

## All the Marys in the world

Bill MacCurtain SJ

Bill MacCurtain SJ invites us to place ourselves in the Easter story and contemplate the events of Jesus' life, death and Resurrection from the perspective of Mary Magdalene. How did her encounters with her Lord transform the life of this one woman, a sinner who was frowned upon by society, so much so that she remained his devoted disciple until the very end?

I'm an old woman now, my life an unwritten history; a love story known only to myself. When I was young I was pretty. Men sought me and seduced me into feeling that I was special. Life for a woman is no rose garden. Our place is to be hewers of wood and drawers of water, so I made the most of my attractiveness to escape the drudgery that men find demeaning. Being young and foolish, I partied a lot. There was the illusion of power in allowing men to drop their 'macho' guard in private and reveal their vulnerability. But they later came to resent having ceded such power to a mere woman and their weapon of revenge was contempt. I brought shame and degradation on my own head and I earned myself a bad name. I was a public sinner. The good times faded away. I had no alternative but to go on partying, but it was squalid and shaming.

There was a man whose lifestyle and whose teaching showed these fellows up for their hypocrisy and they hated him, so they came one day and dragged me by the hair and threw me down at his feet. These were men who had often come in secret to enjoy what pleasure I could give them. They challenged him with the Law: shouldn't I be stoned as a wicked woman? Their aim was to discomfit him, but he turned the tables on them: let that man who was without sin cast the first stone, he said, and they all slunk away.

After they had gone I stayed there on the ground, too ashamed to look up at him. After a silence, he asked



me where my accusers had gone. Then I looked up and caught a conspiratorial smile on his face. My shame melted away. I felt an overwhelming love for him and I felt loved as I had never felt loved before. From that moment I knew I would follow that man to the ends of the earth. I was re-born, in a sense. I felt empowered.

So I bought the most expensive perfume I could find. I followed him to the house of the Pharisee

Simon and I fearlessly bathed his bare feet with tears of love and gratitude. You should have seen Simon's face. His expression was a mixture of disgust and outrage. He was on the verge of having his guard throw me out. It was the intervention of Lord Jesus that protected me. In that calm yet authoritative voice that was his way, he put Simon straight about the etiquette of hospitality and changed Simon's attitude to that of a chastened schoolboy.

From that moment onwards I was determined to stay as close as possible to him whom I now called my Lord. It did not please his entourage very much. He always defended me against their protective jealousy and the thinly veiled hostility of that sycophant Judas. I even followed him to Calvary.

I was not present on the night he was arrested. He had arranged to have supper with the Twelve. I realised later that he didn't want us women around when the trouble started. His courage during those last tense days seemed very foolhardy, but he showed

a calm assurance which allayed much of my worry. When word got round of his arrest I was devastated and I kept as close as possible to him throughout that terrible day. I was there when they crucified my Lord.

We, the Marys, became very close that day when our world crashed down around us. I do not know how we could have survived without each other when the men were nowhere to be seen, except for faithful John. They buried him in haste that day, and on the morning after the Sabbath, I turned up at the tomb to fulfil the offices for the dead. But the corpse was

gone. How, I wailed, could he, who had never allowed me to be separated from him, abandon me there among the tombs? Then he whispered my name and I clung to him.

I'm an old girl now, but my love story is never finished.

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