



# Bringing Home the Word

Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)

July 18, 2021

## The Source of All Forgiveness

By Fr. Mark Haydu, LC

In his 1622 painting *The Penitent St. Mary Magdalene*, Giovanni Francesco Barbieri, known as Guercino, portrays Mary Magdalene with shoulders uncovered and disheveled hair. These details remind us of her shameful past without defining her present. Rather, it is her humble, penitent spirit from which her heroic love for Jesus springs. The sinful Mary, who had been forgiven so much, is also one who has loved much.

One angel holds out before her the symbols of the passion to remind Magdalene of the ransom her Beloved paid to set her free from sin. A second

angel pointing to heaven reminds her that these nails no longer bind him. Or as the angel would tell Mary Magdalene in the garden, “He is not here, for he has been raised” (Matthew 28:6).

Many mistakenly conflate Mary Magdalene with the unknown woman from Luke 7:36–50. The woman offers an act of humility by breaking into the dinner party of Simon and sobbing over the feet of Jesus. She bathes his feet with tears of repentance and dries them with her lovely hair. Despite the confusion, we admire this woman’s and Mary’s humility. Neither were too proud to repent.

The painting is called *The Penitent St. Mary Magdalene* because Mary looks purposely like a person kneeling in confession. Speaking with head downcast, she admits her failures. And as in confession, the representative of God sits on the other side encouraging her to consider Jesus’ passion, love, and mercy. The angel in the center reminds Mary to whom she is really confessing. By pointing to heaven, we are all reminded of the source from whom all forgiveness comes. +

*It is Mary Magdalene’s  
humble, penitent spirit  
from which her heroic love  
for Jesus springs.*

### A Word from Pope Francis

For leadership there is only one road: service. There is no other way. If you have many qualities—the ability to communicate, etcetera—but you are not a servant, your leadership will fail, it is useless, it has not power to gather [people] together.

—Address to Pontifical Colleges and Residences of Rome, May 12, 2014



## Sunday Readings

### Jeremiah 23:1–6

I will raise up shepherds for them who will shepherd them so that they need no longer fear or be terrified; none shall be missing.

### Ephesians 2:13–18

Now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have become near by the blood of Christ.

### Mark 6:30–34

His heart was moved with pity for them, for they were like sheep without a shepherd.

### REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- Am I humble enough to admit my faults to myself and others?
- How often do I ask forgiveness from my loved ones and in confession?

# “Be Not Afraid”

By Kathleen M. Basi

A director of religious education once told me that as grade-school children begin to process the world, they come to their parents and teachers with questions. We need to answer those questions, she said, because the window isn't open all that long. If you don't answer their questions honestly, sometime around the fourth grade they quit asking questions like:

- How can we say “thou shalt not kill” and fight wars and execute prisoners?
- What does gay mean?
- Why don't so-and-so's parents live together?
- What is contraception?
- Why are those people fighting with the police?
- Why would someone shoot schoolkids?
- What does climate change mean?
- Why do those children have flies around their mouths?

For many adults, answering questions like these is terrifying. We are jaded, embittered, and overwhelmed by the scope of the world's problems. When we try to put into words what we believe, it often seems simplistic—a woefully inadequate answer to reality. Trying to explain God and the world to children brings into sharp relief the inadequacy of our own faith and understanding of both.

We are afraid to scar our children's innocence. We are afraid of being labeled intolerant. We are afraid our kids



will demonstrate their knowledge in inappropriate ways or contexts. We are afraid of having to admit to our kids the many ways we have not lived up to what we profess to believe. We are afraid of being seen as frauds. Most of all, we are afraid of screwing up our kids.

And yet despite it all, we have to answer. Children's views of the world are being formed whether we participate in the process or not. We might as well make sure they get the right formation—the one guided by Christ and his Church.

The tough questions will always be tough, but constantly seeking greater wisdom and understanding for ourselves takes away some of the pressure to “get it right” for our kids in one shot. Instead,

we can approach difficult topics with our children as coseekers in the way of Christ, returning to subjects in greater depth as their understanding grows... and as ours does the same.

Perhaps then, it won't feel so difficult to trust God to give us the words when we need them and the wisdom to know when to respond, “You don't need to know that yet.” Honesty is not easy when the subject matter is difficult. But God whispers to us today the same three words that are woven into the entire narrative of salvation history: “Be not afraid.” +

*Parents, it's crucial we use our faith in answering the tough questions of our children.*

**PRAYER**

*Lord, you are the Good Shepherd who cares for all people. Help me be a good shepherd of love and compassion.*

—From *Faithful Meditations for Every Day in Ordinary Time*, Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

## WEEKDAY READINGS

July 19–24

**Monday**, Weekday:

Ex 14:5–18 / Mt 12:38–42

**Tuesday**, Weekday:

Ex 14:21–15:1 / Mt 12:46–50

**Wednesday**, Weekday:

Ex 16:1–5, 9–15 / Mt 13:1–9

**Thursday**, St. Mary Magdalene: Sg 3:1–4b or 2 Cor 5:14–17 / Jn 20:1–2, 11–18

**Friday**, Weekday:

Ex 20:1–17 / Mt 13:18–23

**Saturday**, Weekday:

Ex 24:3–8 / Mt 13:24–30

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