

The Resurrection Hope

Today the Church remembers one of the most inspiring figures in the Gospels, Mary Magdalene. It is now generally accepted that she is not the same as the woman described as a sinner nor as Mary the sister of Martha and brother of Lazarus. What we do know, though, is that she was healed by Jesus before she started to accompany him during his ministry (Mark 16.9, Luke 8.2) and that with other faithful women she remained with Jesus as he hung on the cross. But more significantly she was the first to discover the empty tomb and was the first to meet the risen Jesus. That encounter is described movingly in St John's Gospel (John 20.1-18). Jesus commissions Mary to tell the other disciples that he is risen from the dead, and so in the early Church she was given the title 'Apostle to the Apostles'.

We thus owe much to Mary Magdalene, even though we have few details about her in the New Testament. At the time the testimony of women was given little credence, which makes Jesus' confidence in her all the more remarkable and indeed revolutionary.

The resurrection of Jesus is central to the Christian faith. It underpins all that we believe and are called to live out and to act upon. That is made particularly clear by St Paul in his various letters. And the reading we just heard, from his second letter to the Church in Corinth, is indeed appointed for the feast of Mary Magdalene.

Belief in the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ requires faith – faith that in him we too are able to share in his resurrection life. The apparent downside is that we are also called to share in his death. But in return we are given the hope of new life, of eternal life with God.

It is very easy, when we look at the conflict situations in our world, or even when we think of the uncertainty in our own country at this moment of time, to become despondent or anxious. Can things get better, or will they just get worse? Is there any chance of a satisfactory and lasting solution to these apparently intractable situations? And in any case what can we do? We can feel so helpless.

As Christians we are called to see everything in the light of the resurrection. For the resurrection is the ultimate expression of God's love for his world and for all people. It assures us of the ultimate victory of good over evil, of light over darkness, of life over death.

The road to peace and justice may well be a difficult one, beset with problems and setbacks along the way. But we believe that God's will is for peace. And so the Christian message is not one of resignation or despair but of hope. The task of reconciliation is no less easy. But God has set the agenda for reconciliation through the death and resurrection of his Son Jesus Christ by which God has reconciled the world to himself.

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