



## Carmelite Spiritual Center

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### Life is Worth Giving

ST. MARY MAGDALENE WAS FIRST BELIEVER IN EASTER MIRACLE

by Fr. Kevin Shanley, O.Carm.

According to all four New Testament evangelists, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, St. Mary Magdalene was the first of the followers of Jesus to encounter him after the Resurrection, and to believe in the miracle of Easter. She spoke to Him, believed in his Resurrection, and carried out the Lord's admonition to spread the glorious news of the first Easter morning over 2,000 years ago.

To some extent, all Christians find their Faith challenged by Easter as the most important event in ~~our~~ <sup>(their)</sup> lives if they are truly to become his followers. As St. Paul emphasized: "If Christ was not raised, your faith is worthless." (I Cor. 15, 17)

It was this message of eternal hope and salvation that St. Mary Magdalene delivered to the Apostles and others with the promise that all who believe in Jesus will live in both time and eternity.

### Who is St. Mary Magdalene?

Unfortunately, St. Mary Magdalene is a person who has been afflicted with a mistaken identity for much of the history of Christianity.

And that mistaken identity still haunts her memory to the present time. Indeed, a recent best-selling novel entitled "The DaVinci Code," although a work of fiction, presents the argument that Jesus and St. Mary Magdalene were married and have descendants who now live in the south of France under assumed names. Although there is no scriptural or historical proof to this preposterous claim, some foolishly accept it as true.

#### A Faithful Follower

In addition to her role as a witness that Jesus had risen from the dead, the Gospel evangelists place St. Mary Magdalene at the foot of the Cross during the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ. She was, indeed, among his most faithful followers to the very end of his life on the Cross. It is only fitting that she should be among the very first to share in the joy of the Resurrection.

#### Mistaken Identity

In spite of her faithful and prominent following of Jesus during his public life, St. Mary Magdalene is still confused by some who should know better. Indeed, one writer states that she could well be named as "the patroness of the slandered." This is because a persistent legend in the Church points to her as the unnamed sinful woman in the Gospel of Luke (7,36-50) who anointed the feet of Jesus at the home of Simon the Pharisee.

As Luke describes the incident: "She had heard he was dining with the Pharisee and had brought with her an alabaster jar of ointment. She waited behind him at his feet, weeping, and her tears fell on his feet, and she wiped them away with her hair; then she covered his feet with kisses and anointed them with the ointment."

Jesus used the occasion to teach about the greatness of God's forgiveness, especially of the woman who expressed her sorrow so vividly. The woman in the incident is given no name, but receives the Lord's forgiveness. However, in Chapter 8 which follows, Luke lists the group of women who were followers of Jesus, and Mary Magdalene is mentioned as one "from whom seven demons had gone out." Unfortunately, there has been a persistent legend in the Church down through the ages that the sinful woman in Luke's account was Mary Magdalene.

"This is a case of mistaken identity," explained Fr. John Malley, O.Carm., a noted theologian. "Nor is there any real justification for identifying her with Mary of Bethany (John 11), the sister of Martha and Lazarus. Mary Magdalene's character and attitudes in the Gospels are very different from those of these two other women."

Native of Magdala

Fr. Kevin/ ST. MARY MAGDALENE/ 4

The authentic Mary was a native of Magdala<sup>A</sup>, a prosperous and somewhat infamous fishing village on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee, about four miles north of the city of Tiberias. The village of Magdala had a somewhat unsavory reputation, and this may also have contributed to Mary Magdalene's unusual reputation.

According to the Scriptures, Jesus cured Mary of a terrible affliction, being "possessed by seven devils." It is important to note that this expression more than likely indicates a violent and chronic nervous disorder in Scripture, rather than a state of sinful conduct.

#### Generous to the Lord

It is also believed that Mary Magdalene was a fairly wealthy woman who gave of her own wealth and service to provide for the daily needs of Jesus and his apostles. She is noted as a talented and practical woman who helped in the apostolic work of the Lord. She was truly a firm believer in the mission of salvation by Jesus, and a role model for many in the early Church.

#### Life After the Resurrection

Following the Resurrection and the Ascension of the Lord, Mary Magdalene's life is not recorded in Scripture. Some speculate that she went to the city of Ephesus in Asia Minor with Our Lady and St. John the Evangelist. Here she continued her work of bringing people to believe in Jesus.

Fr. Kevin/ ST. MARY MAGDALENE/ 5

And she lived out her final years there as an inspiration to the early Church.

In the year 811 A.D., her remains were brought to Constantinople by the Byzantine Emperor <sup>e/10</sup> Leo VI. Her faithful and prayerful life earned her the title of "Saint." Her feast-day of July 22 is observed throughout the Church.

But her witness to the Resurrection of the Lord is the true hallmark of her Christian life on earth and in heaven at Easter and always.