

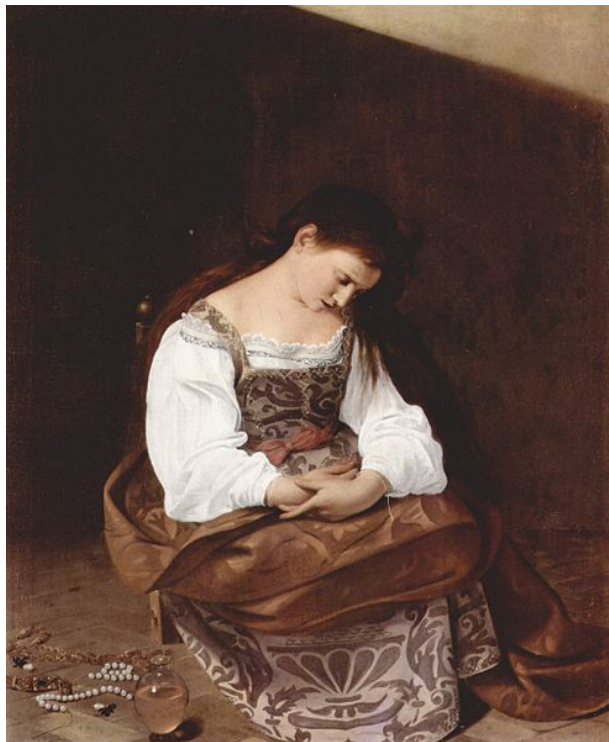


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Message for BBNeighbourhoods
21 July 2020

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

This image of the Penitent Magdalene painted in 1594-1595 by the Italian Master, Caravaggio, is worth contemplating as we celebrate the Feast of Saint Mary Magdalene, the Apostle to the Apostles, on Wednesday this week.



Caravaggio was not the first artist to depict Mary Magdalene in this manner. He makes the assumption that the woman in Luke's Gospel who washes Jesus' feet with her tears and dries them with her hair is Mary of Magdala ([Luke 7:36-50](#)). In the painting, we can see a glass bottle of oil representing the alabaster jar of perfume with which she anointed Christ's feet. Scattered on the floor next to Mary we can also see gold, pearls, and jewels that are symbols of earthly gain. Whatever the background of Mary Magdalene, what calls out to us for contemplation is not so much her past life but rather that, as the reading from the Song of Songs suggests, she found whom her heart loves ([Song of Songs 3:1-4](#)).

Only after having found Jesus in her life was Mary Magdalene able to bear witness to God's mercy and love. Traditionally this has been depicted, as this picture by Caravaggio suggests, as a penitent fallen woman. However, there is something much deeper here for our thought, and it can be found in the passage from John's Gospel ([John 20:1-2, 11-18](#)).



Having known Jesus in both life and death, Mary seeks the fullness of knowledge in his resurrection. There are two levels at which she seeks. The first is the most obvious and we would probably sum it up as the paschal mystery – the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. However, the second is far more subtle, in that by faith, Mary demonstrates the real presence of Jesus in her own life. That is, through her living with Christ and her dying to sin, a new life is possible.

Through her belief in the risen Christ, the Paschal mystery is enacted in her life. This Good News then impelled her to go and tell the Apostles that the Lord is indeed alive! Because of this, we know her as the Apostle to the Apostles.

Each one of us, like Mary Magdalene, is invited to seek Christ in faith. Life in Christ will bring death to sin. Life in Christ is not just to be hoped for; it is something to be enacted now. Christ changes our hearts by making his home within us.

My sisters and brothers, this week be inspired by the life of Saint Mary Magdalene and by the words from the Song of Songs, to seek him whom my heart loves. Moreover, having found that love go and tell others that the Lord is indeed alive!

This is the Good News for each of us.

Happy evangelising.

+Anthony