

Fr. Scott's Easter Sermon 2026

When Pope Francis was visiting the U.S. several years ago, he told the driver of his limo that he really wanted to drive. The driver, a devout Catholic, wouldn't dream of questioning the Pope's authority, so he let Pope Francis take the wheel, and he got in the back.

Ever mindful of things heavenly, the Holy Father didn't realize how fast he was driving. A police officer saw the speeding limo and pulled them over. The officer called headquarters to report a speeding limo with a special V.I.P. inside.

The chief asked, "Well, who is in the limo? Is it the mayor?"

"No!" the officer replied, "It's someone far more important than any mayor."

"Is it the governor?" The chief asked.

The officer answered, "No, this person is more important than a governor."

The chief finally asked, "Well, is it the President?"

"No!" The officer responded, "Someone even more important than the President."

Confused, the chief asked, "Now who is more important than the President?"

The officer stated, "I don't know exactly who it is, chief, but let me put it this way: He has the Pope for a chauffeur."

It is very easy to jump to conclusions, isn't it? The problem is: By rushing to conclusions, we don't really get to know someone. How many people do you know, deeply? How many people truly know you?

That joke actually predates Pope Francis; it's an oldie but a goodie. I chose Francis because many people who struggled to really understand him. But, perhaps the most misunderstood person in history is Mary Magdalene.

Throughout history, even Pope's have discredited her as a prostitute or demon possessed. Many theologians confuse her with Lazarus' sister, Mary. And, Dan Brown made a lot of money writing a novel that said that Mary Magdalene was Jesus' lover. Let me suggest: None of those descriptions even begin to scratch the surface of one of the most interesting figures in history.

So, I decided to take time to really study Mary Magdalene, because by understanding her, it helps us understand today, the most sacred story we tell. By setting her free, we become free. Free to doubt, to consider, to marvel, free to wonder. And, we would do well to follow her example of faithfulness and love.

On the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene got up early, while it was still dark. "It was still dark" describes not only the time of day, but the darkness Mary must have felt inside of her.

Now, the excuse that many people use when demeaning Mary Magdalene is because in that part of the world in those days, a woman without a man, didn't have many options for income to survive.

It is purely conjecture what her life was like before meeting Jesus. What we do know is that she chose to follow Jesus for the better part of three years. That means: Her ears heard the instructions of the kindest and wisest teacher in history, her eyes bore witness to the most breathtaking of miracles, and here was a "man" who provided for her without expecting certain things in return.

So, Mary gave up everything to follow Jesus, and the text gives no hint of regret or blame. Christ's death, however, meant that her freedom was also dead. Our Savior's tomb marked her life's grave as well. Can you imagine how gut-wrenching it must have been for her to journey to that tomb?

And, she knew exactly where it was. Remember, she watched Jesus die on Friday, She likely saw Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus place Christ's corpse in the tomb. She also knew a large stone secured it, so she didn't go to actually do much of anything.

When she arrives, the stone has been rolled away. "Oh, no!" She thought, "Someone must have stolen the body." So, Mary ran to get Peter and the other disciple. "They took him," she blurted tears of confusion, "Someone has taken the Lord."

Peter and the other disciple raced to the tomb. I find it hilarious that the story includes the little detail that the other disciple ran faster than Peter? Our sacred stories are Divinely inspired, but God wrote them to relate to humans like us.

The other disciple only peeked into the tomb, but Peter showed no reservation. He had to see for himself. Were there any signs of foul play? Had the tomb been treated with the respect we should treat a grave?

Everything seemed to be in the right place. The linens were left lying there. The body was just . . . gone! But, the cloth that had been on the thorn-pierced head of Jesus, it had been rolled up. No thief would take the time to roll up a towel.

All of this validated to them that our Savior's body wasn't stolen. Jesus did as was promised, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." (John 2:19) And, the cloth rolled up speaks to the promise that Christ will return. This is the mystery of faith: Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.

Peter and the other disciple seem convinced. They return to their homes. I envy people who's faith is so easily confirmed.

Mary Magdalene, however, was not satisfied. She refused to settle for a quick pat answer and minimalistic hope. Filled with fear and confusion and sorrow, she continued to weep at the tomb. Then, she gathered the courage to look inside. There, she saw two angels sitting at the ends of where our Savior's body once lay.

If you know our Jewish roots, or if you've ever watched *Indiana Jones and the Raider's of the Lost Ark*, you are familiar with the Ark of the Covenant, the gold chest which contained the Ten Commandments that once resided in the Temple in Jerusalem. On the lid were angels with wings folded inward. That was "The Mercy Seat"; it is where God met the people with mercy.

In this, we are to understand that faith is no longer confined to a building. This was important to the writer of this Gospel, John, because he was likely the only disciple who lived long enough to know the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 A.D. John wants us to know that we can find faith in the body of the Risen Lord.

The angels of mercy, ask Mary, "Why are you crying?" As I said in the Easter letter, this was not a statement of judgement. This is a statement of understanding. At the grave, and for other good reasons, fear and doubt and sorrow and confusion are natural responses. But, Mary Magdalene shows us that if we can push through the despair, hope is waiting.

She cried out again, "They have taken away my Lord." Mary turns around to see a person standing behind her.

The Risen Lord asked, "Why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?"

Still spiraling, Mary begs for the dead body of the Jesus. Then, the most amazing thing happens: Jesus calls her by name, "Mary." In just her name, our Savior conveys, "I know you. I understand you, and I love you with the perfect love of eternity."

Mary realizes it immediately. "Rabbouni!" She sighs.

Now, I want you to notice that she named the relationship they had. If there was a romantic connection, she would not have called him, "Teacher." Let me just say: My wife almost never calls me by my title! That isn't our primary relationship.

Mary, in her words, describe her relationship with Jesus: Rabbi and Lord. Then, she goes to the disciples and proclaims, "I have seen the Lord! I have seen the Risen Lord" This makes her the very first Apostle, the first to declare. "Christ is Risen!"

Remember, women had little credibility at that time, but Jesus had modeled an acceptance and inclusion that was unique. Peter later proclaims what Christ demonstrated in our reading from Acts, "God truly shows no partiality." Women, men, slave, free, Jew, Greek, every human being throughout all of history, God knows each and every one of us, and Christ calls us by name.

Bringing this all together, are you able to get a sense of who Mary Magdalene really is? Are you able to lay aside what has been used to discredit, dismiss her, or profit off of her?

Were you able to get a sense of who she really was?

I find that I can really relate to Mary Magdalene. Like her, are we bold enough to stop worrying what others might try to say about us? Are we willing to seek to know and understand who Jesus really is? In the midst of our confusion and fear, sorrow and hope, even in our doubt, might we follow her example to be bold in faith and fearless in love?

Will we wait, and will we listen for the only voice that really matters? The Savior of the world knows you completely, understands you fully, and loves you unconditionally. Listen for the Risen Lord to gently call you by name, and may you respond like Mary Magdalene. May Christ raise you to new life in this world, and give you Resurrection in the beautiful world that is to come.

Alleluia! Christ is Risen! The Lord is Risen indeed. Alleluia! Amen