

- In the Basilica of Saint-Maximin-la-Sainte-Baume in the south of France is the skull of St. Mary Magdalene. Tradition says that this saint, known as the Apostle to the Apostles, spent her final years in a nearby cave there in Provence.
- As you enter the crypt of this 13th century basilica to see this relic, there's a profound sense of peace that pervades the rather cramped and dark space. For those attuned to spiritual realities, you can have no doubt that you're in the presence of a potent, powerful holiness.
- As you look at this relic, you can see that there is piece of flesh on her forehead that has never deteriorated completely – even after nearly 2000 years. It's amazing, really: human flesh that has refused to deteriorate even after 2 millennia.
- It seems to fly in the face of the mantra we hear on Ash Wednesday: “Remember o man that you are dust, and unto dust you shall return.” While this is true for most of us, that ultimately we die and our bodies completely decay, that's not always the case with the saints.
- There are many incorruptible saints – those whose bodies have never deteriorated or at least deteriorated fully. Generally, the incorruptible saints are virgins who lived in remarkably innocent and holy fashion for the entirety of their lives.
- While the Bible never tells us what Mary Magdalene's life was like before meeting Christ, there has always been in our western Tradition an understanding that Mary Magdalene had been a sinful woman who converted after being exorcized of 7 demons by our Lord.
- It was Pope St. Gregory the Great who identified St. Mary Magdalene with the sinful woman in Luke's Gospel who washes Jesus' feet with her tears, dries them with her hair, and anoints them with costly perfumed oil in the home of Simon the Pharisee.
- While this identification has been challenged by Scripture scholars of late, saints throughout history have made this same identification of St. Mary Magdalene with the repentant woman.
- What we know for certain is that St. Mary Magdalene was a woman who loved our Lord in heroic fashion, who bravely stayed at the foot of the Cross with Our Lady and the Beloved Disciple John, and who is the first person Scripture records as seeing our resurrected Lord.
- What we know for certain is that St. Mary Magdalene was a person who received our Lord's mercy and was ever grateful for that mercy – so grateful that she became our Lord's faithful disciple and follower. In this, she's a great model for us all.
- In this, she shows us what God's mercy can accomplish within us.
- As you read the Gospel accounts of St. Mary Magdalene in the garden where Jesus was buried, you get a sense of the depth of her love and her commitment to Christ.
- Our Easter readings show us that she loved Him passionately, so much so that He had to tell to let go of Him so that she could spread word of His resurrection to the apostles.
- The ardor of her love suggests that, either St. Mary Magdalene was always a pure and holy woman like Our Lady or the virgin martyrs of the Church, or she was rehabilitated sinner who came to know our Lord's mercy and was purified and made holy by His mercy.

- As I mentioned a moment ago, when we come to Mass on Ash Wednesday, we often hear the words: “Remember o man that you are dust, and unto dust you shall return”, which occurs as we receive ashes on our foreheads as a sign of our repentance from sin.
- This rather stern admonition is meant to remind us of our mortality, to remind us that this life is short, and therefore we must live our earthly life in a way that prepares us well for Heaven.

- And throughout the course of Lent we are reminded by our readings and prayers at Mass of how we have offended our Lord by our sinfulness. We are called to repent of those sins, to make reparation for them, and to console our Lord by our faithfulness.
- But now that we're in the Easter Season the tone of our readings and prayers at Mass lose their sternness, and we see this in our second reading from St. Peter's 1st epistle.
- St. Peter joyfully calls us today to recognize that Christ has called us out of darkness into His wonderful light, and therefore we are "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of His own" called to praise Him.
- St. Peter reminds us that, though we may be rejected by human beings, we are chosen and precious in God's sight: living stones called to be built into a spiritual Temple.
- And we participate in this spiritual Temple built of living stones, which is the Church, while on earth so that we can dwell in our Lord's eternal Temple in Heaven, where there are many dwelling places, as Christ Himself attests in our Gospel.
- Today's Gospel from the 14th chapter of John is one that is often read at funerals, for it speaks of our Lord's great desire to save us and lead us to Heaven. In essence it's a Gospel about our Lord's mercy.
- What we know about our Lord's mercy is that it is deeper and richer and more accessible than we can possibly imagine. Moreover, God desires to share His mercy with us more than we even want it! What's more, the worst of sinners have the greatest claim on God's mercy.
- In other words, those of us who have committed the most terrible and offensive of sins have the greatest right to His mercy. Jesus wants to be merciful most especially to the worst sinners, which should give us all great confidence in approaching Him.
- Yet, while His mercy is for the taking, we have to want it and go after it. Jesus tells us today that He is "the way, the truth, and the life," and that no one goes to the Father except through Him. In other words, Jesus is our only path of salvation. He is the gateway to Heaven.
- And we go to Him and to His mercy through worthily partaking of the Sacraments, most especially confession and Holy Communion.
- Through the worthy and reverent reception of Holy Communion our venial sins are wiped away, and we are strengthened in virtue. And in going to Confession, every sin we honestly confess and truly are sorry for is obliterated in the ocean of His mercy.
- So we must never be haphazard or thoughtless when we come forward for Holy Communion, or be flippant or casual as we receive Him. And we must never receive the Eucharist when we know we have serious sin on our soul.
- And in going to confession, we must be well prepared and truly sorry for our sins. For receiving the sacraments in this way is how we access the floodgates of God's mercy!
- So, my brothers and sisters, recognize your great dignity as a Christian! By God's mercy we are "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of His own." While we may sully and denigrate this great dignity by our sins, God wishes to impart to us His mercy.
- No matter how numerous and grave your sins may be, do not hesitate to come to the Lord as a living stone so that you may be built into a holy Temple.
- Repent of your sins, my friends, and come to His sacraments recalling the words of the psalmist today: "Lord, let your mercy be on us, as we place our trust in You."
- St. Mary Magdalene, pray for us!