

Reflection Saturday Week 15 St Mary Magdalene 2023

Mary of Magdala was healed of “seven devils” by Jesus. She ministered to him in Galilee and was present at his crucifixion. She was among the women who discovered the empty tomb, and to whom the risen Jesus first appeared. Western tradition believes Mary Magdalene is also “the woman who was a sinner” and the sister of Martha and Lazarus of Bethany. There is no evidence either way and the tradition is tenuous. The Eastern Church believes that they are three different people. Although the Western tradition is to be respected and is a real inspiration, it may not necessarily be historically true. (In 2021 Mary of Bethany was formally recognised as separate and included in the same feast as Martha and Lazarus, a week after Mary of Magdala). This kind of ambiguity is inevitable in Christianity, which is founded on definite historical events rather than myth. Whatever the case, Mary Magdalene is a unique and important character in the story of the Resurrection, chosen by Christ as one of the first witnesses of the event that changed the world.

All souls thirst for God but far too many do not recognise the thirst, replacing God with self-image, power, authority, control, wealth etc. Whatever Mary’s sins may have been the greatest among them was the one that shielded her from God’s healing love. Once that barrier was destroyed, she realised her inner yearning was for God, for Jesus Christ, nothing else.

He blesses every love which weeps and grieves

*and now he blesses hers who stood and wept
and would not be consoled, or leave her love’s
last touching place, but watched as low light crept
up from the east. A sound behind her stirs
a scatter of bright birdsong through the air.
She turns, but cannot focus through her tears,
or recognise the Gardener standing there.
She hardly hears his gentle question ‘Why,
why are you weeping?’, or sees the play of light
that brightens as she chokes out her reply
‘They took my love away; my day is night’
and then she hears her name, she hears Love say
the Word that turns her night, and ours, to Day.* Malcolm Guite