

## St Mary Magdalene – July 22<sup>nd</sup>

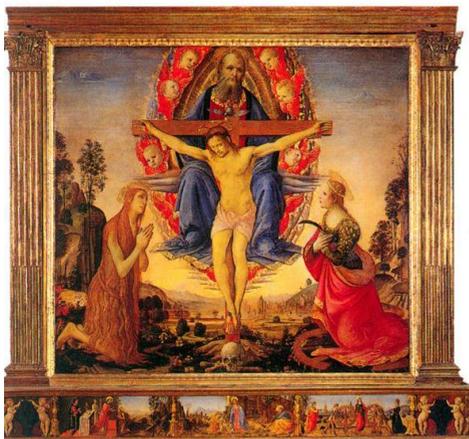


Although there has always been some controversy about exactly which of the many Marys in the Gospels can be identified with Mary Magdalene, it is generally accepted that she was the first witness of the Resurrection. St Mark's gospel tells us that she was also present at the crucifixion. When this is shown in art, Mary is usually right at the foot of the cross, looking with love and devotion at Jesus. The 1501 painting by Matthew Grünewald is typical.

Mary has come to represent the emotional response to Jesus, an instinctive response of pure, uncomplicated, unthinking love. Traditionally Mary

spent her later life in contemplation and prayer. This stage of her life is the subject of Donatello's wonderful wood carving from about 1450, which can be found in the Duomo Museum in Florence.

Mary was a popular subject in Florentine art. One of my very favourite pictures is a painting representing the Trinity (see also David's article on pages 6 and 7) which is in the Church of the Holy Spirit in Florence. In this picture the Holy Spirit emerges as a dove from the crucified Christ supported in the arms of the Father. The Trinity is flanked on one side by Mary and on the other by St Catherine, the saint who disputed with the philosophers of Alexandria. While Mary



represents the emotional response, Catherine represents the response of reason. Together they remind us that we must respond to God with **both** the heart **and** the head. We should never abandon reason altogether, but it is even more important that we never lose sight of the fact that the proper response to God's grace and love for us is to return that love with our own – both for God and for our neighbour.