

## JULY XXII.

## ST. MARY MAGDALEN.

THE illustrious penitent woman mentioned by St. Luke, (1) was, by her perfect conversion, an encouraging model of penitence to all succeeding ages. She is called the Sinner,\* to

(1) Luke vi.

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\* Mention is made in the gospels of a woman who was a sinner, (Luke vii.) of Mary of Bethania, the sister of Lazarus, (John xi. 2. xii. 1. Mark xiv. 3. Matt. xxvi. 6.) and of Mary Magdalen, who followed Jesus from Galilee, and ministered to him. Many grave authors think all this to belong to one and the same person; that she fell into certain disorders in her youth, and in chastisement was delivered over to be possessed by seven devils; that she addressed herself to Jesus in the house of Simon the pharisee, and by her compunction deserved to hear from him that her sins were forgiven her; and in consequence was delivered from the seven devils; that with her brother Lazarus, and her sister Martha, she left Galilee and settled at Bethania, where Jesus frequently honoured their house with his presence. (See Pezron, *Hist. Evang.* t. 2, p. 350.) St. Clement of Alexandria, (l. 2, *Pædag.* c. 8,) Ammonius, (*Harmon.* 4, *Evange.*) St. Gregory the Great, (hom. 25 and 33, in *Evang.*) and from his time the greater part of the Latins down to the sixteenth century adopt this opinion; though St. Ambrose, (lib. de *Virgin.* et l. 6, in *Luc.*) St. Jerom, (in Matt. xxvi. 1, 2, *contr. Jovin.* c. 16, *Pref.* in *Osee* et ep. 150,) St. Austin, (tr. 49, in *Joan.* n. 3,) Albertus Magnus, and St. Thomas Aquinas leave the question undetermined. The two last say the Latins in their time generally presumed that they were the same person, but that the Greeks distinguished them. Baronius, Jan-senius of Ghent, Maldonat, Natalis Alexander, (in *Hist. Eccl. Sæc.* 1, Diss. 17,) Lami, (*Harmon. Evang.* et *epist. Gallicâ.*) Mauduit, (*Analyse des Evang.* t. 2,) Pezron, Trevet, and strenuously Solier the Bollandist, t. 5, Julij. p. 187, and others have wrote in defence of the opinion of St. Gregory the Great.

Others think these were distinct persons. This sentiment is adopted by the Apostolic Constitutions, (l. 3, c. 6,) St. Theophilus of Antioch, (in 4 *Evang.*) St. Irenæus, (l. 3, c. 4,) Origen, (hom. 35, in Matt. et hom. 1, or 2, *Cant.*) St. Chrysostom, (hom. 81, in Matt. 26, et hom. 61, in *Joan.*) St. Macarius, (hom. 12,) and by almost all the Greeks.—Among the modern critics Casaubon, (*Exercit.* 14, in *Baron.*) Estius, (*Or.* 14,) three Jesuits, viz. Bulanger, (*Distrib.* 3, p. 15,) Turrian, (in *Consens.* l. 3, c. 6,) and Salmeron, (t. 9, tr. 49,) also Zegers, a learned Franciscan, (in *Joan.* 11,) Mauconduit, Anquetin, Tillemont, (t. 2, p. 30, et 512,) Hammond, and many others, strenuously assert these to have been three distinct women.

Some, whose sentiment appears most plausible to Toinard and Calmet, distinguish the sister of Lazarus and Magdalen; for this latter attended Christ the last year of his life, and seems to have followed him from Galilee to Jerusalem, when he came up to the Passover, (see Matt. xxvii. 56. 57. Mark xv. 40, 41. Luke xxiii. 49.) at which time the sister of

express her pre-eminence in guilt. This epithet seems to imply that she led a lewd and disorderly life. The scandal of her debaucheries had rendered her name infamous throughout the whole city. Naim, Tiberias, or some neighbouring place in Galilee, seems to have been the chief theatre of her disorders, at least at the time of her conversion. They took their rise from small beginnings; for no one becomes a great proficient in vice all at once. The fences of virtue are weakened by degrees before they are entirely broken down.

