



Daniele Monteleone, "The Risen Christ Appears to His Mother," 1600

## Who Was First to See the Risen Lord?

In an April 6, 2021 article for the National Catholic Register, Joseph Pronechen defends the view that Jesus first appeared to His Mother, a view which many saints held and sound reason dictates. Jesus honored his parents all his earthly life and provided for the care of His Mother from the cross, so surely He would honor her first who alone believed fully in his promised resurrection. She was

first to see Him in His flesh; should she not be first to see Him in His glory?

**“The Gospels mention various appearances of the risen Christ, but not a meeting between Jesus and his Mother. This silence must not lead to the conclusion that after the Resurrection Christ did not appear to Mary; rather it invites us to seek the reasons why the Evangelists made such a choice.”** (St. John Paul II, May 21, 1997 general audience.)

Some say the evangelists did not name Mary as the first to see the risen Lord because those opposed to belief in the resurrection would consider it too biased a view. St. John Paul II cites St. Paul’s mention of Jesus appearing to more than 500 at one time, but the evangelists do not mention that exceptional event. Not everything is contained in the Scriptures, e.g., Mary was not mentioned among the women going to the tomb. Is that because she had already seen the risen Lord? Pope St. John Paul II gives the example of a son at war being reported as dead, but suddenly returns home quite alive and visits his friends, and only last visits his mother. No one would consider him a good son. Jesus was a perfect Son; we would certainly expect Him to visit His Mother first.

St. Vincent states the text shows the loss of faith by the Apostles.

**“Only the Virgin Mary on that Holy Saturday invariably believed. Because of this, on every Saturday the office of the day in the Church of God is celebrated in her honor. When therefore Scripture says, ‘The Lord shows himself to them who have faith in him,’ (Wisdom 1:2), it seems that as a reward of merit for her faith that he would appear to her first.”** [St. Vincent states:] **There was never a mother who loved her son more than Mary loved Christ. [Quoting John 14:21] “And he that loves me, shall be loved of my Father: and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.”** [The Virgin Mary was certain her Son would rise on the third day as He had promised; she did not know the hour, but she believed.]

**“When the third day came, it brought bewilderment and anxiety to the Disciples. The women going to the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus sought him and could not find him. The Apostles were gathered together in their fear, guarding the doors. Then, surely, though we are not told of this in the Gospels, Mary spoke of the Resurrection of her Son, that he had truly risen from death, that he was alive again in all his humanity, no more subject to death, risen to an eternal glory. We read that Mary Magdalen and the Apostles were first to see the risen Christ. But we may believe that Mary his Mother knew of his rising before all others, and that she was the first to see Him. It was Mary in her lowliness who first gave praise and adoration to the risen Christ.”** (St. Bridget of Sweden.) St. Ignatius of Loyola believed the same.

Servant of God, John Hardon, commissioned by Pope Paul VI to write **The Catholic Catechism**, held the same belief. **“It is not only a pious opinion that the Risen Savior first appeared to His Mother Mary on Easter Sunday. No less than six Doctors of the Church, including Sts. Ambrose, Anselm and Albert the Great held that Our Lady was the first witness of the Resurrection.** The main reason being that the Resurrection is the fulfillment of the Annunciation. In both instances, Mary believed the Word of God and was rewarded for her faith. She shared in Christ’s redeeming suffering as no other; on Easter Sunday she shared in the joy of His glorious Resurrection as no other as well.

So why does Sacred Scripture give such preference to Mary Magdalen as the first to see the risen Lord? Who is Mary Magdalen?



St. John’s Gospel tells of a woman caught in adultery brought to Jesus in the temple area by the scribes and the Pharisees who wished to discredit Him. If he denied the Mosaic Law regarding stoning one caught in adultery, they would hold it against him. If he



failed to show mercy, they would say He contradicted His own doctrine of mercy. Jesus said: **“Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.”** One by one they disappeared, and Jesus turned to the woman. **“Has no one condemned you?”** She replied, **“No one, sir.”** Then Jesus said, **“Neither do I condemn you. Go, [and] from now on do not sin anymore.”** (Jn 8:1-12.) This account does not clearly state repentance on the part of the woman, nor forgiveness on the

part of Jesus, just exhortation to a reform of life. The woman is not named but shortly after John has Mary Magdalen appear in the ministry of Jesus.

