

St Mary Magdalene's Anglican Church
Moore Street, Adelaide

Reflection for the Feast of St Mary Magdalene

In the thinking of a few people St Mary Magdalene is the patron saint of Hairdressers. This notion is tied to the traditional conviction that St Mary Magdalene was the woman who bathed Jesus' feet with her tears and then dried the feet with her hair. Accordingly, St Mary Magdalene is often depicted as one with a luxurious head of hair usually red or auburn in colour.

Of course to treat Jesus in the way St Mary Magdalene is said to have done was a very beautiful thing to have been able to do.

In the New Testament as we know it is difficult to work out which of the women we associate with St Mary Magdalene herself. Pope Gregory the Great tried to rationalise the three contenders by stating assertively that St Mary Magdalene is the woman who was a penitent and bathed Jesus' feet with her tears. He made this pronouncement at the turn of the 5th and 6th Centuries. Since then artists have nearly always shown St Mary Magdalene as one with very well groomed hair. Hence Hairdressers and Perfume Makers have adopted her as their Patron Saint.

It seems to be clear that St Mary Magdalene was not a prostitute. Even if she had at one stage needed demons driven out of her that in itself does not mean that she was a prostitute.. Unfortunately, this association has stuck over many centuries, especially in popular devotions.

There is a myth or a legend that St Mary Magdalene went to France with her siblings in order to proclaim the Gospel there. She eventually, it is claimed, settled near Marseilles where she lived as a hermit. By the time she died her clothes had deteriorated to rags which were falling off her. At the same time her hair continued to grow vigorously - so much so that it served to protect St Mary Magdalene's modesty. Little wonder, then, that this story reinforced her as Patron to Hairdressers.!

These days St Mary Magdalene is thought of as the first witness of Christ's resurrection. While this takes us some distance from hairdressing it does draw us much closer to scriptural truth and some positive notion of her worth as our Patron. While this association of St Mary Magdalene and resurrection has yet to affect popular devotion I think that we as Anglicans will adopt the association sooner rather than later - scriptural as it is.

Certainly our Patron as the first apostle of the resurrection will be praying for us here as we, together make our way into the future. As Patron she may pray that we all have hope and come to our church with confidence. Her prayers will wish us to pray hard for solutions to problems and for our financial situation to keep improving. It is true that prayer about all these matters, together with intense interest in whatever is happening here (even if we cannot be involved in other ways) will need to be a major part of our progress as a Parish. St Mary Magdalene will surely be praying with us.

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