

Easter Gospel Restoration

FutureChurch



Mary of Magdala Proclaims the Good News of the Resurrection.

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Restore John's Full Resurrection Account to Easter Sunday Morning

Background

Currently, the Standard Roman Catholic Lectionary calls for only the first half of John's resurrection narrative (John 20:1-9) on Easter Sunday morning. Verse 10 is never read and the rest of the narrative (verses 11-18) is not read on any Sunday -- but instead is read on Easter Tuesday. Years ago, the days of Easter Week were holy days of obligation, and so all Catholics would have heard John 20:11-18 on Easter Tuesday. Yet, because Easter Tuesday is no longer a holy day of obligation, the vast majority of Roman Catholics never hear John's full resurrection narrative as told in 20:1-18 and never hear the story of Mary of Magdala's witness of Jesus' resurrection nor Jesus commissioning her to deliver the news of his resurrection to the community.

In Canada, the entire narrative is read on Easter Sunday. In 1992 the Canadian Catholic Bishops updated their lectionary to include John's full resurrection story. This amendment restored the story of the Apostle to the Apostles to its prominent role in the lectionary. Thus Canadian Catholics hear the whole story and learn from Jesus' example of inclusive ministry and his faith in the leadership of women.

Importance of John 20:10-18

For centuries, Mary of Magdala has been misidentified as a repentant prostitute, thus damaging and diminishing her role as an early and important leader in the historical memory of the Church. The truth is that Mary of Magdala is expressly identified as one of the women who refused to leave Jesus during his crucifixion and death on the cross, in contrast to the male disciples who are depicted as scattering and even denying Jesus. All four Gospels explicitly point out that Mary was present at the tomb on Easter morning and in John's account she is the first witness to the resurrection of Jesus.

John 20:10-18 is significant because it makes clear that only Mary of Magdala was in the garden with Jesus and that she was directly commissioned as the primary apostolic witness to the community. It is John's account of Jesus' inclusive model of leadership that most strikingly and without reservation portrays Mary of Magdala, a woman, as the primary witness of the resurrected Jesus and the first one commissioned by him to "go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God' (Jn 20:14-17)."

Including John 20:10-18 on Easter Sunday

Invite your pastor or leader to include verses 10-18 as part of the Gospel reading and to comment on them in his homily. If he/she is not comfortable doing that, suggest that they simply commented on verses 10-18 in the homily.

Ask to have a qualified woman or other lay person offer a reflection during the Mass -- either after the homily or after the Communion Rite. Use this time to present the omitted verses and the story of Mary of Magdala to your community.

Hold a prayer service or celebration in your community to offer the full resurrection narrative and celebrate Mary of Magdala, Apostle to the Apostles. Resources to help you organize and plan educational or prayer experiences can be downloaded at www.futurechurch.org.

Distribute materials in your parish or community educating on the Gospel omission and Jesus' inclusive ministry. You can download free materials such as "Mary of Magdala," "Jesus and Women," and "The Women in the Ministry of Paul" at www.futurechurch.org.

Preparing to Meet with Your Pastor or Community Leader

WHAT Read the Background and Importance of John 20:10-18 on the first page of this resource to prepare for your meeting(s).

WHO Get to know members of your community by attending activities and opportunities for fellowship offered

Seek out others who are interested in learning more about the role of women leaders in the formation of the earliest Christian communities

Ask if others would like to join you in requesting that all of John 20 be included on Easter Sunday

If you do not know your pastor or faith community leader, schedule time to meet, introduce yourself, and express some of your hopes for the parish or community.

WHEN Start early, after Christmas and well before Ash Wednesday

WHY John 20:1-18 is very clear -- Jesus chose Mary of Magdala as his apostolic witness. This is a prime example of Jesus' inclusive model of leadership.

Unless they worship in Canada, our young women and young men never hear this gospel proclaimed on Sunday.

There is a potential for the positive role that Mary of Magdala can play in the lives of young people you know: Mary of Magdala was a faithful friend and disciple-- what we want of our young people.

Overcoming Common Objections to this Proposal

In your discussions with a pastor, leader, or others you may hear the following offered as reasons for omitting John 20:10-18 from the Easter Sunday Gospel reading:

Objection: On easter morning we are to believe because of faith, not because of an eyewitness.

