

Mary First to See Resurrected Lord

John Paul II in his general audience of Wednesday, 21 May 1997 offered several reasons for concluding that the first person to see the resurrected Lord was His Mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary. Although this is not what we would call a definite teaching - Catholics are free to believe it or not - there is much spiritual fruit to be had by meditating on this idea.

Enemies of the Church will sometimes say that once a person becomes a Catholic he has to check his brain at the door and just let the Pope do the thinking for him. This could not be further from the truth. Pope John Paul II indirectly points this out by pointing to the vast area of theology that is not yet defined where we are free to explore deeper insights into God's love.

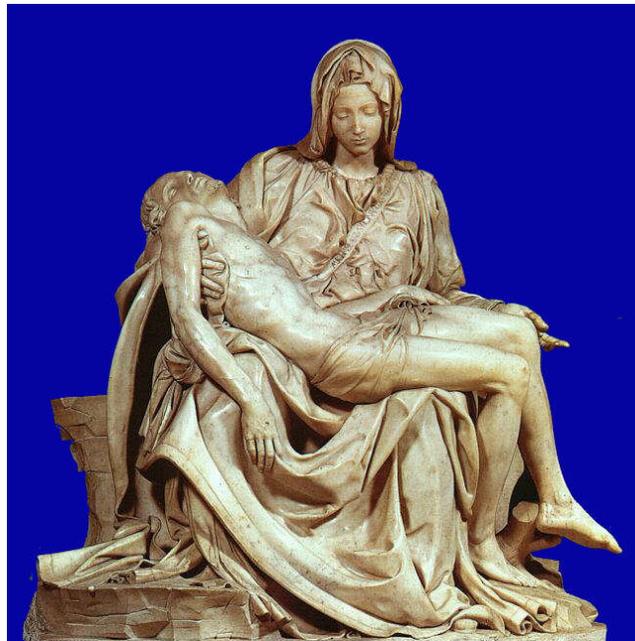
Those that deny that truth can be known are implying that their own attempts at thinking are fruitless. Truth is to the mind what food is to the mouth and body. At some point we are intended to chomp down on it. The mind was made to embrace objective truth. Just as comprehension of scientific laws enables us to go further into science, truth in other fields such as theology enables us to think more deeply and more profitably. A person who knows certain truths is more free, not less so.

We have at least six reasons for concluding that Mary was the first to see our resurrected Lord. We have two biblical reasons, one reason based on justice, one

based on love, and there is the historical testimony of our tradition and now John Paul II's magisterial teaching.

Biblical Reason #1.

Where was Jesus at before Mary Magdalene saw Him? Jesus has a physical body. When Mary Magdalene went to the tomb it was empty. She went to the Apostles and He was not there. Later, she sees Him and He says that He has not yet ascended to the Father. John 20:17 To where or to whom had Jesus gone? With so many prominent individuals eliminated it doesn't seem hard to choose between Pontius Pilate and Mary.



Where was Jesus when the tomb was first discovered empty? First clue see John 20:17

Biblical Reason #2.

How do we explain Mary's absence from the tomb on Easter morning? Mary, most likely a single mother at this point, was very devoted to her only Son and she followed Him all the way to the cross, even when

most of the Apostles did not. No doubt Mary was exhausted with grief and probably slept a good part of the Sabbath, but after resting what else would she have been thinking about other than her only Son? Mary's absence only makes sense if Mary had known that Jesus was not there.

Some will say that this conclusion is pure speculation, but then all attempts to answer questions that are not infallibly determined or defined involve speculation. One of the strengths of by John Paul II's position is that a person can speculate as much as they wish and as long as they wish, but I don't think they can arrive at another answer that is equally plausible. No other answer really fits or solves the above questions.

If a person has one particular piece that fits perfectly into a puzzle and no other piece can fit and one cannot even imagine a piece that would truly fit, then it is reasonable to conclude that this particular piece is the correct one.

Reason 3: An Argument of Justice.

John Paul II explains why Justice leads us to this conclusion. Mary heard the hammer striking the nails as her Son was fastened to the cross. She saw with her own eyes the lance as it pierced His side and the water and blood that poured out onto the ground. Mary was in perfect union with the Son in his suffering on the Cross. So, from an argument based on justice we have another reason to conclude that Mary would have been the first to share in the joy of His Resurrection.