The steps by which young persons, like this sinner, are led into evil courses, are pointed out to us by our Divine Redeemer in the parable of the prodigal son. The source of all his misfortunes is a love of independence and of his own will. He is full of his own wisdom, and of a certain self-sufficiency; is an enemy to advice, the means to find out truth and to discover dangers. All who contradict his passions, or tell him the truth, are odious to him: the counsels of tender parents he calls interested; those of God's anointed too severe and scrupulous: those of the old and experienced, cowardly and mean spirited. Young persons, above all others, are in an age in which the devil prepares innumerable snares, the world lays many stratagems, and passions easily eclipse reason; and it behoves them infinitely to be strongly persuaded that their safety consists

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Lazarus was with her brother and Martha at Bethania. (John xi. 1.) Moreover, these two women seem distinctly characterized, the one being called Magdalen, and being ranked among the women that followed Jesus from Galilee, the other being everywhere called the sister of Lazarus; and though she might have possessed an estate at Magdalum in Galilee, and have come originally from that country, this constant distinction of epithets naturally leads us to imagine them different persons; but St. Irenæus, Origen, St. Chrysostom, &c. no where distinguish the penitent and Magdalen: and St. Luke having mentioned the conversion of the sinful woman (at Naim) in the next chapter, subjoins that certain women who had been delivered by him from evil spirits and infirmities, followed him; and among these he names Mary Magdalen, out of whom he had cast seven devils; whence it may seem reasonable to conclude that the penitent and Magdalen are the same person.

This disputation, however, seems one of those debatable questions which are without end, nothing appearing demonstrative from the sacred text, or from the authority of the ancients. In the Roman Breviary the Penitent is honoured on this day under the name of Mary Magdalen, and for our edification the history of all these examples of virtue is placed in one point of view, as if they belonged to one person, conformably to the sentiment of St. Gregory and others; but the offices are distinct in the Breviaries of Paris, Orleans, Vienne, Cluni, and some others.

altogether in most sincere dispositions of humility, obedience, and docility. Tractableness and dutifulness towards superiors is the most essential virtue of that age, next to the obligation of religion, which we owe to God. Those companions, whose discourse and behaviour tend to inspire a contempt of parents and other superiors, are of all pests the most dangerous to youth.

The prodigal son, blinded by his passions, thought himself prudent and strong enough to be his own governor and master, and flattered himself that his love of liberty and pleasure was not very criminal or unjust; but from this root all vices have sprouted up, and are not to be restrained by him who opens to them such a door by shaking off the happy yoke of subjection, which is the divine ordinance. Such is the strange disorder of that mischievous passion, that though the prodigal son lived in dignity and plenty, and enjoyed all temporal blessings and all the comforts of life without feeling its troubles or knowing its miseries, yet he was not content. His subjection to a good father was true freedom; he was the object of all his parent's cares, and he reaped the fruit of all his labours. But so distempered was his soul, that the constraint of this tender guardian's watchful eye seemed to embitter all his pleasures, and such an obedience appeared to him an insupportable burden and slavery, which therefore he would shake off to have no other law but his own will. This was his capital enemy, though he would not be so persuaded; and by indulging it he fostered a young tiger in his own bosom, which soon grew too strong for him and tore him to pieces. We are astonished at the quick progress which the passions make when once the bridle is let loose. The prodigal youth, seeing himself possessed of that dangerous liberty which he had so passionately desired, full of false joy at the prospect of imaginary happiness, went into a foreign country, to be at a greater distance from all troublesome advisers. His passions being so far yielded to, had no longer any bounds, and he denied his heart nothing of its irregular desires, being no longer master of himself. Unthinking and blinded he soon squandered away his fortune, without keeping any accounts, or knowing how it was spent; he was surprised to find his hands empty, and himself starving, and that he had not yet found

those enjoyments which he had promised himself; instead of which he had met with nothing but shadows and miseries. Nevertheless, cleaving still to so treacherous a world, and yet entertaining desperate foolish hopes of finding happiness in it, he went on in the pursuit of his passions; and losing himself daily more and more in the mazes of sin, he was at length reduced to have no other company but that of the most filthy of beasts, and almost to perish with hunger at the heels of the hogs which he was condemned to serve and fatten.

