

JULY 22 2025 FATHER JOHN BERTAO

See, in this Gospel story, Mary Magdalene is the image—the image of passionate love. This is based not only on today's Gospel reading but also on her brave and determined persistence in staying with Jesus throughout his crucifixion and until his burial.

Saint Luke tells us that Jesus cast out seven demons from her, and this has led many to guess that she was the woman who "had a bad name in the town" and cast herself in moving repentance at Jesus' feet. It is a further guess that the bad name relates to sexual misconduct.

Mary Magdalene is a useful reminder that our great love for God is not something to be cool, relaxed, abstract, or artificial about. It needs to be as passionate, absorbing, and embracing as any—and maybe above any—human love.

Mary's early visit to the tomb is another sign of her devotion. It was early in the morning, at the rising of the sun, very early. She was probably still distraught from her grief, as Scripture scholars tell us. The traditional place of the tomb was in the shadow of the western wall of the city, which might contribute to her bewilderment and confusion. Be it then as it may, she was the first to see the risen Lord.

My dear friends, Mary Magdalene does not recognize the risen Christ until he says her name. What must she have been feeling when Jesus spoke her name directly to her—"Mary"? How did that one word change everything in her life? One name, one calling by name, changed everything.

Mary Magdalene recognized his voice and, without question, did everything he told her to do. She became the apostle to the apostles, the first to encounter the risen Christ, and perhaps the first to proclaim the good news of the resurrection.

Every disciple of the Lord seeks him. We should all seek him unconditionally. We should all be seeking him, especially in Eucharistic adoration. But even before Eucharistic adoration, how many times are we called by name, individually?

For example, baptism. I always ask, "What name do you give your child?" I ask both parents to say it in unison. Sometimes they mess it up, but that's okay—"X, Y, Z, Frank, Henry, John, Matthew, James"—together. That sticks. It's a beautiful thing to call the child's name because it's the first time it's done. Then, we go on with the rest of the process.

Again, I call that child by name when pouring the water. And how about the big one? Confirmation. "James, receive the Holy Spirit. James, peace be with you." It's always calling your name. Every time I pronounce the name—and thank goodness I try to pronounce it properly—they look at me and say, "You remember my name, Father?"

"Yes."

"How do you remember my name?"

"I have it written down."

Of course, I try to remember the name because it's important to pronounce it, especially a name like mine, "João." People don't know how to say "João," unless you're Portuguese. João is how I was called when I was confirmed. Later on, when I was ordained a priest, I can never forget when the Cardinal said to me, "João, do you promise obedience to me and my successors?" I was just jumping for joy because he called my name and said it right. And of course, I said "yes."

Every time we are addressed by name, it makes it special. It's a personal thing. It's a personal encounter.

So, can you imagine when Jesus refers to Mary by her name? Not the gardener. Not a spirit. Not just anybody walking down the street—"Mary."

From what we hear in this Gospel, that also happened when she was in some place having a drink or something, and she was running away, as we see in **The Chosen**. She was about to walk out because this stranger, this man, called her. She was walking, and then hears the name, "Mary." She stops right there, without moving, realizing that there is something special about this person who called her by name.

All of us who are baptized, all of us who've been confirmed, and whether you're in a religious order or in the sacrament of holy orders—you've also been called by name. Cherish that name. Whether it's translated from one language to another, like mine was, John, I still cherish it. Those who call me "John" or "Father John"—that's okay. It's a very intimate way of relating to the person.

All of us, each and every day, are called to pray. "Our Father, who art in heaven," the one who knows you, the one who creates you. And how about the other one? "Hail Mary," developing this personal, intimate relationship with our Saviour, with his mother, and of course, with the one who created us.

Be proud of who you are. Celebrate the sacraments that brought you into the Catholic faith. And maybe, like Mary, don't forget to proclaim Jesus to those you meet in your life, because you can make them special, as you yourself are special.

So, share. And speaking of sharing, let us together pray this prayer, as I will pray for you.

Dear friends in Christ, like Mary Magdalene, we might not know whom we are to look for, but when we recognize Jesus, we are transformed,

going out, as Mary Magdalene did, to proclaim him to those searching for purpose in life.

God bless you.