

## Sermon for the Feast of St. Mary Magdalene – John 20:1-2, 10-18

In the Name of the Father and of the Son ✠ and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

There's something about Mary Magdalene. She was the first of the Lord's followers to see Him alive after His resurrection. Imagine that – she was the very first person to see the Lord Jesus in His glorified and resurrected body – the very body we will see when we meet Him! This privilege was first afforded to Mary Magdalene, who saw the dead-but-now-alive-again Savior.

What else can we say of this Mary? Mary Magdalene was numbered among the women who accompanied Jesus and his other disciples. She was among those who provided for Christ and His disciples out of their own means. God chose to work through their means so that His kingdom would be proclaimed throughout the world. Mary was thankful to her Savior to serve Him in this way. Why? We know also that He had cast seven demons out of her – a lot to be thankful for indeed!

In western Christianity there is also a tradition that arose that Mary Magdalene was the unnamed sinful woman of Luke chapter 7. You may recall this story: Christ was invited to dine at the house of a Pharisee. When a woman of the city, a sinner we're told, learned that Christ was at this Pharisee's house, she came to the place. Crying, kissing, and drying his feet with her hair, she also anointed our Lord with very costly ointment. And she was a sinner. Everyone in the room knew it. But Christ, the Forgiver of sinners, did not turn her away. Rather, He commends her saying her many sins are forgiven and her faith in Himself as the Forgiver of her sins is not misplaced, but in fact, saves her that she may go in peace. Whether this same woman is Mary Magdalene, the Scriptures do not say conclusively. But the fact remains, Mary had a past.

As we all do. We all have a past. Things we regret. Past sins that are the cause of our present miseries. Things we did. Words we said. Evil thoughts and assumptions that caused us to act and speak in a hateful way. Through these, we have abandoned our Lord. If only we could undo what was done. If only we could unsay what was said. But we can't. It's out there. And it has wrecked out relationships with others. It has wrecked ourselves.

Yet remember, dear Christian, what cannot be undone can be forgiven. It happened for Mary Magdalene and it happens for you. And the resurrection of Christ Jesus proves just that. Recall what He said to Mary in John's recounting of this event: "But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and to your Father to My God and to your God.'" Christ who has risen from the dead wants to be called the Brother of His disciples and all believers. "Go to My brothers." What a word to make us joyful and certain of God's acceptance of us and His forgiveness of us!

Who could ever imagine what is contained in this little word "brother" that Christ is for Mary Magdalene, that Christ is for the disciples, that Christ is for us. Peter had denied the Lord three times. The other disciples had fled from Him and shamefully forsaken Him in His distress and suffering. So not only Peter but also all the other disciples are caught with a bad conscience, fear, and guilt. Not only did no one dare to

say a word for fear of the Jews, but they also had to hang their heads and be ashamed of themselves as faithless and fallen away from the Lord. What Christ should have said instead to Mary Magdalene for His disciples and for us was this: "Go to those faithless deserters, those deniers of Me, those ones who fell away from me during my darkest hour and tell them they have no part of Me." That's what we deserve.

But He doesn't say that. He turns it around. "Go and say to My brothers." He could not have been friendlier; He could not have shared a more beautiful word with those who were sitting there in the midst of hell, who were terrified by a bad conscience for being faithless and forsaking Him. "Brother!" God's eternal Son, the Creator and Lord of All, calls us brothers! Who are we to receive such an honor to be called brothers and sisters of the Son of God?!? We're barely worthy to be called creatures, and poor miserable ones at that. Yet God will not have it. We are to be called His brothers and sisters.

The greatness of this word "brother" is glorious beyond all measure. If I am Christ's brother, I am an irrefutable heir together with Christ of all His possessions and of equal inheritance, possessing in common with Him all blessings that He has. St Paul said it: "God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ – for by grace you have been saved – and raised us up with Him and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus." And again, "You have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory." And most pointedly, "All things are yours, and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's." This little word "brother" places a crown on our head. We cannot fully comprehend its glory!

So it follows that we belong to paradise; it follows that we belong to the kingdom of heaven where Christ is Lord, for we are heirs with Him. He gives us His name and His inheritance. All the greatest treasures of the church from all time belong to us. Every Christian and believer is called the Lord's brother because we are heirs of Christ's heavenly blessings.

Are you troubled? Are you in despair? Have your sins caused you a guilty conscience? Take comfort when you are tempted or afraid. Take this to heart, dear Christian: Your Brother Christ has no sin. He is pure. He is innocent. He is righteous. And He gives all of these to you. Are you afraid of death? He is not held by death, but lives. He is Life itself. This is the Christ who calls you "brother." He had died and risen again from the dead. What do you have to fear? Whatever your sins have inflicted upon you, He has forgiven and brought you into His righteousness.

Mary Magdalene goes to Christ's disciples even today. She brings the Word just as Christ said, "Go and tell my brothers." As we, His disciples, still hear that comforting word today, we are reminded: Christ is our Brother, His Father is our Father, and His God is our God. And God grant that we live in this grace forever. Amen.

The Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. ✠BJF✠