

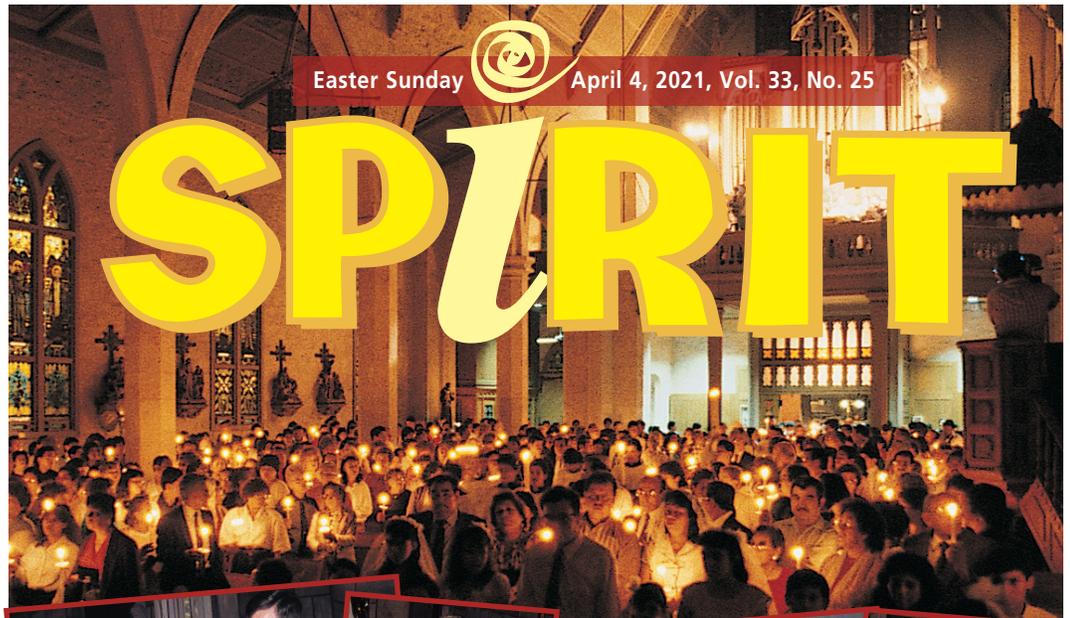
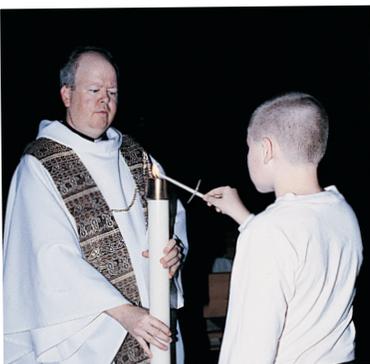
PRAY Life-giving God, easter in us. Complete the work of new life in us our baptisms began. Awaken us to all we can become in you. Amen.

Easter

the word means *dawn*, the hour of Jesus' resurrection, the first light of a new promise that there is a road through death to life and Jesus walked it.

Easter is springtime, white lilies, grass greening, warming days, new fire spreading, Christians' candles lighting up the night.

Easter is the slow dawning in each of us that love is stronger than any other energy and ours to give as each other's daily bread.



Easter Sunday

April 4, 2021, Vol. 33, No. 25



by Brett Johnson

In high school you had to drag me to church. My mother hated to do that, so on Sunday mornings I bided my time, trying to outwait her. Inevitably she started. "Okay, Brett, you should take your shower; we're going to church."

Excuses such as "I'm too old to be forced to go" and "I can decide for myself" passed over my mother like mist on a breeze. She looked at me with the determination of a sailor in a storm and said, "You can give one hour to God." Like waves against her hull, I protested until Dad intervened and I went.

When the time came for me to leave for college, I couldn't wait. Among my many new freedoms, I could decide whether or not to attend church.