Response: All of the Easter Vigil Gospel accounts provide the full eyewitness accounts, so it seems fitting to also include the full account on Easter Sunday.

Objection: John 20:11-18 is read on Easter Tuesday so all Catholics do have the opportunity to hear it.

Response: For a variety of reasons, few Catholics attend weekday masses. Years ago, the days of Easter Week were holy days of obligation, so all Catholics would have heard John 20:11-18. Today, Easter Tuesday is not a holy day of obligation and so the vast majority of Roman Catholics will never hear John's full resurrection narrative.

If you experience other objections, please contact FutureChurch at info@futurechurch.org so we can assist you with your advocacy.

Sample Letter to Your Pastor or Community Leader

adapt the letter to your community

Dear (leader, pastor, etc.),

As we approach Easter and the joyous celebration of the Resurrection, I am aware that our Easter Sunday Gospel omits an important aspect of the experience as witnessed in the gospels. The Gospel of John 20:1-18 includes the crucial story of Mary of Magdala as first witness and messenger chosen by Jesus.

Our lectionary currently limits the Easter Sunday Gospel to John 20:1-9, stopping short of the experience of the woman whose role on this day prompted church fathers to call her "Apostle to the Apostles." Her story, relegated to Easter Tuesday, offers for Catholics a true example of female leadership, model of Jesus' inclusive ministry, and His commissioning to "go to the others and tell them" (John 20:17).

This Easter I encourage you to include these verses in our Easter Sunday Mass, either as an addition to the gospel reading, part of the homily, or as a post-communion reflection. I have enclosed information on the standard lectionary readings and the revised Canadian Lectionary, updated in 1992 to include these key verses; as well as a sample reflection on this powerful story.

Please review these materials and share your thoughts with me.

I believe that bringing the full message of the Resurrection, as told in John 20:1-18, to Catholics on Easter Sunday is critical for the future of our church.

Peace and Prayers,

Your name

Your address, email, phone for follow-up contact

Attachments: Sample Reflection and Lectionary Comparison



Comparing Resurrection Narratives for Easter Sunday

Standard Roman Catholic Easter Sunday Gospel John 20:1-9 (NAB)

On the first day of the week, a Mary of Magdala came to the tomb early in the morning, while it was still dark, and saw the stone removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and told them, "They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we don't know where they put him. So Peter and the other disciple went out and came to the tomb. They both ran, but the other disciple ran faster than Peter and arrived at the tomb first; he bent down and saw the burial cloths there, but did not go in. When Simon Peter arrived after him, he went into the tomb and saw the burial cloths there, and the cloth that had covered his head, not with the burial cloths but rolled up in a separate place. Then the other disciple also went in, the one who had arrived at the tomb first, and he saw and believed. For they did not yet understand the scripture that he had to rise from the dead.

Canadian Roman Catholic Easter Sunday Gospel John 20:1-18 (NRSV*)

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to their homes.

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; 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. 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." When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. 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." Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). 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.'" 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.

Lectionary for Mass for Use in the Dioceses of the United States, second typical edition, Copyright 2001, 1998, 1997, 1986, 1970, Confraternity of Christian Doctrine; Psalm refrain copyright 1968, 1981, 1997, International

Commitee on English in the Liturgy, Inc.

**In Canada, the Roman Catholic Lectionary is based on the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) of the Bible.*

Resurrection Narratives for the Easter Vigil Years A, B & C

Easter Vigil Year A Matthew 28:1-10

After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb. And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, approached, rolled back the stone, and sat upon it. His appearance was like lightning and his clothing was white as snow. The guards were shaken with fear of him and became like dead men. Then the angel said to the women in reply, "Do not be afraid! I know that you are seeking Jesus the crucified. He is not here, for he has been raised just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead, and he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him.' Behold, I have told you." Then they went away quickly from the tomb, fearful yet overjoyed, and ran to announce this to his disciples. And behold, Jesus met them on their way and greeted them. They approached, embraced his feet, and did him homage. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me."

