

## **How to Remain with Jesus: Story of Mary Magdalene**

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Hi everybody, I'm Claire Dwyer. And in this season of repentance and in preparation to enter more deeply into the Paschal mystery of the Lord I want to invite you today to spend a little time with me alongside a saint who knew not only the Paschal mystery, but the person of Jesus Christ very intimately. And whose story is one that we just can't help, but be drawn into and whose total self-gift invites us to just lavish all that we have on the Lord, the Lord who will so magnificently and generously receive our offering. And then give us back to ourselves restored, redeemed and with a mission and a personal vocation of our own, and who doesn't want that?

### **St. Mary Magdalene**

And so, I want to spend some time today with St. Mary Magdalene, who is also known in scripture as Mary of Bethany. She was the sister of Lazarus and Martha, the follower of Jesus Christ, who had been liberated by Him and came to be one of His closest and, of course, one of His most faithful friends. And I want to spend time with Mary Magdalene in the Gospel, of John in particular. And we're actually going to begin at the end. Now, when I teach and coach writers, I often invite them to begin their story, or their book with one of their darkest moments, and there's a reason for that. And then work their way back from there.

And that's what we're going to do. We're going to begin at the end and start with John Chapter 20. And John Chapter 20 seemed like the end to a lot of people, especially to St. Mary Magdalene, as she goes to the tomb Easter Sunday morning wanting to take care of the body. She had probably wanted to go the day before. She did not go on Saturday because she was being obedient and observing the Sabbath, so she waited to go to the tomb until the first day of the week. And John tells us that this is the first day of the week. And that is significant because what happens on the first day?

In the Old Testament, on the first day, God moved over the chaos and created light with a word. And on this first day, this new first day, God is going to move over the chaos of her grief, and the darkness of the world, and the word Himself will be the light and bring forth a new creation. And she, totally unbeknownst to her as she sets out, will be called forth that day into a new kind of existence by the word Himself. But I would imagine it was still dark when she set out. My guess is she hadn't slept at all. She was exhausted, she was definitely crushed in her spirit. She hurries to the garden and she's startled to see in the very pale light, it was probably pre-dawn even at that time, that the stone had been moved away from the tomb.

## Significance of Jesus' Burial Cloth

Okay, change of plans, right? She runs to tell His friends, she runs to Peter and John. "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb "and we don't know where they've laid Him." And then, the guys run, they want to go see for themselves. And they see the cloths, and they see the cloth that has covered His head rolled up in a place all by itself, right? Not the sign of thieves, actually. And this is important, but the sign of a carpenter, who has just finished his job. The sign of a carpenter who has just finished his job.

My pastor actually was the one who told me that in those biblical times, traditionally a carpenter who, of course, would have to go and complete the majority of his projects on site since they didn't have, you know, delivery trucks at the time, he would signal that his work was finished by rolling up his towel that he would wipe the sweat from his brow with in a distinctive way and leave it on the site. That was the sign, "My work is done." Peter would've known this, John who's there, who's writing the gospel would have known this. In fact, they probably would have recognized the very particular way that the Lord folded His own cloth. And the gospel says they saw that and they believed. But they're not sure of what to do exactly. They're not sure of what has happened and they go home.]

## Mary's Mission

But not Mary, apparently she's gone back and she stays there And she wants to be where He was, if she can't be where He is, There's nowhere else for her anymore. It reminds me in John Chapter 6 where Peter says, "To whom should we go," without understanding she just doesn't know what else to do anymore, but to try to be near Him, there's nothing else, there's no one else so there she is. And these angels are there, and they're asking her why she's crying. And she says, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him." And then she turns around and she sees Jesus. But she can't tell it's Him and He asks her, "Woman, why are you weeping, who do you seek?" And she says, "Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you've laid Him and I will take Him away." And then he just says, "Mary." And I just imagine Him saying it in the way that His Father said it when He spoke her into being.

And something woke in her with that word, and she was reborn, and her eyes were opened and she recognized the one who had saved her. "Rabbini," she says and I can't even imagine the emotion of that word. And it's then that He gives her a mission to go and tell His brethren, go and tell the boys that He is who He says He is. And He has done what He has come to do. And she becomes the apostle to the apostles.