I have no major quarrels with the Catholic Church. I don't refuse to attend because of Rome's politics. It's just that when I'm at Mass, I think of everything but what's happening in front of me.

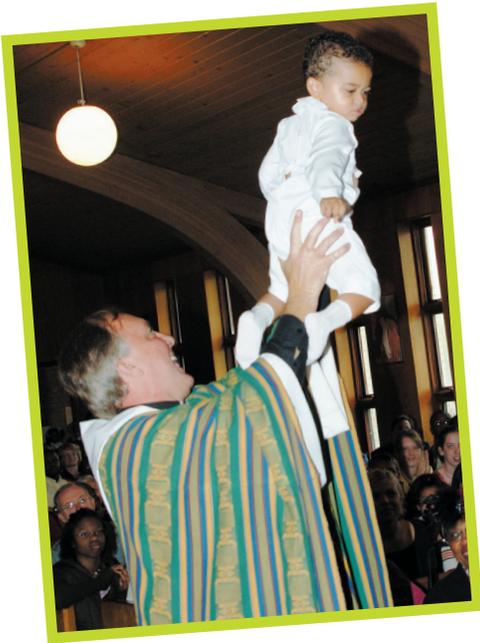
My mind wanders through the readings, I fidget during the presentation of the gifts and daydream through the prayers after Communion. For some reason, I tune out in an almost miraculous hypnosis. Like people with the stigmata, I'm afflicted with holy narcolepsy. So in college I started sleeping in my bed on Sunday mornings instead of in the pew.

I was becoming part of that large and shameless group—the lapsed Catholic. However, I still went to church on Christmas, Easter, and some holy days

Baptism

(if I remembered them). Then, last Easter I found more meaning in church.

It was the first Easter I was away from home, missing the annual gathering of family and friends. A job kept me on campus during the holiday, but I made sure to attend Mass that morning. Going to Mass on this most important day of the religious year gave me a way to connect with my family. In some way, I still felt I was going out of duty rather than devotion.



Men and women in their best outfits crammed the cathedral-like church.

I wondered how many of us came together just to fulfill a minimum obligation. I was ushered to a seat three rows from the back and submerged in dark suits, white dresses, and fresh hair spray.

Only by stretching above shoulders and heads, could I glimpse the altar that seemed leagues away. I identified a priest and one, maybe two, altar persons. The voice on the microphone gurgled in an inaudible echo. My mind wandered. I studied the shimmer of the stained glass, re-read the bulletin, and looked at feet.

I glanced up when the presider introduced an Ecuadoran priest who was going to baptize a child. Between the silhouettes of heads I spied this priest, his brown face smooth and young, his nose curled into a fat hook. He spoke a labored brand of English with a heavy Spanish accent. He faltered as he was handed the infant, cradling it awkwardly.



The priest stood with the baby near a tank of water that rested like low tide on the altar. When he began the ceremony, he might as well have been speaking from underwater. The reverberation from the hall and his accented faltering speech rendered him unintelligible. However, the congregation hushed, straining to hear his halting words.

When the priest held the baby over the water, I struggled to listen. I feared he might drop the child. “Eye-bap-tyzz youh een thee nahme of the Father—” followed by silence. Then the splash of the child against the water. Suddenly a wail filled the church. “And zee Son.” Again a splash! “And the Ho-lee Speerit.” A third time the priest dunked the child, finishing the baptism flawlessly.

Next, the father held the baby up over his head, the tiny figure kicking its legs and arms like a marionette. All eyes focused on this infant and I was startled. The people applauded for this wet, crying, naked, new Catholic. And I realized I had just been caught up in a holy moment—a sacrament.

I was eight years old when I was baptized. An odd age, but my dad had just remarried and my new mother told me, “Catholics have more fun.” So I was baptized. My baptism is the first experience of church I remember. That Easter Mass reminded me of that day, my own baptism.

