

Mary of Magdala
Apostle to the Apostles Catholic Church
Easter Sunday

“The Good News of Easter Morning”

Guest Homilist: Mary of Magdala



Introduction

The four Gospel stories of the most important moments in the history of Christianity can leave us scratching our heads.

Unless we are well educated scripture scholars, we are not able to read the earliest scripture manuscripts in the ancient languages that they were written in. Even if we could, we would still have great differences to reconcile between the four Gospels versions of the Resurrection story.

We come away from reading the alternate accounts of what happened on the morning of the resurrection confused, because the stories are so different.

However, when we read all the stories of the morning of the resurrection “against the grain,” we create the opportunity to see beyond the intentional manipulations of events and details by each of the men who wrote their versions of the oral histories of the resurrection morning.

Including the women’s account of the events, in their own voices, and including the pieces of the story from the Gospel of Mary herself, gives us a fuller understanding of the resurrection experience.

Like the other Gospels, this combined Gospel is also recorded from the oral tradition handed down to the heirs of the witnesses, told by the woman who was with Jesus, from beginning to end to beginning. With humility, I now ask our guest homilist to share her story with you.

Suggested for further reading and study:

But She said. (Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza,1992).

Mary Magdalene, The First apostle: The Struggle for Authority. (Ann Graham Brock, 2003).

Searching the Scriptures. (Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza,1994).

Meaning of Mary Madalene: Discovering the woman at the Heart of Christianity. (Cynthia Bourgeault, 2010)

The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene. (Jane Schaberg, 2002).

The Gospel of Mary Magdalene .(Translated from the Coptic by Jean-Yves Liloup, 2002).

Did you know that the arguments between Mary and the eleven are recorded in *The Gospel of Mary*? Probably not, because her story was not included when the scripture canon was closed more than three hundred years after these events.

Mary’s Gospel was only recently re-discovered in the 20th century.

“The Good News of Easter Morning”
according to me, Mary of Magdala.

We were many: me, Mary, Jesus’ own mother, along with her sister, Mary, who was married to Clophas; Mary, the mother of James and Joseph; the mother of the sons of Zebedee; Salome; Joanna; and many other women as well.

All these women, whom I have named, were very close to Jesus and his family, and were among his best friends. We had all accompanied Jesus from Galilee, along with a great multitude of people.

We women travelled with him as his devoted followers. We called him teacher, and we loved him. We ministered to him as he travelled, preaching, teaching and healing. We looked after his needs. We took care of him.

But we were powerless to take care of him on that terrible night when he was betrayed: by Judas with a kiss, to the authorities and the angry mob; when he was denied 3 times by Peter to avoid being persecuted; when he was forsaken and deserted by the disciples, who fled as Jesus hung on the cross.

We women were utterly helpless as Jesus was dragged to the trial. We could do nothing but weep as he was led away to the place of the crucifixion, as he was spit on, beaten, and tortured by the raging crowd.

We wailed and lamented Jesus, but Jesus turned to us and said, *‘Daughters of Jerusalem do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children ...’*

We followed Jesus to Golgotha, the place of the skull, and watched as he was crucified.... as they jammed a crown of thorn- covered branches onto his head.... as they pounded nails through his hands and feet in to the wood..... as one soldier thrust a sword into his side...as the blood dripped from his wounds.....as he cried out in agony....as he took his last breath and died...

It was more horrifying than I can even begin to describe. Our grief was beyond anything I can express.

We stayed not far from the foot of the cross after he breathed his last, even after the multitude returned home, beating their breasts.

We women, who had followed him from Galilee, stayed and watched as a good man from Arimathea, Joseph, a member of the council there, got permission from Pilate to take Jesus’ body.

We watched as this good and righteous man and his companions took Jesus down, wrap him in a linen shroud and take him to a new tomb, carved from rock.

We saw how well intentioned they were, but we wanted to be sure Jesus was properly prepared for burial according to our customs, so we returned to where we were staying to prepare spices and ointments.

We had to wait until Sabbath ended to return to the tomb, because it was the eve of the Sabbath and against our customs to go out.

It was a very long wait.

On the first day of the week, we went back to the tomb. It was still dark, very early in the morning, with just the first sign of dawn appearing. We women, a large group of followers of Jesus, processed to the tomb. We were anxious to bring the precious perfumed oils so that we could anoint Jesus' body for a proper burial. We wanted to inspect the tomb to see that it conformed to our Jewish burial customs.

In the first blush of morning light, I was the first to see that the stone had been rolled away, because I had reached the tomb first. On the way to the tomb, we had talked among ourselves about the massive stone, wondering just who would roll it away for us. Other women caught up to me: Mary, the mother of James and Joseph, Joanna, and Salome also reached the tomb. And soon after that the rest of the women caught up with us and, they too saw that the stone was rolled away.

