your relationship with Him?

Mary Magdalene remained with Jesus throughout his ministry and even through the very difficult time of his passion and death.

--What was it about Mary that motivated her to remain with Jesus even through his suffering?

--What does this show about how you can “stand strong” with Jesus, even through times of difficulty or suffering?

Even though Mary Magdalene lived in a patriarchal society, she and other women were important figures in the ministry of Jesus. Mary left her old life behind and became the first evangelist.

--Have you ever felt limited in your role as a Christian because of being a woman?

--How can you become like Mary Magdalene in spreading the Good News in today’s world?

Mary Magdalene’s devotion took her back to Jesus’ tomb in the company of other women. The Gospel accounts differ in the details but in John’s, Mary’s love for Jesus makes her unable to leave the tomb. Her Lord is dead - the loss of his body the ultimate catastrophe ... but through her, Jesus was going to tell the apostles and ultimately the whole world the great truth that he had conquered death and was risen to new life.

We invite her to walk with us - reflecting on the first Easter morning when death gave way to newness of life - despair was healed by hope - and the embryonic Church looked to new horizons which would take it to the ends of the earth and far into a future it could not have imagined... We are part of that future and take our place in the great unfolding of the life of the Church, praying and discerning how we announce the Good News of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection to the people of the twenty-first century and hand on the rich legacy of our faith into a future we cannot imagine. From:

[http://wellsprings.org.uk/mary\\_magdalene/index.htm](http://wellsprings.org.uk/mary_magdalene/index.htm)

The Dominican sisters of St. Cecilia in Nashville write about Mary Magdalene, patroness of their order. They describe three characteristics of Mary Magdalene: she is the converted sinner, she is the contemplative soul and she is the herald of the Resurrection. They relate how the life of St. Mary Magdalene as portrayed in the four Gospels serves as a model and a reminder... for all Christians, that to be fruitful apostles we must first be faithful disciples. In order to hear the call of Christ and follow it unreservedly, we must undergo a conversion of heart. As a sinner-turned-saint, Mary Magdalene’s life testifies that allowing the reality of our sinfulness to keep us from our vocation to follow Christ is a mistake. We see in this woman that Jesus calls, that Jesus heals, that Jesus brings the true freedom which enables her to embrace her vocation to holiness. We are inspired to embrace Him in that same freedom. Mary Magdalene shows us that the only proper response to the limitless love of Christ is to love without limit in return. She places every gift at the service of Christ and His Kingdom, returning love for love.

From: <https://www.nashvilledominican.org/prayer/additional-community-devotions/devotion-to-st-mary-magdalene/>

St. Mary Magdalene, woman of many sins, who by conversion became the beloved of Jesus, thank you for your witness that Jesus forgives through the miracle of love. You, who already possess eternal happiness in His glorious presence, please intercede for me, so that someday I may share in the same everlasting joy. Amen.

--Mary of Magdala, as you ran back to the tomb you knew to be empty, your heart and mind were in turmoil. Pray for those who fear the worst -who are troubled by what might be. Guide us through your story to the promise that all shall be well.

--Mary of Magdala, woman of the resurrection. Pray for us as we too go and tell what we know - that Jesus is alive and at work through us. Guide us all through your story and teach us to live always in the light of the resurrection.

Many other prayers and reflections can be found in a Novena from the first website listed above.