Easter Vigil Year B Mark 16:1-7

When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary, the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go and anoint him. Very early when the sun had risen, on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb. They were saying to one another, "Who will roll back the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?" When they looked up,



they saw that the stone had been rolled back; it was very large. On entering the tomb they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a white robe, and they were utterly amazed. He said to them, "Do not be amazed! You seek Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Behold the place where they laid him. But go and tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him, as he told you.'"

Easter Vigil Year C Luke 24:1-12

But at daybreak on the first day of the week they took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb; but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were puzzling over this, behold, two men in dazzling garments appeared to them. They were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground. They said to them, "Why do you seek the living one among the dead? He is not here, but he has been raised. Remember what he said to you while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners and be crucified, and rise on the third day." And they remembered his words. Then they returned from the tomb and announced all these things to the eleven and to all the others. The women were Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary the mother of James; the others who accompanied them also told this to the apostles, but their story seemed like nonsense and they did not believe them. But Peter got up and ran to the tomb, bent down, and saw the burial cloths alone; then he went home amazed at what had happened.

Sample Homilies or Reflections

My Name is Mary ... From Magdala

Written and presented by Nadine K. Di Iorio for the Third Annual Women's Conference March 2-3, 2001 sponsored by the Institute for Ministry and the Office of Social Ministry, Archdiocese of Detroit.

My name is Mary and I am from Magdala, a beautiful and prosperous fishing city on the Sea of Galilee, which is a lake in northern Palestine. I am a Jew living amongst fellow Jews in a rich land under Roman rule. We dry and pickle fish, grow wheat, make pottery and build boats. We ship the fruits of our labor, which are many, as far away as Rome. Despite the abundance around us, we are subject to poverty and the loss of land due to Roman and Temple taxation.

The women of Palestine are amongst the poorest in the world. We have minimal to no property rights except to theoretically inherit land. Our fathers betroth us before the age of 12 and after marriage our husbands control our land and its uses. Hebrew men can divorce their wives for anything from burning meals to adultery, yet women are not permitted to divorce their husbands. In my culture a woman cannot survive unless she associates with a patriarchal household. We are not accepted as witnesses in Jewish law and have no official religious or leadership roles. We cannot proclaim Torah at synagogue because of our periodic uncleanness while menstruating and therefore are not taught to read. This is the oppressive context of my life.

You may have heard some stories about me personally. I have been labeled a prostitute and public sinner who after encountering Jesus repented and spent the rest of my life in private prayer and penitence. You may have seen portraits of me as a bare breasted reformed harlot of Renaissance art.

Biblical accounts of my life paint a very different picture of who I am. Nowhere in scripture am I identified as a prostitute or public sinner, only as a wounded woman from whom Jesus "cast out 7 demons." Was I afflicted with a violent illness such as epilepsy? Was it an emotional illness of internal conflict and anxiety? Or was I a woman who yearned in frustration for a life quite different from the expectations of my culture? I may have been seriously sick, but not seriously sinful and does it really matter?

What matters is that I, against religious and cultural adversity, was divinely inspired to leave my home, family, relationships, city and my everyday life to follow one man, Jesus of Nazareth. Why? I was made whole through my willingness to receive his healing love into my heart, body and soul; I experienced the natural ecstasy of God's living presence. I abandoned everything I knew and became completely committed to the man, his min-

istry of love and mission to heal the world. I, along with other sisters and brothers provided Jesus with physical, financial, and spiritual support while living and learning in the tender equality of Christian community.

I loved Jesus so much that I was willing to remain at the foot of the cross to bear his most agonizing moment. And he loved me so much that he proclaimed, through my witnessing of his resurrection, eternal forgiveness to the world.

Early in the morning on the first day of the week while it was still dark, I came to the tomb with the intention of anointing Jesus' body. On the way I wondered if I would be threatened by the guards outside his tomb and how I might move the stone that blocked its entrance. When I arrived I saw that the stone had been rolled away and the tomb was empty. I was afraid and ran to find Simon Peter and John and told them, "Our Rabbi has been taken from the tomb! I don't know where they have put Jesus?" At that Simon Peter and John started out toward the tomb. Simon Peter entered the tomb and observed the linen wrappings on the ground and saw the piece of cloth that had covered Jesus' head lying not with the wrappings, but rolled up in a place by itself. Then John went in to look for himself. Satisfied that Jesus was not in the tomb, the disciples went back to their homes.

