

Novena to St Mary Magdalene

Mary Magdalene accompanied Jesus through much of his ministry. We do not know how long, but her experience of being "freed from seven demons" turned her life around and she became a devoted follower. When most of the disciples fled into hiding, she was one of the few who followed Jesus to Calvary. She witnessed the horror of his death - the blood and water flowing from his side - and the burial and sealing of the tomb. She knew the reality of his death and burial.

Her devotion took her back to the tomb in the company of other women. The Gospel accounts differ in the details but in John's, Mary's love for Jesus makes her unable to leave the tomb. Her Lord is dead - the loss of his body the ultimate catastrophe ... but through her, Jesus was going to tell the apostles and ultimately the whole world the great truth that he had conquered death and was risen to new life.

We invite her to walk with us - reflecting on the first Easter morning when death gave way to newness of life - despair was healed by hope - and the embryonic Church looked to new horizons which would take it to the ends of the earth and far into a future it could not have imagined...

We are part of that future and take our place in the great unfolding of the life of the Church, praying and discerning how we announce the Good News of Jesus' life, death and resurrection to the people of the twenty-first century and hand on the rich legacy of our faith into a future we cannot imagine.

The Novena - nine days of prayer - could fill the Easter Octave (and a little beyond!) - or the period from Ascension Thursday to Pentecost - the nine days leading to the Feast of Mary Magdalene (22 July) - or any time when a time of reflection and prayer about a decision might be helpful. It is suitable for personal use - but could profitably be used in a small group.

Each day for nine days, we will take two verses from John's account (20: 1-18) - use them for contemplation - and then ask for the intercession of Mary Magdalene who so obviously loved and was loved by Jesus to pray for the blessing of God and an outpouring of the gifts of the Spirit.

Day 1: The darkest hour just before dawn....

Reading

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him."

Wondering

What drew Mary back to the tomb? What went through her mind as she looked into the tomb? What was going through it as she ran back to Simon Peter and the disciple Jesus loved - probably John who recorded this account of the resurrection?

Contemplating

You might like to spend a few minutes reading the Scripture passage and see if any words or phrases seem to be especially significant. How might God be speaking to you? You might like to jot down any thoughts in a spiritual journal.

or...

Spend a few minutes building the scene. It can be helpful to put yourself in the shoes of a film director working to recapture the atmosphere of the scene. You could even sketch out the scene. What would the scenery be like? Where do the main characters appear from? How are they behaving? Are there any "extras" - and where are they - what are they doing? Then, try to put yourself into one of the characters to see how it might have seemed to them... how might they have been feeling?

Reflecting

Of all outcomes, this was the least expected - how could the empty tomb be explained? This was beyond their experience. How might some of the feelings of those in the Gospel be echoed in your own experience? Pray for those for whom this time is a period of confusion and fear.

Praying

Mary of Magdala,
woman at the tomb.
You did not yet know what awaited you
but felt confusion - doubt and loss.
Pray for those whose feelings you so well understand.
Guide us through your story
to the hope of resurrection.

Our Father...
Hail Mary...
Glory be...

Day 2: Going to see for themselves

Reading

Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first.

Wondering

What do the people watching the disciples make of seeing two grown men running through the streets? What might have been going through the disciples' minds as they ran?

Contemplating

Spend a few minutes reading the Scripture passage and see if any words or phrases seem to be especially significant to you. What might God be saying to you - perhaps, in your own life. If you are using a spiritual journal, add any thoughts or insights.

or...

Spend a few minutes building the scene. Use the film-director approach if that worked yesterday or allow the scene to build in your imagination. What new insights emerge as you contemplate this part of the story?

Reflecting

Often people will tell us something but we sense the need to go and see for ourselves. Many things go through our minds - all sorts of possibilities - we can get carried away by our imaginations.

Pray for those who may be caught up in "fearing the worst".

Praying

Mary of Magdala,
as you ran back to the tomb you knew to be empty,
your heart and mind were in turmoil.

Pray for those who fear the worst -
who are troubled by what might be.

