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*Dear Friend of the Missions,*

*Summer is finally upon us. I hope that you all have some time to rest relax. July 1st is Canada Day and July 4th is Independence Day. Pray for the people of the Canada and the United States, that God may bless them and give them peace, prosperity and a spirit of generosity. Keep our missions in your prayers. We are so grateful for all you do for them. God bless you and keep you safe and filled with peace.*



## Apostle to the Apostles

By Fr. Russell Becker, OFM

July 22nd is the feast of St. Mary Magdalene. Lately she has spent a lot of time in the press because of the DaVinci Code. Her role in the early Church has been confused and even her person is confused with at least two other women in the Scriptures. One is the woman in Luke's Gospel who washes the feet of Jesus repenting her sinful life, the other is Mary the sister of Lazarus and Martha, who anointed the feet of Jesus before the death and resurrection. This confusion was set in the minds of most through the preaching of Pope St. Gregory the Great.

Most of us presume Mary was a prostitute who repented and became a close follower of Jesus, but the Gospels do not lend themselves to this image, if they are studied carefully. It was not until 1969 that connections were re-evaluated and a more biblical picture of Mary Magdalene emerges and is celebrated at the liturgy of her feast day. So perhaps we can look at what we know for certain, and what she can say to us about being a disciple in these times.

**What we know.** Mostly what we know comes from the New Testament. Mary was from Magdala, a town on the banks of the Sea of Galilee. Some believe that it was a very cosmopolitan city which might explain some of the presumptions that people have made about her.



Watanabe (Japan)

Mark's Gospel (Chapter 15), the earliest, tells us that Mary was part of the group who was present at the crucifixion of Jesus and witnessed his burial. It was Mary and the other women who also went to the tomb after the Sabbath to anoint the body of Jesus and finish the burial rites. When they arrived there, they saw the stone rolled away and a young man spoke to them that Jesus had been raised and to tell his disciples to go to Galilee to meet him. They were all afraid and said nothing (Mark 16,8). Then in a longer ending to the Gospel in vv. 16, 9-11, Jesus himself appears to Mary Magdalene. It says: he appeared *first to Mary Magdalene*. Then it says that she went and told the disciples, who were still weeping, and *they did not believe*.

What we learn here about Mary is that she was a constant supporter (no reason not to call her a disciple) of the ministry of Jesus along with many other women; that there might be something about the fact that in every list she is the first mentioned, and that Jesus appeared to her before anyone else after the resurrection. It is also worth noting that the disciples did not believe what she told them. Women were not considered reliable witnesses in Judaism.

St. Matthew's Gospel (27:54ff) tells us almost the same thing about Mary: she was there at the crucifixion with other women who had been part of Jesus group since Galilee. He adds a little note that, when Jesus was buried, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary stayed facing the tomb. On the first Easter morning, Mary and the other women



**It is Jesus' women friends who remain faithful to him through his crucifixion and burial. They, especially his closest friend Mary Magdalene, are the first witnesses of the resurrection. Jewish law regarded women as incapable of acting as responsible witnesses. To make women the first witnesses of the resurrection was to make them the original source of credibility of the Christian faith.**  
-Rosemary Ruether

went to the tomb and an angel appeared to them, told them of the resurrection and to tell his disciples to meet him in Galilee. While they were returning to the disciples, Jesus appeared to all of them.

Here Mary seems to be even bolder, *for she did not leave the tomb and watched there for a while*. Not easy to do with the guards there! She was again part of the group that went to the tomb and along with the others is one of the first to see the risen Lord.

St. Luke's Gospel introduces Mary in Chapter 8. [In the chapter before there was the story of the sinful woman who washed the feet of Jesus and dried them with her hair. That is how many made the first confession.] The text says that many women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases followed him and mentions three: Mary Magdalene (from whom Jesus cast seven demons) and Johanna (wife of Herod's steward) and Susanna. These women provided for the company of Jesus out of their personal resources.

In Chapter 23, Luke only mentions that the women who followed him from Galilee were among those who were at the crucifixion (no mention of Mary by name). In Chapter 24, two angels tell the women who came to the tomb that Jesus had been raised and that they should tell his disciples. The women went and the apostles did not believe.