Meanwhile I stood crying beside the tomb fearing that my sacred journey had ended. I stopped to peer inside again and saw two angels in dazzling robes. One was seated at the head and the other at the foot of the place where Jesus' body had lain. They asked me, "Why are you weeping?" I answered, "because they have taken away my Rabbi, and I don't know where they have put his body." I then turned around and caught sight of a man standing there that I supposed was a gardener. He asked me, "Why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?" I said, "Please, if you are the one who carried Jesus away, tell me where you have laid the body and I will take it away."

This man said to me, "Mary." When I heard him say my name in that gentle way he had said it so many times before unlike anyone that I had ever known, I realized that it was Jesus, the risen savior. I then turned to embrace him and said, "Rabboni."

Jesus then said, "Don't hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to God. Rather go to our sisters and brothers and tell them, I'm ascending to my God and to your God." I went to the disciples and proclaimed, "I have seen the teacher" and reported to them what the savior had said to me.

This is my story, this is your story for I am every woman and every woman is me.

Sample Homilies or Reflections

Saint Mary of Magdala

This reflection was written by Rita Houlihan, member of both the FutureChurch Board of Trustees and Women in Church Leadership Advisory Committee and is offered as an inspiration for your own homily or reflection.

As I meditated on John 20:1-18, I found that in order to imagine what Mary of Magdala experienced on Easter morning I had to go back to the crucifixion. According to both Mark and Matthew, she and some other women stood and watched at a distance; according to John she stood right at the cross. What did she discover as she witnessed the suffering and death of her dear friend, Jesus? She may have realized how the power of her love overcame her fear and perhaps, even revulsion as she witnessed the horrors of His suffering. I can't imagine seeing my best friend's body and face bloody and torn knowing that he or she, of all people did not deserve this.

What kept her there at the foot of the cross? Perhaps the deep bond of friendship and a desire to comfort, even if only by her presence? Was it memories of how he had healed her and welcomed her fully to his group of disciples; or memories of all the healing and kindness she had witnessed? That Sabbath after the crucifixion must have been a day of sorrowful waiting. Finally, on Sunday she leaves before dawn with some other women or perhaps, alone as John suggests.

We know she fully expected to find Jesus' body there because she is stunned and afraid when she sees the tomb empty. She ran to tell Peter and the beloved disciple – she calls out, "They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we don't know where they put him." They ran back to the tomb together. She and the younger disciple arrive first and wait for Peter; he arrives, goes in, sees the cloths and head wrappings but does not understand. The beloved disciple goes in and has a sense that something important has occurred; they both leave, returning to their homes (verse 10) without saying a word.

But Mary stays. Echoing the soul thirsting in Psalm 63, she looks in the tomb and sees two angels. They ask her, 'Why are you weeping?' For the 2nd time she cries out, "They have taken my Lord, and I don't know where they laid him." She turns away and stays weeping in the garden. I have to ask again, 'What kept her there?' This was the most important

teacher and friend in her life. For two years she had traveled with Jesus and the other women and men disciples up and down Galilee and now into Jerusalem. He had saved her life and the lives of many others - the woman who had hemorrhaged for 12 years and was, according to Jewish law unclean. When this woman touched Jesus he did not condemn her but blessed and cured her, breaking her horrible and long isolation. (Mark 5:21-34) He raised a 12 year old girl from the dead – in a society that permitted people to leave unwanted children out to die. (Mark 5:35-43) He saw an old woman crippled and bent praying quietly in the temple; he called her over to where he was teaching and praised her as a true 'daughter of Abraham'. (Luke 13:10-17)

This was a man who not only saved Mary of Magdala's life but also clearly laid out new rules for life; he included women, children, lepers, sinners and tax collectors in his community and mission. She probably had thanked him and may have generously supported his mission in Galilee from her own funds; but when your best friend suffers and dies that isn't enough. She had to be there at the tomb, the last place Jesus was known to be.

