

22nd July: Feast of Saint Mary Magdalene

John 20:1-2,11-18

Forty-two years ago, on this Feast-day of Mary Magdalene I was ordained priest and my priesthood owes so much to this first Missionary of the Good News of the resurrection. According to the gospels, Mary Magdalene was one of the women disciples who followed Jesus in Galilee. She stood with the other women at that key moment of our salvation, looking on as Jesus was crucified. She even witnessed the burial of Jesus by Joseph of Arimathea. She did not stop over there. Mary Magdalene would not rest and she had to come back to the tomb with other women early on the first day of the week. The gospel of John highlights the role of Mary Magdalene on Easter Sunday. She stands outside the tomb of Jesus weeping. She typically reflects a true experience of all who have suffered a painful loss. I am sure many of us have at some point witnessed someone weeping at a graveside. Many of us have at one point or another shed tears at a graveside. The tears we shed at a graveside flow from our love for the person who has died. We get overwhelmed with a profound sense of loss. At such moments we get heart broken. When we love someone deeply, sooner or later our heart will be broken. On that first Easter Sunday, Mary seems to have been alone weeping outside the tomb. Yet, she was not really alone. The one for whom she wasn't weeping was present to her, even though she did not recognize him, *'she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, though she did not recognize him'*. She thought she was seeing the gardener. The risen Lord is always present to us in our moments of sadness and grief, in our times of struggle and distress. Like Mary Magdalene, we don't always recognize the Lord's presence. We can be so absorbed by our grief or by our plight that we struggle to see beyond it. At such times, we often need to find a quiet moment to become aware of the risen Lord's presence, and to hear him speak our name, as he spoke Mary's name to her. It was when the stranger spoke her name that she recognized him as the risen Lord. As Jesus, the risen Lord, said to Mary Magdalene, he has ascended to his Father and our Father, to his God and our God, but he is also present among us and present to each one of us personally, especially in times of loss and struggle. The feast day of Mary Magdalene invites us to allow ourselves to become more aware of the risen Lord's presence and to become attuned to his calling us by name.