Here Mary is part of the company of Jesus, along with many other women. They are the ones who did not seem to run away,

seemed stronger. Whenever names are mentioned, Mary's name is first in the group. Most Scriptures scholars do not believe that the seven demons that were cast out of her were anything other an indication of some severe illness either physical or mental. It would be a back reading to presume that this is an indication a broken moral life

*St. John's Gospel* (Chapter 19) Mary is present at the crucifixion, but she is listed after three other women including the mother of Jesus. But she is still the first one to whom Jesus appears. In Chapter 20, she is the only one who comes to the tomb that morning. When she sees that the tomb is open she runs back and tells the disciples. They all run to the tomb, and after they see, there are varying amounts of belief. Mary stayed by the tomb, still weeping, thinking the body had been stolen. Jesus appears. At first she thinks it is the gardener and asks him to help her find the body. Jesus speaks her name and she sees! He tells her not to cling to him and to go and tell his company that he is going to the Father. She goes and announces to the disciples: *I have seen the Lord!*

Here Mary is seen as part of the company, though her listing dropped. But she is the only one who goes to the tomb, who wants to do the final burial rites for the one whom she loved, and who was practical about all of this. (*What have they done with the body?*) Then her faithfulness is rewarded by getting to see and speak with Jesus and receiving the commission to tell the disciples.

*Model of discipleship.* May Magdalene has been a great source of



**Do you see these women's courage? Do you see their affection? Do you see their noble spirit in money, their noble spirit in death? Let us men imitate the women. Let us not forsake Jesus in temptation. For they spent so much and exposed their lives for him—even dead—but we neither feed him when he is hungry, nor clothe him when he is naked, but seeing him begging we pass by.**  
—St. John Chrysostom

speculation and confusion in the course of the history of the Church. I am sure that you have been hearing many of the things that have been said about her. They are not worth repeating now. For me, three things about Mary stand out that are worth trying to put into practice.

She was part of the company of Jesus all the way from Galilee to Jerusalem. She and the other women seemed to be a bit more constant than the men of the group. Jesus obviously helped her through a difficult time and her response was gratitude, a gratitude that was lived. She, like many others whom Jesus helped, committed herself to care for the group and helped to support and sustain his ministry. She had to be a very generous and caring person. Many believe because in many lists she is first, that she was the liaison with the women in the company. She does seem to possess a stronger will than most. She stood by and witnessed, surely with some sense of helplessness, the crucifixion. She watched Jesus be buried and stayed by the tomb, and, after the Sabbath, rushed to the tomb to care for the Lord in death, a final act of love and loyalty. For this she becomes the first to see the risen Lord and the first to announce the resurrection. This is interesting since women were not con-

sidered reliable witnesses in Judaism, but the Lord decides who is credible and reliable, for better reasons than we do. (And the Lord just may have wanted to give everyone one most chance to run away.)

So here are three questions I would ask myself in the light of what we know about Mary Magdalene--not the repentant sinner, not the sister of Lazarus and Martha, but *the Apostle to the Apostles.*

**Reflection questions:**

1. By baptism we all become part of the company of Jesus, how constant have we been? How faithful in distress?
2. The Lord helps us out through difficult times, how grateful are we? How do we live the “thank you!”?
3. Christ is risen! How well do we witness to the Lord’s resurrection, even in the midst of death?

**Please remember the following missionary friars on their birthday**

**Fr. Thomas Kornacki, O.F.M. (Bolivia): July 12**

**Fr. Bede Fitzpatrick, O.F.M. (Japan): July 13**

**Fr. Anthony Wilson O.F.M. (Peru): July 14**

**Fr. Carlos Sarmiento-Diaz O.F.M. (Peru): July 25**

**Fr. William Keenan O.F.M. (Bolivia): July 27**

**Fr. Christopher Dunn O.F.M. (Peru): July 29**

**May God bless them with health, strength and happiness!**



*(L-R) Francis Soucy, O.F.M, director of our infirmary, Fr. Campion Lally, O.F.M. (former missionary to Japan) and Fr. Bede Fitzpatrick, O.F.M. who still works in Japan,*

***Please also pray for our missionaries and former missionary friars who are ill:***

**Fr. Campion Lally, O.F.M. (Japan)**

**Fr. Clement Healy, O.F.M. (Jamaica)**

**Fr. Thomas Fox, O.F.M (Brazil)**

**Fr. Finian Riley, O.F.M. (Africa)**

**Fr. Robert Nee, O.F.M. (Brazil)**

**May God’s healing love care for them  
and give them peace.**



**Also pray in a special way for Fr. Theodore Blackowski, O.F.M. (Japan and Honkong) who died on June 8, 2006.**

**May he rest in peace!**

***The Lord Bless you and keep you.  
The Lord let His Face shine upon  
you and be gracious to you.  
The Lord look upon you kindly and  
give you peace.***

***The Lord bless you.***



**Photos by Octavio Duran, OFM**