

What is love? In our somewhat restrained celibate life as monks and nuns, we can readily forget the passions which fuel human love: we keep them in check and we can also keep our passion for Christ, for God, in check as passion turns to dispassion and faith becomes a humdrum matter of getting through each day as best we can, not in a search for God but a search for survival.

Remembering Mary Magdalene, is a useful counter to such cool collectedness and also a counter to despair for, not only does she search but goes on searching, when her companions leave her to gather in an upstairs room, afraid and still unbelieving. The analogy is with human love but works both ways – for God’s search for us is equally human in the person of one whom we can see and touch and pine for, just as much as any other human being, and who comes back to us even after death. But this is a figure always on the move, just like any other human figure, and we cannot capture him at one particular moment in time – at that moment, perhaps, of first falling in love. No, we have to let him be himself, ultimately a mystery to us, as we all truly are to one another – a ‘known unknown’ one might say. And so the lesson Mary represents to us is the greater freedom of letting our love, in a sense, go: letting God be God to us in ever-changing ways; letting ourselves be transformed in Christ’s image in ever-changing and, to us, to ourselves, unknown ways. By letting go in this way we discover, instead, that the empty tomb is full of the presence of Christ.

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