It took the cry of a baby for me to connect with a deeper meaning of church. My mother’s words of giving an hour for God came to mind. I was glad to be Catholic.

Now back to my daydreams.



SUNDAY GOSPEL

Easter Sunday

Mary Magdalene meets Jesus risen.

NARRATOR 1: Early in the morning on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb. She saw that the stone had been moved away, so she ran off to Simon Peter and the other disciple (the one Jesus loved) and told them:

MARY MAGDALENE: The Lord has been taken from the tomb! We don't know where they have put him.

NARRATOR 2: At that, Peter and the other disciple started out on their way toward the tomb. They were running side by side, but then the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first.

NARRATOR 1: He did not enter but bent down to peer in, and saw the wrappings lying on the ground. Presently, Simon Peter came along behind him and entered the tomb.

NARRATOR 2: He observed the wrappings on the ground and saw the piece of cloth which had covered the head not lying by

the wrappings, but rolled up in a place by itself.

NARRATOR 1: Then the disciple who had arrived first at the tomb went in. He saw and believed.

NARRATOR 2: Remember, as yet they did not understand the scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead. The disciples returned to their homes. But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb.

NARRATOR 1: As she wept she bent over to look into the tomb. She saw two angels dressed in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet.

ANGELS: Woman, why are you weeping?

MARY MAGDALENE: They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.

NARRATOR 2: She turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus.

JESUS: Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?

NARRATOR 1: Mary supposed the man was the gardener.

MARY MAGDALENE: Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.

JESUS: Mary!

MARY MAGDALENE: Rabbouni! Teacher!

JESUS: Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God."

NARRATOR 2: Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples.

MARY MAGDALENE: I have seen the Lord.

NARRATOR 1: She told them that he had said these things to her.

John 20.1-18

QUESTIONS 1 When has a holy moment in church caught you up? 2 What is the deeper meaning of church Brett experiences? 3 What do Easter and Baptism celebrate? 4 Why does one disciple believe and Peter doesn't? 5 When have you recognized Jesus' presence with you? 6 How did you become a believer?

EASTER

Jesus' death/resurrection is the founding event of Christianity. Jesus' death is inseparable from his resurrection, two moments in a single reality.

In his death Jesus is like every human, having to entrust himself to God. In the passion story, he feels forsaken and cries out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

But, death cannot hold Jesus. By his resurrection he changes the meaning of death. No longer is it an end but a passage to life with God.

The word *resurrection* means *waking*. Resurrection is not resuscitation. The risen Jesus has a real but glorified body. His

friends see and touch him, and he eats, yet he appears and disappears suddenly. In this risen state, Jesus' divinity permeates his humanity.

In the sacrament of baptism—in the way Christians celebrated it in the early Church and many parishes do now—a person who wants to commit to following Jesus plunges under water to die with Jesus and comes up from the water to rise with him.

Jesus' death and resurrection happens at Passover in springtime. Christians believe that the God who raises Jesus to new life and whom we trust to raise us up is the God we already know as the Creator and giver of life in us and all creation.

Easter is the first day of a new creation; it is the day after sabbath, the seventh day that celebrates God's six days of creation. We have no scientific proof God raised Jesus from the dead. We have only the witness of his friends, who committed their lives to spread his message. Many died in this work.

By his death Christ liberates us from sin: by his resurrection he opens for us the way to new life.

Catechism of the Catholic Church #654

Who is Mary Magdalene, apostle or prostitute?

Mary Magdalene stands out among Jesus' women disciples the way Peter stands out among Jesus' men disciples. In each of the four gospels she witnesses Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection. She is among the few faithful disciples who stand at Jesus' cross. She leads the women to anoint Jesus' body three days later and discovers his tomb is empty because he is risen. She is the primary witness of Jesus' death and resurrection.

