

Vocation of Mary Magdalene

Tell us, Mary, what did you see!

“Tell us, Mary: What did you see along the road? I saw the tomb of Christ alive, and the glory of the resurrected. I saw the witnesses of the Angels, I saw the shroud. Christ has resurrected, my hope!” (Paschal Sequence).

11 Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; 12 and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. 13 They said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.” 14 When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. 15 Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?” Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.” 16 Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to him in Hebrew, “Rabbouni!” (which means Teacher). 17 Jesus said to her, “Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” 18 Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”; and she told them that he had said these things to her. (John 20, 11-18)

I think that one of the great New Testament Biblical characters to put on the “lamp-stand of our house” (Matthew 5, 15) is Mary Magdalene, the woman of the great daybreak, the first messenger of the Resurrection. She is the image of the passionate Church Wife, looking for her Lord. Mary Magdalene is therefore intimately linked to that special happening that is at the origin and centre of our faith: the festival of Easter.

Easter for Christians is, in effect, our genesis. It is our birth. With Easter all our fears were dissipated and all our desires fulfilled! Whoever unreservedly welcomes the “Paschal announcement” cannot be indifferent to the cry of the EXULTET, which resounds (in the silence of an assembly full of suspense) to invite heaven and earth to take joy in the GREAT NEWS of the triumph of Christ. Easter is the unexpected triumph of Life which brings to life a special Hope; it is the morning Star that illumines the dark night and opens the way for the meridian Sun; it is the explosion of Spring which inaugurates the epoch of Beauty, the season of colours, of singing and flowers... A Christian without Easter is a defeated man from whom you flee because of the smell of death he stinks of! The Easter Christian is the messenger of a contagious happiness, a perfumed ointment capable of resuscitating dying hearts!

Mary, the Early Riser!

The first witness of Easter is Mary Magdalene (John 20, 11-18). Her passion for the Master kept her heart awake on the night of the great “Passage:” I sleep, but my heart is awake” (Song of Songs 5,2). And because love made her wake up early, the Loved One showed himself firstly to her.

It is she we are going to ask: Tell us, Mary, what did you see? (Sequence of Easter Sunday). Yes, ask the witnesses, who saw. Unfortunately today, our society, permeated with a culture of suspicion and transgression, carried away by their itch for “novelties” that satisfy their own desires, surrounds itself with masters of fables (2 Timothy 4,1-5). Paul VI said “the world listens more happily to witnesses than to Masters,” which is as true today as it was then. But today we would say, sometimes, guardate that those “who see,” with an eye capable of penetrating the invisible (Hebrews 11, 27), these witnesses are very often vilified, labelled as “visionaries” and booed; whilst those “who do not see,” and therefore deny spiritual reality, “invisible” to the short-sightedness of the new “masters” in vogue, are considered “illuminated” and applauded by great audiences.

Tell us Mary, what did you see! It is the heart's desire that looks for the truth, that doesn't give in to the current fashion, is not content with (false) tales that are third or fourth hand but goes to drink from the freshness of the spring, to hear the narrative from the lips inflamed with passion of the witnesses who saw Him. And Mary Magdalene (all the Gospels agree with this!) is a first-hand witness, a female first fruit, the "apostle of apostles," as she was called by the ancient Fathers of the Church.

Mary, the Lover!

But, children as we are, we too, from an "incredulous" society, need a word of introduction for this privileged witness. Are we not hiding a mistake: wasn't Mary Magdalene the "sinner woman" spoken of in Luke 7, 36-50 and John 8,1-11. In fact, we come across several "Mary's" in the entourage of women who followed Jesus: apart from Mary Mother of Jesus, we have Mary of Bethany, Mary the wife of Clopas, Mary the mother of James the Less and naturally our Mary Magdalene. This Mary comes from Magdala, a riverside population on Lake Tiberiades. Hence the name Magdalene. She was a person who suffered a great deal, but, once freed of "seven demons" (Luke 8,2), she follows Jesus from Galilee, from the first hour.

What characterizes Mary Magdalene? A great love! She is a woman who is passionate about Jesus, who doesn't accept the prospect of losing him and holds onto that inert body until the last moment, to be able to touch "the man who is my sweetheart" (Song of Songs 3, 1-4). And here we have another recent mistake, created by another prestigious "master," Dan Brown, the North American writer who wrote *The Da Vinci Code* (2003), a success with world sales (with several million copies sold: this "fiction," absolutely full of crude falsifications is still selling!) According to Brown, Magdalene was, in reality, Jesus' lover!...