So there it is; I think it was the unremitting kindness that Jesus had shown to her and to so many others; the guidance, the prayers He had taught them, the example He had set – this could have kept Mary of Magdala at the tomb. But on the other hand, she may not have been thinking of all those memories though they were in her soul, a deep part of her experience. Maybe on this first Easter she was simply being present; something foreign to us but that the mystics, prophets and teachers of contemplation urge us to do. There she is showing us how to be present to God's presence in the face of our own powerlessness, helplessness, fear, confusion and overwhelming sadness. Her love for Jesus empowers her to stay and propels her to act, to give Jesus a proper burial and to insist that someone tell her where He is!

There she stayed - Unlike Peter and the other disciple - she didn't leave when she did not understand or when sorrow overcame her. She was staying here at the last spot where she had seen her best friend. A gardener appears; he asks as the angels did, "Woman, why are you weeping?" He adds, "Who are you looking for?" She's very clear and for the 3rd time asks for Jesus; "Sir, if you carried him

away, tell me where you laid him, and I will take him.”

And so here she is - the witness Jesus needs and maybe waited for – a woman faithful to her duty, who knows Him, who wants to be with Him and is not afraid to let others know she is looking for Him. He calls her name, “Mary”; she knows Him immediately, even with her back to Him – as a true disciple, ‘she knew Him when He called her name.’ (John 10:3-5)

Mary wants to hold Jesus here on earth as if her salvation is just being with Him again – but it is not enough. Jesus, now the Risen Christ tells her she cannot hold onto Him “... for I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my (adelphoi – siblings) to my sisters and brothers and tell them, “I must ascend to my Father who is now your Father, to my God who is now your God.” (20:17) Full of new hope and strengthened under his wing (as the soul in Psalm 63), Mary goes and announces this Good News to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord; and she told them that he had said these things to her.” (Verse 18b)

Sandra Schneiders* (see note at end) offers a potent analysis of this radical statement Jesus presents to St. Mary of Magdala – ‘I must ascend to my Father who is now your Father, to my God who is now your God.’ and of the fact that Jesus ‘sent out’ a specific disciple – a woman - to proclaim it to the others. Yes, Jesus has risen and will ascend to God – but His Resurrection must be proclaimed - His God is now our God; His loving Parent is now ours as well. Through Mary’s, and our belief in Jesus - and her, and our proclaiming of His name “...the purpose of the Incarnation is fulfilled.” From now on, ‘We - those who believe in his name - become the children of God.’ He has risen and He has also built a new resurrection covenant with us - His God is our God, His loving Parent is our Parent and we are the sisters and brothers of Christ.

Why is this important for us today? When we understand that Jesus selected Mary of Magdala as the first witness to proclaim His new covenant, it is clear that each one of us can be a witness. We don’t have to be lawyers or people who can give testimony in court – Peter and the beloved disciple (both men) went to the empty tomb; they qualified to give testimony in a 1st century court of law and Mary, a woman, did not. But Jesus did not appear to them – did they leave too soon? They were silent. Do we need to call out so Jesus and others can hear our voices?

So who did Jesus select to carry this message: what were her characteristics and how can I model them? First - A disciple faithful to her duty - Mary went to the tomb to fulfill a responsibility to give Jesus a proper burial. She went as early as possible – no hesitation.

Second - A disciple who insists on seeing Him; a disciple who calls out, making it clear she is looking for Him.

And Third - A disciple who stays, watching, remembering his kindness, being in His presence. Seeing her love I realize I want to know more about the Jesus she saw in action. Her relentless seeking makes it clear that He was remarkable and much loved and that I would benefit greatly from getting to know him better.

When I see St. Mary of Magdala as this model of a true apostolic witness - it is clear that the only barrier to being a ‘witness’ is within me. There aren’t any external barriers, just internal. I have no excuses – we can all be complete witnesses in the way we live our lives; do our work; pray and most of all treat our friends, families, colleagues, enemies, and strangers. This is St. Mary of Magdala’s gift to us – may we celebrate now the Eucharist she did so much to prepare for us.

*S. Schneiders, “Women in the Fourth Gospel and the Role of Women in the Contemporary Church”. Biblical Theology Bulletin, 12 (1982), pp. 35-45.