



As a gift, one more day. Today we will reflect on the figure of another possible image of the Church: María Magdalena.

This feminine figure doesn't appear in the writings of Francisco Palau as representation of the Church. For him, the Church is "a virgin always pure", and Magdalene in the history of the theology has been identified almost exclusively as sinner. In two of his letters of 1862, Palau mentions her as model of penitence, poverty, solitude, and prayer: the way she has been presented by Christian iconography from the very beginning of the Occidental Church. And nevertheless, the figure of Mary of Magdala is much richer than this. The last decades of biblical and historical studies have begun to return to her the position she deserves among the disciples of Jesus. Following the logic of Francisco Palau of seeing in the biblical women, as if they were mirror, the image of the Church of his time, Magdalene can be easily interpreted in similar way that may help us understand the Church of our times.



She is mentioned in the four Gospels by her own name, without any allusion to any kind of relationship of matrimony or family. We only know that she comes from Magdala, an antique city and the shore of the Sea of Galilee. She seems to be rich, given that she is able to help economically to Jesus and his disciples during their trips. She was healed by Jesus when he expelled from her seven bad spirits. From that day, she accompanied him closely, being present in the moment of crucifixion and burial of Jesus and being the first witness of his Resurrection. For all these reasons, in the Church she is called "Apostle of the Apostles".

"The one from whom Jesus expelled seven bad spirits and illnesses" (Lk 8:2)

From the VI century, in the Occidental Church Mary Magdalene was identified with the sinful woman, the woman who anointed Jesus' feet in the house of Simon the Pharisee, even with Mary of Bethany. Because "the seven bad spirits" could indicate a kind of impurity that, for many, could be understood only as sexual impurity and prostitution. The truth is that we will never know what kind of demons the Gospel speaks about. This will always remain as a secret between Jesus and his disciple. This is how good is the Lord. We can only suspect that spiritual situation of Mary in the moment of encountering Jesus was really grave. Seven bad spirits evoke the words of Jesus in Lk 11:24-26: "The unclean spirit, when he has gone out of a man, goes through dry places, looking for rest; and when he does not get it, he says, I will go back to my house from which I came. And when he comes, he sees that it has been made fair and clean. Then he goes and gets seven other spirits more evil than himself, and they go in, and take their places there: and the last condition of that man is worse than the first". Number 7 in the Bible indicates plenty, fullness. It means that Mary was completely dominated by evil and illness. It is in this situation of slavery where Jesus looks at her with love and offers her true freedom. The demons are no obstacle for Jesus to love this suffering daughter of his people. It is like in the case of a woman he was suffering because of the loss of blood, or in the case of Zaccheus... there are no "impossible" situations for God's love.

The seven bad spirits could also indicate the seven capital sins. Mary was a rich woman, and to gain richness many times comes together with unjust games and abuses. She could be seen as "a woman of success" of her time: entrepreneurial, but without family, sacrificing it all to her career. Anger, gluttony, pride, lust, laziness, envy, greed... they are not very far from being requirements for a brilliant career. This way, the situation of Magdalene could be a mirror for the actual Church. The sin is present in the life of the Church, both in its hierarchy, consecrated life, and in simple churchgoers. The more we try to hide it, the more it comes out. It is a reality that we cannot deny anymore. Only admitting its presence in the life of each one of us, be it Pope and bishops, be it the last old woman in some



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distant parish, can open us to the possibility of liberation. Jesus heals Mary with his love and power. But in reality, he does something bigger: he invites her to follow him and to serve him and to his disciples. Mary learns to live in the logic opposite to the world of richness and brilliant careers. Anger, gluttony, pride, lust, laziness, envy, greed, are not substituted by the values of silent patience, of living only with what is necessary, of pure and unconditional love, of taking care for others, of appreciating other's giftedness, of generous sharing. This is also the path for the Church. Jesus keeps healing and forgiving our sins, but not with the purpose for us to keep in our old ways, but that we may learn, as Magdalene, the path of following and serving, of being close to Jesus taking care of his needs and the needs of his disciples: taking her of his Body.