Guide us through your story
to the promise that all shall be well.

Our Father...

Hail Mary...

Glory be...

Day 3: Waiting ... and acting ...

Reading

The disciple bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there.

Wondering

Why did the disciple Jesus loved wait even though he had seen the linen wrappings? What might have been going through his mind? What about Peter? What was his reaction to what he saw? What gave him the courage to go into the tomb of one who had been dead for two days

Contemplating

Spend a few minutes reading the Scripture passage and see if any words or phrases seem to be especially significant. Why might the word or phrase be important - in your own life? Make a mental note of any insights or jot down any thoughts in a spiritual journal.

or...

Spend a few minutes building the scene in whatever way is helpful - in the shoes of a film director - or sketching the scene. What insights do you get from the action in this part of the story? How are people reacting as it unfolds?

Reflecting

There is a time for waiting - and a time for finding the courage to act in ways we would not have thought possible.

Pray for those for whom this is a time of waiting ... and for those for whom it is time to find the courage to do things they do not yet think they can.

Praying

Mary of Magdala,
you waited at the foot of the cross -
but found courage to return to the tomb to anoint your Lord.
Pray for those who wait -
and those finding the courage to act.
Guide us all through your story
to the hope of resurrection.

Our Father...

Hail Mary...

Glory be...

Day 4: Seeing and believing

Reading

Peter saw the cloth that had been on Jesus' head (was) not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed.

Wondering

Why does John point out the detail about the cloth that had covered Jesus' face? How does seeing the grave clothes as they are lead him to believe - and what is he believing in at this moment - he has not yet seen the Lord?

Contemplating

Spend a few minutes reading and reflecting on the Scripture passage. What springs to mind as you ponder the words and phrases? How might these ideas feed into your own life? Jot down any thoughts in a spiritual journal. Are any threads beginning to emerge?

or...

Spend a few minutes building the scene. How might a film director film the scene? What would they focus on? What kind of atmosphere would they be trying to create? How do the participants in this drama feel at this point?

Reflecting

We cannot always say what leads us to believe... quite often it is a glimpse - a moment when we recognise that there is something beyond what we can see and touch. It is this faith that sustains us through the any changes that happen in our lives.

Pray for a strengthening of faith for those who feel on the fringes or marginalised.

Praying

Mary of Magdala,
woman of faith,
pray for those whose belief is tested -
who feel that they are not good enough -
who feel they do not belong.
Guide us all through your story
to the hope of resurrection.

Our Father...
Hail Mary...
Glory be...

Day 5: Faith leading to understanding

Reading

As yet they did not understand the scripture that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to their homes.

Wondering

What was the mood of the disciples as they turned back to go home? What were their expectations about what might happen next?

Contemplating

A very short piece but continue to read it through a few times, allowing the words to sink deep within you. Are there words or insights from the passage that seem important as we pass the halfway point in our Novena,

or...

Spend a few minutes building the scene in whatever way you find most helpful. How do the disciples take their leave of Mary? What is the "feel" of the scene at this point?

Reflecting

Faith often comes before understanding. We believe - but may have to reflect - read - contemplate - experience something differently before we move to understanding. Reflecting and learning how to make our faith yet more alive and active is for some people exciting - for others it is a challenge. Pray for people who are excited - and those who are challenged.

Praying

Mary of Magdala,
you did not understand but you believed.
Pray for as we seek to understand more fully
what God wills for us.
Pray for those for whom this is an exciting time
and for those for whom it is difficult and challenging.
Guide us all through your story
to the hope of resurrection.

Our Father...
Hail Mary...
Glory be...

Day 6: Staying in the dark places...

Reading

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet.

Wondering

What is Mary's state of mind now? What might her reaction have been to seeing the two angels?

Contemplating

As you ponder the reading, which words or phrases seem to be especially significant to you. What might God be saying to you - perhaps, for your own life and for your community. If you are using a spiritual journal, add any thoughts or insights - and perhaps look back to see if there are any links that are beginning to form.

or...