## Why did Jesus Choose Mary?

In fact, there was a decree that came from the Pope dated in June, 2016, which was the Feast of the Sacred Heart. This was June 3rd, 2016, it was the Feast of the Sacred Heart in the Year of Mercy. And he raised her memorial to a feast day on the same level as that of the other apostles. And the church, in doing that, says to the world, "Look at this woman, the first to proclaim "the gospel of the resurrection "to those who would bear it into the rest of the world." Why Mary, why was she the first account of seeing the risen Christ? Why was she given this privilege and this dignity? Why not Peter, after all, Peter was the rock, right? Peter, the leader of the church. Why not John the beloved, the apostle that Jesus gives his own mother to take care of?

Well, this is the part of the story now, where we're going to go back and we see this scene in John Chapter 12, and it's before the Final Passover. And Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem and He stops at Mary, and Martha and Lazarus's house. Martha's doing what Martha's good at, she's serving. Lazarus is sitting with Jesus and Mary approaches with a full pound of costly ointment. And Mary anoints His feet and this ointment, I discovered, could actually have been and probably was part of her dowry, her inheritance. The tradition was that a woman's family would give her an alabaster jar of precious perfume or ointment when she reached marrying age that became part of her dowry. And it was worth what would be thousands of dollars in our day, and she takes the lowest possible posture and without any apparent self-consciousness she just pours it on Him. And she uses her hair to wipe His feet.

The same feat that Luke tells us in his gospel that Mary sat at to hear the Lord speak, to receive His words and to choose the better part. Well, this time she goes to His feet and this time Jesus receives her love. And in the gospel story it says that the fragrance filled the house. Now, in John's gospel, in particular, everything is very deliberately filled with meaning, infused with meaning. And this fragrance filling the entire house points to the beauty of this act. It's a gesture of extravagant, reckless love, which will fill the church's memory just like it filled the house at the time. And it will be what we are talking about today. And despite Judas' protest, Judas who pretends to care about the poor, Jesus receives it.

And I imagine the tenderness of His face as she bends down reverencing the body in the way that she went to the tomb to do, but she was unable to do because His body would then be living again, glorified. And He would give her the gift of faith rather than the ability to cling to His physical presence. And there's just something about her not counting the cost, not keeping anything back of just emptying herself at His feet.

It's the posture of true prayer. It's the proximity to Him, the intimacy with Him, the humility before Him and this is a woman who knows Him. She knows who He is, she has heard His voice and she's been changed by it. And on the morning of the resurrection,

because of this intimacy, she recognizes Him again in the way that He says her name and she's forever changed. She knows Him, she knows herself as a new creation. She understands her mission and she goes forth.

## **Hear the Lord Speak Your Name**

So what can we take from this story? So many things, but let me leave you with two things to reflect on. Number one, we are invited to pour out our lives without reserve, we all have been designed and created to be for others. And it is in our total self-gift that we discover who we are. When Adam sees Eve, that's when he understands himself. Like, "This at last is flesh of my flesh, bone of my bone." And Mary empties herself at the feet of Christ, giving all she has and, in return, she has the privilege of being given a new identity in Him.

"Mary," He says and just the way He says it identifies not only Himself but herself, and the beauty of their relationship. Imagine the Lord saying your name intimately, tenderly, reverently. God's word is alive and when He speaks your name, you come alive, or you come alive again, or you come alive in a new way. So hear Him speak your name over you, the name given you in the waters of baptism. And allow yourself to be forever changed by that single, most personal word.

## **Stay Close to the Lord**

Secondly, do you want to know what God wants of you? Stay close to Him, stay with Him no matter what. Stay when it seems dark. Often we anguish over knowing His will, wondering what our vocation is, whether it's our state in life, or our personal vocation, our mission, our calling. "What would you have me do, Lord?" And the answer is found and it's only found in staying close to Him, and coming to know and recognize His voice in your prayer. Mary stayed, she stayed at His feet first and then she stayed in her distress, and her desolation on the morning of the resurrection at the only place that she knew Him to be. When she couldn't see anything, didn't know anything she came, and she came again and she stayed.

And then, in one moment, she realized that He had actually been there all along and she was with Him and could receive her calling from Him. But it was only because she was there. When prayer seems dry, and God seems far away, and there are no consolations, and you feel like crying out, "They have taken my Lord "and I don't know where they have put Him," and you're tempted to give up and go away, and do something that seems more productive and worthwhile when other things beckon and call you away, stay. Stay so that when He speaks, you are there to hear. Stay with Him this Lent, press close to His heart, ask Him to reveal His voice to you and you to yourself. And ask for the intercession of St. Mary Magdalene.