“The one who stood at the foot of the cross of Jesus” (Jn 19:25)

Magdalene follows Jesus as his servant and disciple. She surely hears Jesus speaking about his trip to Jerusalem where he will meet death. Her heart was getting ready for this moment. The heart of a woman in love is strong, that's why it was them who were present there near to the cross when Jesus was dying. The presence of Mary of Magdala was very important: she stood there in the name of all the sinners, possessed, marginalized, humble. In the name of all the “last, lost, and least”. This was the place reserved for her, and for the Church. Walking with Jesus, Mary learnt to be the last, the “broom of the house”. Her work of serving in all the simple domestic tasks, like washing robes of Jesus, was the best position of her career. When she sees the soldiers play for Jesus' robe, she knows well that it is Jesus': she knows very well every tread, every

mend. Seeing that his tunic is not torn apart, gives her hope that maybe also the body of her Master, in some mysterious way that only he knows, will remain whole. This is also the hope that the Church keeps in its heart. To be the last (not only with the last ones) is the path that gives us the privilege of standing at the foot of the cross of Jesus, of being witness of his extreme love. We don't need any other position, only the silent presence at the side of the cross. As Church, we take care for the Body of Christ, we robe it with tenderness, and our heart breaks every time this Body and this Rope are treated with violence and hatred. But staying so close to the Master we also experience the deep hope that death doesn't have the last word. This Body, so maltreated, is taken care by God. It will rise.





“The one who anxiously looked for the gardener”

Mary of Magdala is a woman crazy of love. She doesn't think about the consequences of her actions. Even before the dawn, putting her life and good name in danger, she runs to the grave. She cannot stay far from the love of her life. Like the Beloved from the Song of Songs. She has in her head many preoccupations, above all the one of not being able to move the rock. She is surprised when she finds the grave open and... empty. Scared of the thought that someone might have taken her master away from her, she runs back to Peter and John. She returns with them, but she doesn't hear nor see anything of what happens to them. She stays outside, crying, closed in her pain that it's not only that they killed him, but also that they took him away. Not even angels, not even Jesus himself can make her go out of her pain. Magdalene keeps closed in her thoughts and ideas, incapable of changing them.

This kind of posture we can feel too often in the womb of the Church, in our own womb. This thing is to continue with our thoughts and ideas, our points of view, as if it was the only way of thinking or feeling, not capable of seeing other possibilities, closed in our pain of having lost our glorious past... sounds too familiar. Mary saw in Jesus the gardener. We, in the Church, see often only the possibility of living comfortably, of having position and respect, of being considered... and we ask him: “Where is the Church that we used to know? Tell us, where have you taken her? So that we may bring her back and recover her glory...” Magdalene finally recognizes her beloved Master when he calls her by her name. It is also necessary for us that Jesus calls things by their name, that he calls us again “the Church” (community of God's covenant). We need to call things by their name, once and again confronting our life of community with the Word of Jesus, to discover Jesus alive in other realities, our ways of thinking and feeling.

“The one who tells it to other disciples” (Mt 28:10)



The scene of encounter of Jesus with Mary Magdalene has something tender in it. Jesus tells her not to retain him, because he is on his way to the house of the Father, but in reality, it is he who decides to stay longer just to encounter once more his faithful disciple. As if he couldn't resist the crazy love of this woman. This is also the way the Church loves Jesus. It's true, there are endless sins and infidelity in the Church, but there is also this unmeasured crazy love. There are many men and women that every day give their life in the heroic service to the Body of Jesus. While there is this craziness, Jesus will be always close, because he cannot resist when his Beloved loves him this way.

After resurrection, Magdalene lost her job. Jesus went to his Father, to prepare a place for his disciples. She cannot serve him anymore the way she used to. Therefore, Jesus gives her another job that will keep her occupied for the rest of her days: that she tells it to the others, that she reminds them to go back to Galilee, always go back to Galilee, to the beginnings, when everything was different, simpler, more joyful. In the Gospel according to Matthew, this assignment Mary receives together with other women. This will become the great role of the women in the Church, and the great role of the Church in society: to remind all how the things were at the beginning, that everything



else is not essential, that what counts is to be with Jesus, to bring the Good News to those who desire it, to heal and throw out the bad spirits that torment the people. Because when Jesus is with his disciples, everything is simpler and more joyful.

Mary Magdalene followed Jesus as shadow. She never separated from him, neither in his life nor in his death. The Church represented by the figure of this woman has this peculiarity: to be close to the Body of Jesus the way the shadow is close to its object. We can recall these tender words of Francisco Palau: “Your presence alone is enough; your shadow will shelter me” (MR 4,21). May this will be the kind of presence of the Church in society: as the shadow that shelters and accompanies, without desiring to be more important than the reality it reflects. So that every believer (o not so believer) can say:

*“I have always at my left hand a shadow that follows me in vigil;
and when I sleep, it covers me with her black veil and protects
me. And this shadow is the mantle with which my Beloved robes
me in” (MR 1,21).*