Yes, Mary Magdalene is Jesus' great "Lover," but not in the carnal sense as seen through Brown's eyes. If the "loved disciple" (perhaps the apostle St. John, according to tradition, although this identification never appears in his Gospel!) is the prototype of the male disciple, Mary Magdalene is, in some way, his "corresponding" female (without thereby overshadowing the figure of Mary mother of Jesus!). Mary Magdalene is the "preferred female disciple" and the first "female apostle" of Christ Resurrected. She (twice called by the generic name of "woman") represents the new concrete, suffering and redeemed humanity, the Eve converted by the Love of the Husband, once lost in the Garden of Eden, but now recovered in this new Garden (John 19,41) where her Loved one has descended (Song of Songs 5,1).

Tell us, Mary, what you saw! Tell passionately. Let us contemplate in your eyes what your heart saw! The vocation of an apostle is not worthwhile if it hasn't lived with your passion!

"To stay" and "cry"

Mary Magdalene's vocation is vibrant with love and also faith. Faith and love are both necessary: faith gives legs to walk, love gives wings to fly. Faith without love doesn't risk, but love without faith can get lost at the many crossroads.

And hope is the daughter of both. It is love and faith that bring Mary Magdalene to stay near the tomb, to cry and to hope, although she didn't know very well what for. As opposed to the two apostles, Peter (figure of faith) and John (figure of love), who keep away from the Tomb.

The Woman, who unites both dimensions, "stays" and "cries." Her "staying" comes from faith, her "crying" from love. She "stays" because her faith perseveres in the search, she does not lose hope facing a lack of success, she questions (the angels and the gardener), like the Loved One from the Song of Songs. She hopes against all hope! Until, having found her Loved one, love throws her at His feet, embracing them in the vain attempt not to ever let Him leave again (Song of Songs 3, 1-4).

Today we, apostles and friends of Jesus, on the contrary, easily capitulate in front of the "tomb." We flee from it! We lack faith to hope that in situations of death, of emptiness, of failure, life can have a new start. We no longer have faith in "miracles." There is no room in us to hope for a God

capable of “resurrecting the dead.” We hurry to close those “tombs” with the “big stone” (Mark, 16,4) of our incredulity. Our mission becomes a “desperate” struggle against death. A business condemned to failure because death reigns from the beginning of the world. We then end up dedicating ourselves to the “compassionate work” of “burying the dead” (with or without the special attention of “embalming them”), forgetting we were sent to “resuscitate” them (Matthew 10, 8). Confronting the “tomb” is the Apostle’s crossing of the Rubicon, his Red Sea crossing (Exodus 14-15). Without removing the stone of our incredulity to confront and overcome such a terrible enemy, we will not see the Glory of God: “Have I not told you that if you believe you will see the glory of God?” (John 11, 40).

Today we also have difficulty “crying,” undoubtedly because we love little. “Crying is the feminine gene,” said Pope John Paul II. Does she love more? “For wherever your treasure is, there will your heart be too” (Matthew 6,21). Magdalene’s heart is in that garden, and that is why she cries. Ours easily forgets its “dead.” Worried about “so many things” to do, it doesn’t have time to “stay” and “cry” with those who are suffering! If our prayer doesn’t know moments of “loud cries and with tears” (Hebrews 5,7) we should ask ourselves if we aren’t being corroded by indifference. Bit by bit our heart atrophies, becomes alienated in the activity, incapable of “compassion.”

The audacity to “stay” to “cry” is not sterile. Mary’s tears call the angels. They are God’s response. They don’t bring back the “corpse” as she requests but, on the contrary, they announce to her, that “He whom your heart loves” is alive! But this heart needs to “see” and “touch” her Loved One. And Jesus gives in, finally, to the insistence of her heart. He goes to find Mary Magdalene. When he calls her by name: “Mariam,” it is then that her heart shakes with emotion, recognizing the Master’s voice. Being called by our name: it is the deepest desire (unconfessed) that we carry in us. Only then will the “person” reach the fullness of his being and be conscious of his identity. Until then he will be feeling his way! Only then will he be able to say with the fire of an impassioned heart: I saw the Lord!” And on that day, like Mary, we will become first hand witnesses: “Something which has existed since the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our own eyes, which we have watched and touched with our own handswe saw it and are giving our testimony!” (1 John 1, 1-4).

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THE MASTER IS HERE AND IS CALLING FOR YOU! – Vocation in the Bible

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