

## THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

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### She Knew Him Then

I think Mary Magdalen is my favourite Paschal person. If you want to experience her share in Easter to the full, you have to come to Mass on Easter Tuesday, and listen to John's account of the first Easter appearance of Jesus.

#### He called her name

Mark tells us the arresting fact that Jesus had driven out of Mary *seven* devils (in Hebrew thinking, you could call that a Perfection of Possessions); so we should think of Mary of Magdala as someone who has known intimately the presence of evil. But equally powerfully she has understood the effects of Jesus' holiness, in her liberation. I think that means that she is a saint who can engage our special interest; if knowing evil can coexist with sanctity, this woman has something vital to teach us. If Jesus freed her from so radical a slavery to sin, then no-one has a greater right than he to call her by name. He *knows* Mary as no-one else does; his act of liberation has given her permission to be her true self.

#### Mary said: *Dear Master.*

Her response may seem at first low-key. She replies with a humble word, though affectionate too; he has been her teacher in the path of life, but the lesson she is about to learn is overwhelming. No-one needs more than Mary to open her ear, to prepare to listen, to welcome the Gospel. John gives the honour of this very first encounter with the risen Christ to her - not to Peter, leader of the Apostles, who lumbers first into the Sepulchre, and looks on what is within with unaccustomed slowness; not to the Beloved Disciple, even though he ran first to the tomb, and with the eye of love *saw, and believed*. Mary, who *stayed by the tomb, weeping*, her mind full of grave-robbers, soldiers, hammers and nails, politics and intrigues, gardeners, disciples, betrayals and public execution, had perhaps no more strength to move about. She has fallen victim to that bombed-out grief that just sits still and dissolves. It is through a sticky flood of human tears that human eyes first see the Resurrection.

#### She Knew him

On Good Friday, I watch the people of God come up, one by one, to the Cross. They kneel, and

make their veneration. There is an unpleasant rubric that says what to do if there are too many people (you just have a token few kiss the Cross, and then proceed with the liturgy). I will never follow that rubric. I find it deeply moving to watch the faces of my parishioners on this little procession. *They all come*, with their own cargo of griefs and failures and losses, all the disappointments and pain of their separate lives. I, who know some of these stories, look on and imagine the many more that are unknown to me. God knows them all. In this submission to the way of the Cross, he recognises in each of us the precious image of his Son, who so freely went to the Cross himself. We can only come to *know* Jesus, as Mary did, when those burdens have passed into his hands, and become part of his sacrifice. Then I am ready to hear him call *my* name, and ready to respond with the abounding joy of the realised Gospel, which I have so long heard, and so poorly received.

#### A Good Easter

I pray that Easter will be for you, and all those you love, a time of deep and personal joy. Our hearts habitually weave between faith and doubt, love and indifference, hope and despair. Today the Church has no room for anything but wonder at the depth of God's love, the glory of Christ's rising. It is the season to dry our tears. May the Risen Lord be with you! *Fr Philip*