

Tuesday Reflection 06 April 2021

Who was she?

Today's Gospel (John 20:11-18) encourages us to reflect on Mary Magdalene, one of the main supporting characters in the drama of Holy Week and Easter.

As the Evangelist reports, it was Mary who first discovered that the tomb was empty as (together with other women?) she approached Jesus's burial place early in the morning of the first day of the week to embalm the body of her crucified Lord - or had she perhaps been keeping watch there all night? Imagine the courage of the women who had stayed at the foot of the Cross and then had waited to see where Jesus's body was laid, while all the male disciples (with the possible exception of one) had fled in panic and terror.

It was Mary who went back into Jerusalem - a woman walking alone - to bring the news of the Resurrection to the male disciples as they cowered in fear behind locked doors in the upper room. There is much confusion surrounding the identity of Mary - caused in part by the popularity of that name. Was she the woman out of whom Jesus had cast seven devils - which could have represented the seven deadly sins - and thus restored her to a state of innocence and purity? Was that the same woman who had anointed him with precious ointment, foreshadowing His death? Was that the same Mary Magdalene who had announced the Resurrection and earned herself the title of "Apostle to the Apostles"?

Many are the myths and legends which later grew up around the character of Mary. Pope Gregory the Great portrayed her as a reformed prostitute, Dan Brown fictionalised her as the wife of Jesus and the mother of his child.

It was Pope John Paul II who sought to introduce clarity into the situation when in 1988 he emphasised the special role of women and that Christ had entrusted divine truths to women as well as to men.

And a final thought - 'Christ' is not Jesus's second name. The Christ is the Anointed One, and although Jesus was spiritually anointed by the Father as he rose from the waters of baptism in the River Jordan, it was a woman who performed the sacramental act of anointing him at Bethany. Let us go into this day in peace to love and serve the Lord in the spirit and with the dedication of Mary of Magdala.

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