Spend a few minutes building the scene using whatever technique has helped you over recent days. Try to put yourself in Mary's shoes as the scene begins to move to its fulfilment.

Reflecting

Mary is struggling to come to terms with what is happening... but still she stays in the place where things don't yet make sense. This is a feeling we can identify with ... sometimes we do need to walk away from something but on other occasions we realise we have to stay in a spiritual place until God deems it the right time to offer us the revelation that allows us to move on.

Pray for those who find themselves "stuck" - whose faith feels empty and whose prayer seems dry.

Praying

Mary of Magdala,
you still did not know what was to come -
but your love for the Lord held you by his tomb.
Pray for those who are in dark places -
who feel without hope
and for whom the idea of a Pastoral Plan feels burdensome.
Guide us all through your story
to the hope of resurrection.

Our Father...

Hail Mary...

Glory be...

Day 7: Not knowing what is to come...

They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus.

Wondering

Is Mary comforted by the words of the angels - or further confused? She turns and sees Jesus but does not yet recognise him... why not?

Contemplating

We are reaching the climax of the story - but are not there yet... Read the passage a few times and see what ideas or thoughts begin to emerge.

Make a note of your thoughts - jot them down - and, if you are using the Novena in a group, prepare to receive the insights of others.

or..

Spend a few minutes building the scene in whatever way you have found has worked for you. What fears might be within Mary at this point - and what hope against hope?

Reflecting

We who know the story know what's coming and have a feeling of anticipation - but Mary does not. We ourselves sometimes wonder: what will be asked of me? Will I like what I see and hear?

Pray for a willingness to wait to see what God is to reveal...

Praying

Mary of Magdala,
still sorrowful,
even you could not at first recognise your Lord.
Guide us all through your story
to the hope of resurrection.

Our Father...

Hail Mary...

Glory be...

Day 8: The moment of recognition...

Reading

Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him and I will take him away."

Jesus said to her, "Mary!"

She turned and said to him, "Rabbouni!" (which means "Teacher").

Wondering

How did Jesus approach Mary? At what point did Mary recognise her Lord?

Contemplating

One of our longest pieces in the account of Mary on that first Easter morning... Read it through several times and allow any significant words or phrases to sink into your soul. Why are they important to you? Make a note of them and prepare to use them to feed into your mind and spirit.

or...

Spend a few minutes building the scene in whatever way you find most helpful. If as a film director - enjoy the scene unfolding... if in imagination - simply enjoy!

Reflecting

Many people have moments of recognising something that holds promise and builds on the many good things that have been happening.

Pray for them - for the moment of grace which may affect the rest of their lives.

Praying

Mary of Magdala,
your moment of recognition echoes down the centuries
as we learn to recognise our Lord in Word and Communion.
Pray for those experiencing such a moment of recognising
something founded on the rich legacy of faith
and love of countless millions of believers around the world.
Pray too for those who contributed to its development.
Guide us all through your story
to the hope of resurrection.

Our Father...

Hail Mary...

Glory be...

Day 9: Go and tell...

Reading

Jesus said to her, "Do not hold on to me because I have not yet ascended to my Father. But go and tell my disciples and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

Wondering

It seems a little of the story has been missed out... what might Mary's reaction have been that caused Jesus to tell her not to cling to him? What about when she is sent to the disciples? And what of their reaction?

Contemplating

Read the passage a few times and see what ideas or thoughts emerge. Look back over your journal or take a mental trip back over the last nine days. Read the whole story - reminding yourself of the thoughts that accompanied it....

Spend a few minutes building the scene in whatever way you have found has worked for you. Allow the scene to play out in your mind. How do the feelings change?

Reflecting

We are people, like Mary, with a mission - to tell people what we have seen - what we have heard - what we believe...

Pray that we may live faithfully the command to go and tell...

Praying

Mary of Magdala,
woman of the resurrection.
Pray for us as we too go and tell what we know -
that Jesus is alive
and at work through us.
Guide us all through your story
teach us to live always in the light of the resurrection.

Our Father...

Hail Mary...

Glory be...