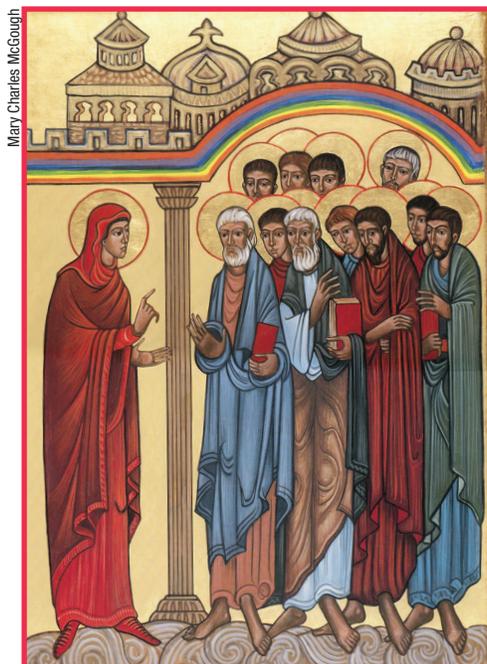
Not only does Mary witness the most important events in Jesus' life, Jesus also sends her on the special mission of telling the rest of his disciples the good news of his resurrection. He makes her the apostle to his friends.

Why then do so many people know Mary Magdalene as a prostitute rather than an apostle, as a repentant sinner rather than the first person sent to preach the gospel? In our time, we can blame Andrew Lloyd Webber a little. In his musical *Jesus Christ Superstar*, Mary Magdalene is a repentant prostitute who doesn't know how to love a man like Jesus.

Her reputation as a prostitute comes from people misinterpreting Luke's gospel. Luke was the third person to write a gospel. He used Mark's gospel as the basis for his story, but he tried to improve Mark's story, too. Mark mentions Jesus' women disciples, including Mary Magdalene, only after Jesus has died. He explains these women followed and served Jesus and have been with him from the beginning in Galilee (Mark 15.40-41).

Prepare an Easter homily for teens about how to live Easter every day.

To improve on Mark's account, Luke introduces the women disciples much earlier in his gospel but also adds a mysterious detail that contributes to Mary Magdalene's mistaken identity. He



Mary Charles McGough

says that seven demons went out from her. Just before introducing the women disciples (Luke 8.3), Luke tells the powerful story of a sinful woman who bathes Jesus' feet with her tears, wipes his feet with her hair, kisses them, and anoints them with ointment (Luke 7.36-50). Jesus forgives her many sins because she shows such great love for him.

Some bible interpreters think the sinful woman of chapter seven must be Mary Magdalene, the woman freed of seven demons, whom we meet at the beginning of chapter eight. But they are two different women.

The gospels

themselves contain evidence that people in Jesus' time did not value Mary Magdalene as a witness of the resurrection because she was a woman. For example, in Luke 24.10-11 when Mary Magdalene and the other women announce to the other disciples that Jesus is risen, the men don't believe them. Peter goes to see for himself. Mark 16.11 repeats this same refusal to believe Mary Magdalene. Later Jesus scolds his disciples for this.

In its liturgy over the centuries, the Church has celebrated Mary Magdalene both as the apostle to the apostles and as a model penitent. In our time, even though the Second Vatican Council expanded the system of Sunday readings from one cycle to three so that Catholics could hear more scripture, the Sunday readings for Easter leave out Mary Magdalene's role as apostle to the apostles. The Church does, however, remember her and the other women resurrection witnesses in its weekday readings for Easter week: Easter Monday (Matthew 28.8-15); Easter Tuesday (John 20.11-18).

FAITH in ACTION

1 Icon artist Mary

Charles McGough paints Mary Magdalene as the apostle to the apostles. How would you paint Mary Magdalene?

2 Conduct a survey of 10 Catholics of varying ages. Ask what each believes about life after death. Talk about any experience members of your group or class have had of someone close dying. What do you believe about this person's life with God? 3 Make a Easter banner for your meeting area or classroom. Express your understanding of Easter and resurrection.