As we all gathered around the opening. Like me, they too saw that the tomb was empty. Some of the women were terrified and fled from the empty tomb, trembling and astonished and very afraid. They said nothing to anyone about what they had seen.

Remembering what Jesus had said about rising on the third day, the rest of the women with me, were filled with awe and great joy and they left, running to carry the good news to the disciples that the tomb was empty.

But I stood there weeping.

I stooped to peer into the tomb and thought to myself, *"Someone has taken him, where could they have put the body? If only I knew, I would go and get it and take it away."*

And then I heard my name spoken. "Mary!" I turned toward the voice and saw Jesus was standing there. I cried out, *"Rabboni!"* which means teacher.

Immediately, instinctively, I reached out to hug him, but he said, *"Don't hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to Abba God. Rather, go the sisters and brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Abba and to your Abba, my God and your God!'"*

I wish I could tell you that it was easy to leave Jesus at the tomb, but it wasn't. However, I did what he had instructed me to do. I went back to the disciples, and told them, *'I have seen the Teacher!' and then I told them what he had said to me.*

Can you believe it?

When I told them he was alive and I had seen him, they did not believe me. Later, I learned that my companions, the women who, in joy and awe, had left the tomb before me, also encountered Jesus while on their way. He suddenly stood before them and said, *"Shalom! Peace!"*

They ran straight up to him and knelt down to embrace his feet and worship him. When they did this, Jesus said to them, *"Do not be afraid! Go tell the disciples to go to Galilee, where they will see me."* When these women returned to where we were all staying, they told the eleven men and the others all these things, about the empty tomb, how they met Jesus on the road, and his request to deliver his message to them.

But, the men refused to believe the women's words, just as they later refused to believe me. The women's words seemed to be an idle tale to them. Nonetheless, Peter and the beloved disciple raced each other to the tomb to see for themselves. When they got there, they found the tomb empty and just went back to where the others were waiting.

It took many appearances by Jesus before many of the men who followed Jesus finally believed that Jesus had risen from the dead.

It took the appearance in the upper room to the cowering eleven men later in the evening of that first day of the week, the same day we women had already encountered the risen Jesus and told them about it.

It took the Jesus' appearances to the two men walking in the country, and his appearance to the two men on the road to Emmaus, as well as his appearance to the disciples on the beach fishing, where he later ate fish with them on the beach.

They simply did not believe without seeing.

Did you know that Jesus actually scolded the eleven when he appeared to them in the upper room? He scolded them because they did not believe us when we told them that we had encountered him as the risen Jesus and because they did not believe that he commissioned us to go and spread the good news of his rising. They refused to believe that our claims were legitimate.

This true story of that morning, obscured because we women our culture did not educate us. We could not write it down. But we could share our story. Somehow, the truth of the events did survive in what was written down by the men of the later

decades, when most of the eye witnesses were nearly all gone. Our truth is entombed there, but you can resurrect it if you look for it, which I have done for you here.

What I tell you is true.

I followed Jesus through out his ministry, betrayal, arrest, trial, and crucifixion at Golgotha. I saw Jesus die. I saw him be buried. I saw his empty tomb. Then, I saw him alive; I heard him; I held him; and finally, I did what he asked of me. I witnessed the living presence of the crucified Jesus. Yes! I saw and held, spoke to and listened to my teacher, my beloved of Nazareth, risen from the dead.

I share this Good News with you now, so that all future generations may know that when we Christians hear Jesus call us by name, we too will turn toward his voice and see him.

We too will have to make the choice to do, (or not to do), what he asks of each of us. What will be asked will not be the same for everyone, but, we will all be asked to serve others in some way. That was what Jesus taught every step of the way during his life and it is what he continued to teach after he rose from the dead.

We women were commissioned to go and tell the Good News that Jesus is waiting for us in the appointed place. He chooses the place. He promises that we will see him again, that we will each meet him again.

But, and this is a big but, we have to show up!

We have to go out to meet him. We have to turn to him. We have to reach out to embrace him, to act, to do something in order to bring ourselves into his presence. Maybe that "something" is prayer; maybe it's service to others, feeding, clothing, housing, freeing them; maybe it's weeping at the tombs in our lives, the times of sorrow and tragedy; maybe it's showing up to wait and watch with others in their difficult times, their dark nights; maybe it's having faith when we don't understand what is happening... or why; maybe it is not being deterred from doing what Jesus asks of us, even when the cost is great and the path difficult.

But believe this good news! HE WILL BE THERE AHEAD OF US, WAITING FOR US TO COME TO HIM. **He is risen and waiting for us now in the Eucharist.**

When we come into communion with him in the bread and wine, we become the body and blood of Jesus and we too are commissioned to go and tell the good news to others, to be of service to others and to be witnesses of Jesus' extravagant love for us, a love so great that he, though he died, rose to give us the promise of life eternal. I, Mary of Magdala, the Apostle to the Apostles, am bearing witness to these events to you, and I know that this testimony is true. Shalom and Alleluia!!