

Readings: *Song of Songs 3: 1 – 4 or 2 Corinthians 5: 14 – 17; Psalm: 62 (63) 1 – 9;*
John: 20: 1 -2, 11 – 18.

In all four Gospels Mary Magdalene appears in the accounts of the passion, burial, and resurrection of the Lord. She is, therefore, a principal witness to the central truths of our Christian faith. Mark, Matthew and John name her among the women who were present at the crucifixion, while Luke speaks of *the women who had followed him from Galilee*, who, including Mary, were earlier described as part of the group of disciples in Galilee. They *saw the tomb and how his body was laid* (Luke 23 vv 49 & 56). Mark and Matthew also record the presence of Mary and other women at the tomb on the evening of Good Friday.

On the first day of the week women went to the tomb, intending to perform the burial duties which had been cut short on the eve of the Sabbath. Mark, Matthew and Luke speak of a group, all including *Mary Magdalene and the other Mary*, who are told by an angel (or in Luke by *two men in dazzling apparel*) that Jesus is risen.

But the fourth evangelist, in the passage we hear as today's Gospel, gives Mary Magdalene a more distinctive role. She went alone to the tomb *while it was still dark*, found the stone rolled away and fetched *Simon Peter and the disciple whom Jesus loved*. When they left, she remained behind, and was met by the risen Lord who gave her a commission: *Go to my brothers and say to them 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God'*.

This commission has led to Mary being called (for example by S. Thomas Aquinas) 'The Apostle to the Apostles', a title which has recently been officially recognized by Pope Francis. The newly approved Preface for her feast says: 'she loved him in life, witnessed his death on the cross, sought him as he lay in the tomb and was the first to adore him when he rose from the dead'.

This liturgical recognition of Mary's place in the life of the Church is a fitting compensation for the many years in which the Western Church wrongly identified her with *the woman of the town who was a sinner* (Luke 7: 37), as well as with Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus of Bethany.

The Church has traditionally applied to Mary the description in the *Song of Songs* of the woman searching passionately for her Beloved, which is one of the options for today's first reading.