

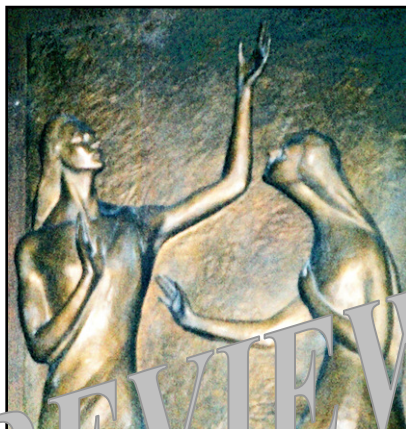


Letting go of our losses

From the Mass of Saint Mary Magdalene

Prepare: Read John 20:1-2, 11-18

We should reflect on Mary Magdalene's attitude and the great love she felt for Christ; for though the disciples had left the tomb, she remained. ... And so it happened that the woman who stayed behind to seek Christ was the only one to see him. For perseverance is essential to any good deed, as the voice of truth tell us: "Whoever perseveres to the end will be saved." - Pope St. Gregory the Great (from a sermon on St. Mary Magdalene)



In John 20:1-2, 11-18, we see the emotions of Mary of Magdala, one of a Jesus' closest friends. First, she wept — like we do when someone or something important has been taken from us.

All the way to the core, we mourn and we try to hang onto past memories as if enfleshing them in the present. We wish our time with our loved one or a previous phase of life had never ended. We wish we could go back and relish more fully what we'd had. If we can, we even try to bring it back, and we get mad at those (and at God) who are responsible for our loss. This is normal for a healthy grieving process.

Surely in Mary's tears was the feeling of: "I loved him sooooo much! I didn't get enough of him! I want more! I need more! I can't believe he's gone. It's not fair! It's not right! How could God allow this?"

Then, when the resurrected Jesus appeared to her and she finally recognized him, she embraced him with excitement, relief, and awe. It was more than a "welcome back" hug. She didn't want to let go. How do we feel when we regain something we've lost? We want to cling to it so we won't lose it again.

However, Jesus did not let her hug him very long. Why not? Surely he understood her feelings and her needs. His explanation: "I have not yet ascended to the Father." In other words, as good as it was to have Jesus back, something even better was going to happen.

Jesus was going to have to leave her again. His flesh had to depart from this world so that he could give his spirit to everyone. Thus he can be with all of us all of the time.

Whatever losses we've had in our lives, we need to trust that God wants to move us to a new place, a good place. We need to let go, stop clinging to the past, and quit the "what if" thinking that only makes us feel more miserable. Then, we become free to move on to a new life in which we experience more of the resurrected Christ through his Holy Spirit.

Death and resurrection are two essential ingredients of Christian living. There is no improvement without loss. There is no loss that comes without improvement, as long as we move through it with the Lord.

It's good to value the past — just as Mary Magdalene and the disciples forever treasured their three years with Jesus and repeatedly told others about it — but we should ALSO value what God is planning for the future, even if we don't yet know what that future holds. As scary or lonely as that future seems now, God will be with you, and he will be very good to you!