

Mary Magdalene

by

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It is said that Jesus cast out 'seven demons' (Luke 8:2) from Mary and from that time on she became one of his followers.

Mary of Magdala was one of the women who followed Jesus and His disciples and assisted the work that they did. She was there during His ministry; she was at the foot of the cross when he died; and she was the first person to see Jesus after the resurrection. She is called the 'Apostle to the Apostles' and except for the Blessed Mother, few women are more honored in the bible than Mary Magdalene.

In 591 A.D. Pope Gregory the Great mistakenly combined the stories of three women mentioned in the New Testament and identified Mary as a sinful woman which might have led to the assumption that the sins he spoke of were sexual. Most Scripture scholars concur that there is no scriptural basis for this confusion. Yet until 1969, after Vatican II when it is thought the Vatican quietly spoke out against this thinking, Mary Magdalene was thought of as the repentant sinner. Even today she is the Patron Saint for Penitents.

What I admire most about Mary Magdalene is her unwavering devotion to Christ from His public ministry straight through to His resurrection. When the apostles were in hiding for fear of their own lives, Mary Magdalene was at the foot of the cross. Later she went to the tomb to anoint Jesus' body. This is especially fitting because Mary is translated 'myrrh' which is the pungent herb used in perfumes and for anointing. She became known as a 'Myrrhbearer.' Because of this she is also the Patron Saint for Perfumers.

All four gospel accounts name her as the first to witness the Risen Christ at the tomb. It is amazing that of all those that followed Jesus and were close to Him, she was given this distinction. She was the one to share the news of the resurrection with the other apostles.

There is a legend in the Eastern Orthodox Church that explains the tradition of Christians sharing dyed and painted eggs on Easter Sunday. They greet one another, "Christ is risen!" The response is "Truly He is risen!" The legend states that following Jesus' death and resurrection, Mary used her clout to obtain an invitation to a banquet given by Emperor Tiberius. It is said that when she met him, she held a plain egg in her hand and exclaimed "Christ is risen!" Caesar laughed, and said that Christ rising from the dead was as likely as the egg in her hand turning red while she held it. Before he finished speaking, the egg in her hand turned a bright red.

Another version of the legend popularized in Greece is that after the crucifixion, Mary Magdalene and the Virgin Mary put a basket full of eggs at the foot of the cross and they were painted red by the blood of Christ. Then, Mary Magdalene brought them to Tiberius Caesar.

Since I first read about how Mary Magdalene's reputation was recently restored in the Church, I have been interested in reading and praying about her and her life with Christ. When I hear gossip, or am tempted to pass along something I 'heard,' I think about the story of Mary Magdalene and am reminded of how devastating words can be when spoken without full knowledge. It took nearly 14 centuries to right that wrong!

Mostly I pray that in bearing the crosses of this life I will be as strong as Mary Magdalene was in her love and devotion to Jesus Christ, as she wept at the foot of the cross and rejoiced in His resurrection.