This is a true picture of the sinner who has thrown off the holy yoke of God, and has enslaved himself to his passions. How earnestly ought every Christian to pray that God may always so strengthen his resolution with his grace, that he may never receive any other than his sweet and holy law? What completes the misfortune of the habitual sinner is, that few who have fallen into that gulf ever sincerely rise again. The very afflictions which converted the prodigal son throw thousands into despair. God's powerful graces are weakened after having been long contemned; and habits grow stronger than reason. When the poison of sin has sunk deep into the heart, it is not expelled by an ordinary grace. Of such a sinner that curse is pronounced, that even in his old age, if he ever arrive at it, his bones shall be filled with the vices of his youth, and they shall descend with him into the grave, and shall sleep with him in the dust.<sup>(1)</sup> Christ indeed came from heaven to save all such; in his tender compassion for their miseries he invites them to return to him, and for their encouragement has shown a remarkable example of his mercy in our saint. Having considered in the image of the prodigal son, the unhappy steps by which she fell, we shall, with greater edification, take a view of the circumstances which have given so great a lustre to her repentance.

Jesus, not long after he had raised to life the son of a widow at Naim, a town in Galilee, was invited to dinner by a certain Pharisee called Simon, who seems to have lived in the same town, or some neighbouring city, as Calmet shows. Our Lord was pleased to accept his invitation, chiefly that he might confound the pride of the Pharisees by manifesting the power of

(1) Job xx. 11.

his grace in the wonderful conversion of this abandoned sinner. His bowels had yearned over her spiritual miseries, and he spread upon her soul a beam of his divine light which penetrated her understanding and her heart so effectually, that, listening to the interior voice of his grace, she saw the abominable filth and miseries in which she was plunged, was filled with confusion and horror, and conceived the most sincere detestation of her ingratitude and baseness. Our Lord went to the banquet in great joy to wait for this soul, which he himself had secretly wounded with his holy love, and which he was pleased to draw to him in the midst of a great assembly, that by her public repentance she might repair the scandal she had given, and he might give to all succeeding ages an illustrious instance of his mercy towards all repenting sinners. She began her conversion by entering into herself. As her fall was owing to inconsideration, so doubtless her first step towards repentance was serious reflection on the misery of her present condition, the happiness she had forfeited, and the punishment she was to expect. From these considerations she raised her thoughts to others higher and more noble, those of divine love, reflecting who He is whom she had so grievously offended, and how excessive and incomprehensible his goodness is, which she had so long and so basely slighted. This motive of love, to which Christ ascribed her conversion, drew from her eyes a torrent of tears, and made her cry out with the prodigal son, that she had sinned against heaven. That model of true penitents forgot his corporal miseries and all other circumstances of his fall, being full of this reflection alone, how he could be capable of offending so good a parent. He acknowledged himself unworthy to be again called a child; yet deferred not a moment to restore his heart to him to whom he owed it, and, confiding in his indulgence, threw himself upon his mercy, hoping by his goodness to be admitted among his hired servants.

In the like dispositions does our penitent raise her heart to God. She hearkens not to the suggestions of worldly prudence which might seem to require some time for deliberation, for settling her concerns, or for taking proper measures about her conversion itself; the least delay appears to her a new crime, a fresh aggravation of her misfortune. She was informed that

our Divine Redeemer was at table in the house of the Pharisee. She did not so much as think of the disgrace to which she exposed herself by appearing before a numerous and honourable assembly, of the reproaches and disdain she was to expect from the Pharisee, or the fear of moving Christ himself to indignation by an unseasonable importunate address. One moment's delay in seeking her physician seemed too much, because her heart was now wounded with divine love. Sinners who, in returning to God, think too nicely that they have temporal interests to provide for, friends to please, and opportunities to wait for, are far from the dispositions of this happy penitent. She found mercy because she sought it before all things. Had she dallied with grace, it would have been justly withdrawn; had she been for compounding with her passions, they would have again enslaved her more strongly than ever. She found all difficulties vanish in a moment, because her conversion was sincere and perfect; by one steady resolution the work is done. What further deliberation can one that has sinned require, than that the gate of mercy is yet open to him? Let him at all rates make haste to find it, though for this he should sacrifice every thing else. So insupportable to this holy penitent was the stench of her own filth, and the load of her guilt, that she could not defer the remedy an hour longer to wait for a better opportunity, or to inquire if our Lord was at leisure to hear her; and a firm confidence in his boundless mercy was her encouragement, and her strong assurance that he would not reject her tears.

