

✠ John 20:1-2, 11-18 ✠

IN NOMINE IESU

Mary of Magdala was one from whom the Lord Jesus cast seven demons. Tradition tells us that she is the one who wept at Jesus' feet, wiping her tears with her hair and pouring ointment on over them. While her sister, Martha, busied herself in the kitchen, Mary sat at Jesus' feet listening to the words of God. And when Martha berated her sister for not helping, the Lord said to Martha, "Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken from her" (Luke 10:40-41).

Oh how merciful and true our Lord is. Not only was the good portion not taken from her, but He was given back to her at the resurrection. For the "good portion" is Jesus Himself. Martha wept bitterly at the tomb, thinking her Teacher and Master gone; taken in death like any other man. Yet the Good Portion was not taken from her. He calls her by name and restores her faith and her soul.

What a great blessing our Lord gives to this woman who had been possessed by demons and racked with guilt and shame. Our Lord blesses this saint of His by allowing her to be the first witness to the resurrection. She does not deserve this honor nor does she ask for this honor, but her Lord gives to her this honor.

Perhaps He did so in order that James and John could not argue over who is greater because they saw the Lord first. Or perhaps He did this because Mary stood faithful at the cross while His disciples fled from Him. Or perhaps He allowed Mary to be the first witness to the resurrection because Mary, in all of her grotesque and sordid past, is the perfect picture of the Church.

The Church of God is made up of you who were once objects of God's wrath, God-haters, slanderers, fornicators, idolaters, and liars. Yet despite this, or rather, in light of this, God had mercy on you. God chose the weak of the world to shame the strong. He chose the foolish of the world to shame the wise. He chose those who cannot help themselves, those who cannot save themselves, perhaps the worst of the worst, as St. Paul would say (1 Timothy 1:15). He chose you who do not deserve such a blessing in order to demonstrate His great love and mercy. Mary is a picture of this, as she was deserved of death and hell, yet Jesus chose her to be His chosen vessel to carry the good news of the resurrection to His disciples. She is the embodiment of the Church as it is the voice of the Church that carries the news of the resurrection to the unbelieving and fearful.

In the eyes of the self-righteous she will always have the baggage of being a woman of the city, prostituting herself out to the highest bidder. She will always be known as one who was possessed by demons, one who embarrasses herself and her sister by shamelessly weeping over and kissing Jesus' feet. She will always be reminded of her past because her past stands in stark contrast of the future her Lord gives her. But for Mary, the one who did not care what the Pharisee thought or what her sister thought, Jesus is the better portion, and so she will not

be shamed, but rather, wherever the Gospel is preached she will be remembered. But I do not speak of Mary Magdalene, but of the Church, for the Church of God shall not be shamed.

“Woman, why are you weeping?” Why do you weep, O Church of God, has not the one who was slain risen from the dead? Why do you weep in sorrow, as if your Lord and Teacher was not able to keep and sustain you? For has not your sorrow been turned to joy? Have not your tears been dried by the hand of the Risen One? Why do you weep? Do you not believe that He who cast out your demons in the holy water of Baptism continues to forgive your sins and restore your soul? Weep over your sins, but do not weep as those who have no hope. For behold, He is risen!

Do not look to angels who must themselves fall prostrate before the Lord of Glory. For the truth of God is not revealed in the words of angels but in the words of Jesus. The angels recognize their Master and God. Perhaps this is the reason Mary turned from the angels who sat in the empty tomb, she saw the angels fall prostrate when the Lord of Heaven appeared before them. For they too are mere servants, messengers and obedient slaves. Perhaps their faces lit up with divine brilliance and their eyes shifted from Mary to behind her as they too bore witness to this once dead Man whom they call God. Indeed a mystery they long to discover (1 Peter 1:12).

Jesus reveals Himself to His saints by calling them by name. Or do you think it incidental that when you are baptized, your Christian name is spoken? No, for when the Church does something, she confesses something. The Baptism is the Lord’s work, and the words are His. It is He who makes you to recognize Him by saying to you, “I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” And the response of those who see the Lord is as Mary’s, “Rabboni! Teacher, Lord, Master, King, Holy God.”

Paradise had become a graveyard and here the graveyard becomes Paradise. Man ate of the forbidden fruit, casting himself and his seed into utter darkness, falling into sin and shame. It was a woman who took the lie of the evil one to man, giving the fruit of death to her husband. Now the Lord restores all things and sends a woman to give the truth of the Holy One to man, giving the fruit of life, “The Lord is risen!” Now the Man, the true Adam, devours the bitter fruit of death and rose victorious over sin and shame. He cast the light of salvation to the four corners of creation, scattering the darkness.

Such is the mercy and glory of God. For the first wife was disobedient and shameful, bringing lies and deception to her husband. But the Lord chose for Himself a more excellent Bride. One who would listen and be obedient to His words. The Lord chose a wife He Himself made clean by removing any fault or sin in her; by casting out her demons of self-worship and pride; by teaching her the way to love Him.

Now the Lord has created and found the most excellent wife. She is far more precious than fine jewels and pure silver, she is more costly than gold and more beautiful than diamonds. She does Him good by giving glory and honor to His name, calling upon it in the day of trouble and praising His name in the day of salvation.

Her Husband is glorified because she opens her mouth with wisdom, speaking the words of her Redeemer-Husband, teaching His kindness to all who bend ear. She does not eat the bread of idleness or division, but eats of the one loaf and drinks of the one cup, the Holy Meal given to her by her Husband, His own flesh to eat and blood to drink. Her children rise up and call

her blessed because she does not forget to train them in the words of her Husband. She preaches the Word; always ready to reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching (2 Timothy 4:2). She protects her children and keeps them, always reminding them that they are the begotten of God.

Her Husband praises her saying, “Many women have done excellently, but you surpass them all.” She is a bride who fears the Lord and a mother who is wise in her teaching and she will be preserved in her offspring (1 Timothy 2:15).

Blessed are you, O Church of God, for you bear witness to the resurrection of Jesus. You are indeed blessed among man and honored among women for you alone are the Bride of Christ. You are His chosen one, the apple of His eye, the delight of His heart. It is you, O Church, whom He has ransomed and purchased with His life’s blood. You are His and He will not let you go.

Cling only to Him, and that by faith, for He has ascended on High, seated at the right hand of the Father, and has sent to you the Comforter, His Spirit of grace and truth, by whom He calls you His own and brings you to His altar. It is He, the Risen One, who brings you to His Father who is now your Father by adoption. You are the daughter of God, O Jerusalem. Hear and consider, incline your ear. Forget your people and the house of your father. For the Good Husband lays down His life for His Bride, that she may have life and have it more abundantly. She hears His voice, and He calls her by name. Rejoice, O Church of Christ, for you are clothed in the brightness of this light; let all this house of God ring out with rejoicing, with the praises of all God’s faithful people.

All Glory be to God on High.

In the name of the FATHER and of the ✠ SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT.

✠ AMEN ✠