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Meditations: July 22, feast of Saint Mary Magdalene

Some reflections that can assist our prayer on the feast of Saint Mary Magdalene.

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- The women who followed our Lord
- Mary Magdalene, apostle of apostles
- A heart enkindled with love

MANY WOMEN accompanied our Lord and the apostles (cf. *Lk* 8:3). With their service, they cooperated in the apostolic effort to preach the Kingdom of God. But these women, unlike most of the disciples, did not abandon Jesus in the Passion. They consoled Him by staying at the foot of the cross. They are also “the first at the tomb. They are the first to find it empty. They are the first to hear: ‘He is not here. He has risen, as he said’ (*Mt* 28:6). They are the first to embrace his feet (cf. *Mt* 28:9). They are also the first to be called to announce this truth to the Apostles.”^[1] Contemplating how these holy women acted, Saint Josemaría exclaimed: “Woman is stronger than man, and more faithful, in the hour of suffering: Mary of Magdala and Mary Cleophas and Salome! With a group of valiant women like these, closely united to our Lady of Sorrows, what work for souls could be done in the world!”^[2]

This same fidelity and fortitude have been shown by many other women down through the centuries in the Church. Women have had “an active and important role in the life of the early Church, in building up from its foundations the first Christian community – and subsequent communities – through their own charisms and their varied service.”^[3] Undoubtedly, “without the generous contribution of many women, the history of Christianity would have developed very differently.”^[4] Also now, in our day and age, “women are called to bring to the family, to society and to the Church, characteristics which are their own and which they alone can give: their gentle warmth and untiring generosity, their love for detail, their quick-wittedness and intuition, their simple and deep piety, their constancy.”^[5]

AMONG THOSE WOMEN who followed Christ, *Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out (Lk 8:2)*, held a special place. She accompanied our Lady on the way of the cross. Together with the Mother of God and the beloved disciple, she heard our Lord's final breath and contemplated his pierced side. Early on Easter morning she was the first to encounter our Lord (cf. *Mk 16:9*). And she went to the Apostles as an eyewitness of the Risen Christ.

Jesus entrusted Mary Magdalene in a special way with the mission of announcing his glorious Resurrection: *Go to my brethren and say to them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God. Mary Magdalene went and said to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"; and she told them that he had said these things to her (Jn 20:17-18)*. Therefore Thomas Aquinas

reserves for her the unique title of “Apostle of the Apostles.” And he adds: “Just as a woman had announced the words of death to the first man, so also a woman was the first to announce to the Apostles the words of life.”^[6] —

Following Mary Magdalene’s example, Christians have the mission of “proclaiming the living Christ,”^[7] joyfully bearing witness everywhere to his kingdom. Mary Magdalene was overjoyed when she discovered, at the entrance to Christ’s tomb, that the One she thought was dead was alive, and once again called her by her name. “How beautiful it is to think that the first appearance of the Risen One took place in such a personal way! To think that there is someone who knows us, who sees our suffering and disappointment, who is moved with us and calls us by name . . . Each person is a love story that God writes on this earth.”^[8] — Through

our testimony and our words, we can announce that our Lord has risen, and that He lives among us, calls us by our name and brings us salvation.

BEFORE meeting Christ, Mary Magdalene had led a tormented life. Our Lord had even expelled seven demons from her. After being healed, she began to follow the Master, with great love and gratitude. In the Passion she refused to leave his side, and accompanied the disciples who carried his body to the tomb. On Sunday before dawn, she hurried to finish embalming the Master. Even thinking that He was dead, her ardent love for Christ remained alive.

Mary's weaknesses had been great, but she no longer let sin guide her life. She had discovered a love that

gave meaning to her entire existence. That is why she was the first to go to the tomb. And although at first she failed to find Jesus, she “persevered in her search, and found Him in the end. The delay only increased her eagerness, which enabled her to find the One she was looking for.”^[9] —

Mary Magdalene shows us that the Christian life is grounded on our personal encounter with Christ. From our interaction with Jesus, the desire to lead a new life, centered on our Lord, is born. In the company of the holy women, surely Mary Magdalene also developed a close friendship with the Mother of Jesus. We can ask both of them to give us the persevering love that enabled them to remain close to our Lord at the foot of the Cross.

^[1] — Saint John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, no. 16.

^[2] — Saint Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 982.

[3] Saint John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, no. 27.

[4] Benedict XVI, Audience, 14 February 2007.

[5] Saint Josemaría, *Conversations*, no. 87.

[6] Benedict XVI, Audience, 14 February 2007.

[7] General Roman Missal, Collect for the Feast of Saint Mary Magdalene.

[8] Francis, Audience, 17 May 2017.

[9] Saint Gregory the Great, Homily 25,1-2. 4-5: PL 76, 1189-1193.