When the prodigal son said to himself, *I will arise, and will go to my Father*, we might have asked him, says St. Peter Chrysologus, what he trusted to for his pardon? upon what he grounded his confidence? upon what hope or assurance he presumed to appear in the presence of him whom he had so heinously offended? His answer would have been: "This is the assured grounds of my confidence, that he is my Father. I have forfeited all title to the name or rank of his son; but he hath not lost the quality or affection of a parent. I want no stranger to intercede with a father. The tender affection of his own breast pleads powerfully within him, and is sure to incline him in my favour. His paternal bowels are moved, and yearn to restore to a son by pardon that life which he

formerly gave him by birth.”\* In like sentiments this penitent woman seeks her Almighty Physician, professing herself altogether undeserving and unworthy of mercy, and therefore alleges nothing on her side to recommend her to his compassion, except only that she was the work of his hands, though an unnatural and rebellious child, in whom that title was only a grievous exaggeration of her guilt; but she confidently appeals to his infinite goodness and mercy, and begs that for his own sake he will save her, in whom he still discovers, though frightfully disfigured, the traces of his divine image which his own omnipotent hand had formed, and which it is in his power easily to repair and perfect.

In these dispositions she bolted into the chamber where Jesus was at dinner with the Pharisee, and, regardless of what others thought or said of her past life or of her present boldness,† she made up to her Redeemer and Physician. She durst not appear before his face, and therefore went behind him; and the nearer she approached his sacred person streams gushed more abundantly from her eyes. She reflected how basely she had defiled

\* “*Quâ spe? quâ fiducia? quâ confidentiâ? Quâ spe? illâ quâ Pater est. Ego perdidici quod erat filii: ille quod Patris est non amisit. Apud patrem non intercedit extraneus: intus est in Patris pectore qui intervenit et exorat, affectus. Urgentur Patris viscera iterum genitura per veniam,*” &c. St. Peter Chrysolog. Sermon. 2.

† The ancient Jews did not sit down on carpets spread on the floor to eat, as the Arabs, Turks, and other inhabitants of the countries about Palestine do at this day. Their tables were raised above the ground. (Exod. xxv. 24; Jud. i. 7; Matt. xv. 27; Luke xvi. 21.) Neither Hebrews, Greeks, nor Romans used napkins or table-cloths. Their ancient custom was to sit at table, as we do now. (Prov. xxiii. 1.) But after Solomon's time the Jews leaned or lay down on couches round the table. Amos, (iv. 7,) Toby, (xi. 3,) and Ezekiel (xxiii. 41,) speak of eating on beds or couches; but this custom was not general. It was become very frequent in our Saviour's time, who ate in this manner not only on the present occasion, but also when Magdalen anointed his feet, (Matt. xxvi. 7,) and at his last supper, (John xiii. 23;) so that it seems to have then been the ordinary custom of that country. The Jews seem to have learned it from the Persians, (Esth. i. 6; vii. 8.) They took two meals a day from the times of the primitive patriarchs; but never ate before noon, (Eccles. x. 16; Isa. v. 11; Acts ii. 15.) And their dinner was usually rather a small refreshment than a meal; on fast-days the Jews never ate or drank till evening. See Calmet, *Dissert. sur le Manger des Hébreux*. Fleury, *Mœurs des Israélites, et Mœurs des Chrétiens*. Also Almay, *sur la Vie Privée des Romains*.