Luke 7:36-8:5 speaks of a woman entering the house of Simon, the Pharisee, where Jesus was dining, anointing his feet with precious ointments, bathing them with her tears and wiping them with her hair. Simon was aghast that Jesus did not know what a sinful woman was touching Him, but Jesus knew Simon’s thoughts and told the parable of two people who owed 500 days wages and 50 days respectively. Both were forgiven their debts. Jesus asked Simon which one would love the master more? Simon replied, the one who was forgiven more. Then Jesus said to Simon:

**“When I entered your house, you did not give me water for my feet, but she has bathed them with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but she has not ceased kissing my feet since the time I entered. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she anointed my feet with ointment. So I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven; hence, she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little.”** He said to her: **“Your sins are forgiven.... Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”**

Neither does Luke name the woman but recognizes this as an act of contrition and reparation. Immediately after he also identifies Mary, called Magdalen, as a new disciple from whom seven demons were cast out.



Later, six days before the Passover, John says Jesus, with His apostles, went to Bethany to dine with Mary, Martha and Lazarus. Again John recounts Mary anointing the feet of Jesus and Judas retorting that the oil should have been sold for three hundred days wages and given to the poor. Judas did not care about the poor, for he was a thief and used to steal from the money bag. Jesus replied: **“Leave her alone. Let her keep this for the day of my burial. You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me.”** (Jn 12: 1-8.) There is no mention of repentance or forgiveness. Mary had already repented and been forgiven, and that forgiveness brought forth in her a remarkable love for Jesus.

In chapter 19, John identifies Mary as Magdalen who stood with the Mother of Jesus at the foot of the cross. He also identifies her as the first disciple to see the risen Jesus, making her the apostle to the apostles when she hurried to tell them Jesus’ body was gone. There is a consistent theme of weeping, at the anointing of the feet, at the foot of the cross, and at the tomb, all indicative of great sorrow and great love. While controversy remains, Pope Gregory the Great identified these three women as one and the same, Mary Magdalen, St. Mary of Bethany, but other Church Fathers refrain from making that identity. What is important is that Magdalen’s conversion was real and it took her to the cross of Jesus at the side of the Mother of the Redeemer. The Sacred Writers were inspired to present this repentant woman who was forgiven much because she loved much as an example par excellence of God’s mercy overriding His justice in the New Covenant He established on the cross. She was at the foot of the cross with His Mother. **“Though your sins be like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.”** (Is 1:18 <https://www.catholic.org/encyclopedia/view.php?id=7679>)

To the people of that day, the events of that first Holy Week, culminating in Christ’s death on the cross, must have appeared as the darkest time one could ever imagine. How many of us say the same of our own day? On November 15, 1956, Our Lady addressed the evils of our day to Sister Mildred (Mary Ephrem) Neuzil.

**“The hour grows late. My Son’s patience will not last forever. Help me hold back His anger, which is about to descend on sinful and ungrateful men. Suffering and anguish, such as never before experienced, is about to overtake mankind. It is the darkest hour. But if men will come to me, my Immaculate Heart will make it bright again with the mercy which my Son will rain down through my hands. Help me save those who will not save themselves. Help me bring once again the sunshine of God’s peace upon the world.” ...”** Has ever a mother shown more love and interest in her children’s welfare than I have done?” ...” Souls that cling to sin cannot have their hands free to receive the treasures of grace that I hold out to them.” (Sister Mildred (Mary Ephrem) Neuzil, *The Diary, OUR LADY OF AMERICA*, Pgs. 13, 17, 19.)

**“I am the Mother of Mercy. Under my mantle I will hide my children. The justice of God will not reach them if they seek refuge [be]neath the protection of my mercy. My Son gives to me all those souls who come to me with confidence, calling upon my aid. Their salvation is in my hands. I will obtain for them the necessary graces to save their souls. Come to me, poor, suffering and frightened ones. I am your Mother. Never will I forsake you. Only come to me with a wholehearted and loving trust. Place your souls into my keeping. I am that faithful Mother who never forsakes her children. Honor me by your confidence and love. This I desire and ask of you, my poor children. Do not deny the wishes of your Mother.”** (May 5, 1957 Letter.)

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