

22. July 2023

The Way of Love
St. Mary Magdalene

Song 3:1-4a

In my bed by night I sought him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, and found him not. I will rise, and will go about the city: in the streets and the broad ways I will seek him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, and I found him not. The watchmen who keep the city, found me: Have you seen him, whom my soul loveth? When I had a little passed by them, I found him whom my soul loveth.

This text is read at Holy Mass on the Feast of a great lover who met her Lord: St. Mary Magdalene. Today's Gospel recounts precisely the encounter of Mary Magdalene with the Risen Lord, and the way in which He makes Himself known to her (Jn 20:1,11-18).

The way of a loving heart to the heart of the Lord is very simple and direct, because the mystery of our Creation, Redemption and Sanctification is the love of God, who seeks us. This love is the only reason for our existence, and St. Mary Magdalene's response was to let herself be inflamed by it.

True love, as today's reading so appealingly describes it, makes a person fully awake, for the heart longs to be united with the beloved. She seeks him vigilantly, and does not rest until she has found him. We know this in human love, and good literature knows how to describe, without sentimentality, the extent to which the heart can be inflamed by love and not rest until it is united with the beloved. On the other hand, we also know the torments and pain that unrequited love can cause in a person's heart.

Moved by this love, St. Mary Magdalene rushed to the tomb early in the morning. She was looking for her Lord - whom she believed to be dead - to show her love for Him, for "love is strong as death" (Song 8:6). And, according to the testimony of Scripture, the Lord appeared to her first. Jesus made her the first messenger of His Resurrection!

We Christians too have been called by God to bear witness to His presence in our hearts and in the world, especially through love. There is nothing more convincing than a truly loving person, in whom love is the criterion by which everything is governed. However, since this term is so often abused and confused, it is appropriate to speak of “true love”, i.e. a love that is based on truth. This is different from a mere desire, which has as its goal the satisfaction of one's own “I” and not the union with a “you”.

From the biblical text and the testimony of St. Mary Magdalene we must learn that we must always seek the Lord. Even if we have had the grace to find Him, this love needs to be deepened. There are endless opportunities to make it grow.

This love is nourished by interiorising the Word of God, by receiving the sacraments, by incessant and intimate dialogue with the Lord in prayer, by corporal and spiritual works of mercy, by working on our own hearts....

The masters of the spiritual life make us see that it is especially disordered self-love - that is, the pursuit of one's own convenience - that stands in the way of the unfolding of love.

Let us turn to the Holy Spirit, who is the love that has been poured into our hearts (Rom 5:5). The more we listen to Him and obey Him, the more He will see to it that our love becomes lasting, and not a fire that is quickly kindled but easily extinguished in everyday life. Let us invite Him and ask Him to put aside everything in us that prevents us from responding adequately to God's love.

Let us ask the Lord to accompany us with His “jealous love”, to always make us see when we put worldly and worthless things before Him, so that our soul does not fall asleep, become scattered and thus weakened in its capacity to love.

We can also ask St. Mary Magdalene, being our friend and sister in heaven, to help us to remain vigilant, so that love does not die out in us; and that, like her, we set out again and again on the way, to go out to meet the Lord ever more deeply and to let ourselves be found by Him.