and sought to destroy her own soul, and how impiously she had robbed Christ of many other souls whilst he was come from heaven, and was ready to sacrifice himself on the cross for her and them ; and at this and other like considerations she was not able to moderate her grief. The inward confusion she felt at the sight of her sins and baseness made her despise all the confusion which she could receive before men, or rather rejoice in it to meet that contempt which she acknowledged herself most justly to deserve from all creatures. Attentive only on Christ, from whom she sought her health and salvation, standing at his feet, she watered them with her tears, wiped them with her hair, most respectfully kissed them, and anointed them with rich perfumes and sweet-scented essences which she had brought in an alabaster box. She now defaces or consecrates to penance whatever had formerly been an instrument of sin ; her eyes, which had been full of dangerous charms, are now converted into fountains of tears to cleanse the stains of her soul ; and her hair, once dressed in tresses and curls to ensnare souls, now hangs loose and dishevelled, and serves for a towel to wipe our Lord's feet, which she kisses with her lips, and scents with her perfumes, formerly the incentives of vice. The penitent must consecrate his riches to Christ in the poor which are his feet ; must employ his eyes in tears, and his lips in supplications for mercy, and must make all that serve to charity and mortification which before served self-love. These exterior offerings must be accompanied with the interior sacrifice of the heart, by humble confidence in the divine mercy, by lively faith and ardent love, with which the soul of a sinner approaches to Jesus, and is reconciled to him. Our holy penitent prepared as it were an altar at the feet of our Lord, on which she offered to him the true sacrifice of a contrite and humble heart. There losing the use of her speech whilst grief intercepted her words, she spoke only by her tears ; but before Him to whom the secrets of her heart were open, these sighs, and this silence itself, was a louder cry than that of any words could have been. Thus she earnestly begged of God's pure mercy, that pardon which she confessed herself most unworthy to obtain.

Jesus, who had himself inspired her with these dispositions, cast on her a favourable eye of mercy. He was come to the



Pharisee's banquet exulting with holy joy, which sprung from his foreknowledge of the conversion of this soul; the mainspring of all he did and suffered on earth being that insatiable thirst for the salvation of sinners which brought him from heaven, and which was not to be satisfied but by his sufferings on the cross, and by the last drop of his blood poured out for them upon it. In these sentiments he had testified that it was his delight to converse with sinners, out of compassion for their miseries, being desirous to draw them out of that gulf into which they had blindly plunged themselves. This he expressed by many moving parables, especially that of the prodigal son, where he paints his mercy in the strongest colouring by the manner in which he represents the good old father receiving him upon his return. From the time of his going astray the tender parent never allowed himself any respite in his tears, inquiries, and search: at length, from an eminence on which he looked about on every side, still hoping he should one day see him return, he descried him at a distance. He saw only a disfigured, languishing, and frightful spectre; the wretched remains of a debauchee and rake worn out by riots and revellings; his features horrid and defaced, his body resembling a walking skeleton, but half covered with a few filthy rags. Yet, under this disguise, his eye, directed by love, discovered him at a great distance, and before any other could see him, knew that it was his son. Far from being disgusted at such a spectacle, he ran to meet him, affection giving vigour to his enfeebled age. He remembered no longer his past behaviour, but rushing to his embraces, kissed him, and bathed his head and face with floods of tears which joy drew from his eyes, and which he mingled with the tears of sincere grief and affection which the penitent son abundantly poured forth. The good father wiped them off his face, prevented his confusion, restored him to his former rank, called for, and gave him the best robe, a ring upon his finger, (a symbol of dignity,) and shoes on his feet. He, moreover, ordered a fatted calf to be forthwith killed, and gave a splendid entertainment with music, inviting all to rejoice with him and make merry, because his son whom he lamented as dead was come to life again, and he that had been lost was found. If the birth of this son, when he was first brought into

life, had been to him a subject of great joy, how much more reason had he to rejoice seeing him now restored by a second birth, so much the more joyful, as it wiped away his tears, and changed his grievous sorrow into comfort? Thus doth our loving God and Redeemer receive the penitent sinner; thus is there joy in heaven upon one sinner that doth penance. The Holy Ghost clothes him with the robe of sanctifying grace, puts a ring on his hand, the emblem of his divine gifts, and gives shoes to his feet, that is, fortifies him with strength to tread on the venomous aspick and basilisk, and to trample upon the raging lion and dragon.

