

Easter 1

The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene

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Why Mary Magdalene? Why was she the first to witness the Resurrection? Because she was the first to return to the tomb. She went back to that dark place in order to anoint Jesus' corpse, to complete the rites of burial that had been so rushed three days earlier. Unlike the official apostles she did not scatter and flee for fear of her life at Jesus' crucifixion but remained with Christ, and his mother, at the foot of the cross. She arranged with Joseph of Arimathea to have Jesus' body taken down from the cross and stored in a vacant nearby tomb until after the Passover and she could return to finish the sacred rites of burial.

Perhaps Mary Magdalene should be the patron saint for the coronavirus doctors and nurses, medical techs, police and first responders, all who are today running towards the sick and dying as Mary ran towards the tomb that Easter morning. It was there, at the place of death that Mary witnessed the rise of renewed life, sacred life that the demonic could no longer touch.

In fact maybe Mary Magdalene should be the patron saint for all of us going through these days of quarantine and isolation. For Mary did not originally recognize Jesus when he appeared physically before her. It was only when she heard his voice calling her by name. We all must remain physically apart, but we too can connect with one another through the sound of one another's voice. Voice and videos, posts and texts. Perhaps Mary can teach us to find that new life, that sacred life, that she experienced at the sound of her Savior's voice.

We will all be talking about these weeks if not months for the rest of our lives. We will regale, perhaps to the point of boring to distraction, our children and grandchildren, all who follow after us about what we did and suffered during the great pandemic of 2020. What will be the stories we tell? For sure, stories of the suffering and death of neighbors, for too many of us even friends, for some, God forbid, even family. We will also be telling stories of heroic selflessness, but I suspect just as much, stories of what would in ordinary times be the most trivial acts of common compassion. And I suspect we will also be sharing the wisdom of what we have learned, the reminding and re-ordering of priorities brought home during these anxious surreal weeks.

One lesson that is already playing out is just who are the "essential" workers our society cannot afford to send home. It's not the powerful and the affluent, those who seemed so important a month ago. No, it's the nursing home workers and grocery clerks, the transportation workers and delivery people, the sanitation workers and the call center service providers, those most likely to be working minimum wage jobs precisely because there are so many of them, and the work they do so basic to our common life. They are normally as invisible as the air we breathe, the water we drink, the food we eat, day in and day out. We are learning that they are the essential ones. We are learning that we can live without many things, that seemed so important last month. But we are learning that we cannot live without them and the fruits of their labor.

Perhaps Mary Magdalene should be their patron saint too. Unlike the men, she did not need to flee in fear of arrest or mob violence at Jesus' crucifixion. She was only a woman. In a patriarchal society she was neither seen nor heard. But that Easter morn, witnessing Christ arisen, she did manage to get people's attention. The leading apostles, Peter and John, dropped

everything to run and check out what she had said. As the first to proclaim the Gospel, the apostle to the apostles Mary Magdalene should perhaps be counted the patron saint of us all.