

the boldness of this woman, and Simon, the host, kept his own thoughts hidden: “This Man, if He were a prophet, would know surely who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth Him, that she is a sinner!” (Luke 7:39) The Gospel continues to tell how Our Lord turned to Simon, reading his heart, and told him the story of two creditors, and Simon judged the case rightly. Our Lord then reproved His host, and contrasted how this woman, this “sinner,” as Simon called her, had shown Him better treatment than Simon. Turning to the penitent, Our Lord addressed those consoling words, “Thy sins are forgiven thee.” (Luke 7:48) Thus does the Sacred Heart receive the penitent sinner, and thus does He forgive and forget, even as the Holy Ghost clothes the soul once more with the pure robe of sanctifying grace.

By her very actions, Mary Magdalene was the first to confess Christ publicly before men, even in the presence of His enemies, the pharisees. Even after being pardoned, she continued to show her gratitude to her Divine Redeemer. She followed constantly wherever He went. She listened to His instructions and ministered to His needs. She attended Him above all during his Passion and death; it was she who stood at the foot of the cross with His Mother, it was she who saw her Redeemer die upon the cross. Early in the morning on the third day, it was she who sought the body of Our Lord so that she might anoint it with sweet spices. She was the one who ran to tell Peter and John: “They have taken my Lord and I know not where they have laid Him.” (John 20:13) It was to her, the penitent, that Our Lord appeared after His Resurrection. He called her by name: “Mary.” Answering in the only way she could, she cried out “Rabboni—Master.” Truly, she now had but one Master, her true and only Lord.

After Our Lord's Ascension, we know there were great persecutions from the Jews against any of His followers. As a result of these persecutions, Mary Magdalene, her sister Martha and her brother Lazarus, along with other Christians, were set adrift in a small boat on the waters of the Mediterranean without sail or rudder. But Divine Providence watched out for them and they landed in Southern France in Marseilles. They established the Church there, Lazarus being made bishop of the city. Mary retired into the hills to

do penance for her previous life of sin.

To this day in the mountains just north of Marseilles, you can climb the steep hill to the cold damp cave where St. Mary Magdalene spent the last years of her life. In this cave there is a miraculous spring which provided her with drinking water. Right in the middle of the cave, there is a small slab of stone higher than the rest of the floor, facing a small altar etched out of the wall. In the small slab of stone you can see two indentations, the places where the knees of The Penitent were bent in continual prayer and adoration. Down the mountainside back to the little village, there is an ancient church in need of much repair. As you enter, there are signs in French indicating the place where the relics of St. Mary Magdalene are to be found. The signs direct you to a set of stairs toward the back of the church. As you descend the narrow stairs, the light becomes dimmer and dimmer. Objects become difficult to see. At the bottom of the steps, is a little room, in the middle of which is a stone coffin—no decoration, no legible inscription, just a large block of stone. But as you begin to make out the coffin, you will notice that to the right is a very narrow opening, about shoulder wide, tall enough to stoop into. Behind big iron bars and thick glass, there is a little, sparsely lighted area. In this area is a beautiful gold reliquary, and inside is the skull of The Penitent. You can see the remains of what was once a beautiful creature of God. Just as you are contemplating the passing of this life, the nothingness of the human frame, and the end for each and every one of us, your eyes become a little more accustomed to the dimly lit conditions, and you realize that the reliquary is modeled in the form of a head, and that it is the head of a beautiful woman with golden hair. It almost seems as though St. Mary Magdalene is right there looking back at you with her radiant eyes and loving smile, telling you of the mercy and goodness of the Sacred Heart.

Let us implore St. Mary Magdalene to help us on our journey through this valley of tears. Ask her to enlighten our minds and inflame our hearts so that we can see clearly the faults which hold us bound, and so that we may, following her example, place our hearts at the feet of the Sacred Heart as sacrifices of true contrition and perfect humility.