

Molweni beloved family and friends of False Bay Diocese,

Scripture: John 20:1-18

Hymn: *All glory, laud and honour*

Today is the Feast Day of St Mary Magdalene in the church's liturgical calendar. She is recognised for her role as the first to witness Christ's resurrection and as a "true and authentic evangelizer." All the four gospels mention Mary Magdalene, who has a special place among the followers of Jesus. She stood at the foot of the Cross as a representative of the people of the New Covenant. Mary was one of the few women who stood by the Cross on Calvary that Friday when the Lord was brutally crucified. She who witnessed the Lord's Death became the first witness of his Resurrection. Mary was Jesus' most ardent and loving follower. She has always been the example of great love and great forgiveness.

Mary of Magdala, near Capernaum, is to be distinguished from Mary of Bethany, the sister of Lazarus and Martha. It was Mary of Bethany who sat at the feet of Jesus and listened to him (Luke 10:39) and anointed his feet (John 12:3). Opinion differs as to whether she is to be identified with the anonymous repentant woman who anointed Jesus with her tears and precious oil (Luke 7:37-50).

Mary Magdalene and the other women could not complete the anointing of the body of Jesus for burial because of the Sabbath, so she returned with the spices at the earliest permissible moment, to anoint the body of her Lord. When the Lord saw her weeping in the garden, he asked her "*Woman, why are you weeping? Whom do you seek?*" She did not recognise him but thought he was the gardener. Then Jesus called her by her name, as if to say, "*Now recognise the one who recognises you.*" At this point she calls him "*Rabboni*". She recognises the Lord after a painful but faithful search. On her return from the Lord's tomb, she told the Disciples that Jesus was risen and that she had met him. Thus, she became the first herald of Easter joy.

During this Covid-19 pandemic we are daily facing deaths of loved ones. When a loved one dies, the world seems at first completely out of kilter. Daily rhythms are disrupted. Relationships shift. Things that seemed important before you take a back seat, while other urgent concerns come to the fore. A whole reorientation to life without the physical presence of the loved one is necessary. In the gospel, we catch a glimpse of how Mary Magdalene and the first disciples of Jesus navigated the difficult days in the aftermath of his death, how they had to construct their lives and meaning anew. We assure all who are grieving and mourning at this time that God's love that has been poured into your hearts will never leave you. You have the gift of the Diocesan family and the presence of God abiding with you. Although your loved one's body is no longer with you, his or her goodness will remain present with you. We pray for the repose of the souls of all our blessed departed including struggle veteran Andrew Mlangeni (95) who passed away this morning.

On the Resurrection day, when the Disciples had come and verified that Mary Magdalene's report was true, they went back home. But she remained at the tomb and wept. Her love would not let her go away even after the Disciples left the place. She alone remained; in tears she kept looking for him. She alone persevered in the search and she alone saw him. She was in fact looking for a dead body, but she found the Risen Lord! Pope St Gregory the Great says, "*She had already sought and found nothing. But she persevered and therefore found the object of her love ... Holy desires grow with delay: if they fade through delay they are no desires at all. Such must be the love that inflames anyone who is reaching out for the truth.*"

We note that it was still dark when Mary ran to the sepulchre, and when she found it empty, she wept. Mary receives the joyful news of the Resurrection as a gift from the Risen Lord himself.

The resurrection is not simply a "happy ever after" ending or the fulfilment of our expectations. It turns the world on end and defies explanation. The gospel of John, drives home the central question: where is Jesus now? A single character, Mary Magdalene represents the voice of the community, as she seeks her beloved, and laments, "*We don't know **where** they have laid him* (20:2). The question "**Where**" permeates

the whole of John's gospel. The first followers want to know "**Where do you stay.**" (1:38). And in his final address to his disciples, Jesus speaks to them about an eternal dwelling place, which is not a geographical space, but his very self (15:4-10).

Mary Magdalene was both disciple and apostle. As **disciple** she **followed** Jesus together with the other women and took care of the material needs of Jesus. After his resurrection, Jesus sends her as an **apostle** to the **disciples** to break the good news of his victory over sin and death. She reported to the Disciples "*I have seen the Lord, and he said these things to me.*" Jesus himself appears directly to Mary Magdalene and tells her not to cling to him as the earthly person she knew previously.

The risen Lord accepts her reverent and ardent love. And so, she becomes the symbol of every believer called to bear witness to the risen and living Christ. Mary followed the Lord so faithfully that her name occupies the first place in the list of women who accompanied him (cf Lk 8:2; Mr 15:57, Mt 27:56). She was ever eager to serve Jesus. Through her proclamation of the Resurrection, the good news spread to the whole world. A gospel that began by reflecting on how "*the Word became flesh and dwelt among us*" (Jn 1:14) concludes with the Word becoming enfleshed in each individual believer and in the whole body of the faith community. That is where Jesus is to be found, as his transformation is completed in our own.

The Feast Day of St Mary Magdalene invites us to love the Lord whole-heartedly, to follow him devoutly and to be at his service faithfully. Let each one of us resolve today to be the best Christian, the best disciple of Christ, he or she can be.

Please **reach out** to any member of the Guild of St Mary Magdalene; any member of our churches named after St Mary Magdalene; or any person with the name of Mary or Magdalene.

We pray God's blessing on The Guild of St Mary Magdalene and the clergy and parishioners of the churches of St Mary Magdalene as they celebrate their Feast Day. We thank God for their work and witness in our communities.

We pray for the community of Khayelitsha with all the tensions and violence surrounding service delivery and housing issues. We pray for our clergy in the area: Archdeacon Lundi and Revds Martha Sam, Nonceba Mdunyelwa and Nyaniso Gwazilitye. We pray God's wisdom and justice to bring relief and restoration to the people in Khayelitsha feeling dispossessed. We pray for governmental structures attending to the needs of the most disadvantaged. We pray for the personal safety of individuals across the divide. Source of All Good, steady our wavering hearts. Buoy up our efforts when we grow discouraged. Keep our focus on your insistence that everyone be given opportunities to provide for their well-being. Amen

I am, Because We Are, Because God is ... Opening hearts to heal God's world. *We put our hope and trust in God.*