The Pharisee who had invited Jesus to his table, was shocked to see an infamous sinner well known in that city, admitted by our Lord to stand at his feet, and secretly said within himself that He could not be a prophet, or know that she was a scandalous person. To inculcate our strict obligation of shunning bad company, God commanded all intimacy with public sinners to be avoided, lest the sound should be infected by the contagion of their vices. The haughty Pharisees construed this law according to the false maxims of their pride, as if it were a part of virtue to despise sinners, and as if that respect and charity which we owe to all men, were not due to such; but the humble man, whilst he shuns the snare of wicked company, places himself below the worst of sinners, as the most ungrateful of all creatures; discharges all offices of charity, and spares neither tears nor pains to reclaim those who are gone astray. The contempt of any one is always the height of pride, which degrades a man in the sight of God beneath that sinner whom he undervalues. This was the case of the Pharisee; and such was the disorder of his pride that it betrayed him into a rash judgment by which he condemned a penitent who was then a saint; and, arraigning the goodness and mercy of God, blasphemously censured the sanctity of our Redeemer. Nothing is more wonderful in the conduct of the Son of God on earth, than the patience and meekness with which he bore the contradictions, murmurings, and blasphemies of men in most unjustly condemning his charity itself. We cannot form any idea, unless we have experienced it, what force such injurious treatment has to

make men abandon the good which they have begun, and cease bestowing favours on those who murmur against them. Christ has encouraged us by his example to this heroic practice of virtue, teaching us that the most effectual means of confounding slanderers is to instruct them by silence, meekness, perseverance in good works, and a constant return of sincere kind offices; he shows how we must still persevere steadfastly to regulate our intentions and actions according to the maxims of piety, and give ourselves no trouble about what men will say of us.

Christ sought indirectly by a parable, to cure the pride and rash judgment of this Pharisee, and convince him that she to whom much had been forgiven, then loved God the more; consequently was more acceptable to him. Some interpreters understand his words, that much was forgiven this penitent, because her love and sorrow were great and sincere; others take the meaning to be, that gratitude would make her after this mercy more fervent in love. Each interpretation is undoubtedly true; but, as A. Lapide shows, the first seems most agreeable to the context. The conversion of sinners is usually begun by motives of fear, but is always perfected by those of love; and the fervour of their love will be the measure of the grace which they will receive. By the love of vanity the soul falls from Christ; and by his divine love she returns to him. How fervent was this love in our devout penitent! By it she is become at once insensible of the reproaches and judgment of men; she defers not her sacrifice a single moment, and allows not herself the least mitigation in it; she cuts off all her engagements, extirpating them to the very root both in her heart and actions; she renounces for ever all dangerous occasions of her disorders. With what courage and resolution does she embrace all the most heroic practices of penance? confessing publicly her crimes: looking upon the utmost humiliation as her due and her gain, and as falling far short of what she deserves; chastising sin in herself without mercy, in order to excite the divine compassion; making the number and enormity of her sins the measure of her penance, or rather desiring to set no bounds to it, as the malice of her offences went beyond all bounds; and devoting the remainder of her life to tears, prayer, and every exercise of virtue and

divine love. She is the first to confess Jesus Christ publicly before men, and in the presence of his enemies. By these dispositions she deserved that her Lord should take upon him her defence, and declare himself her protector. Happy are those sinners who by the sincerity and fervour of their repentance will have at the last day their Judge, Redeemer, and God for their advocate and patron! The first and most important grace which the church teaches us in her litany most earnestly to ask of God is, that He vouchsafe, in his mercy, to bring us to this true penance.

Mercy is the property and the favourite attribute of our divine Redeemer; and tinder is not so soon kindled by fire when applied to it, as the divine mercy blots out all sin when it is implored with a heart full of confusion and truly penitent. Hence, Christ assured this humble sinner that her offences were cancelled, and that her lively faith, animated by ardent charity, which drew from her eyes tears of repentance, had saved her; and he insured to her that solid and happy peace which is the fruit of such a repentance. The pious Cardinal Berulle admires the happy intercourse between the heart of this holy penitent and that of Jesus; the first employed in the most perfect sentiments of compunction, love, and entire sacrifice; the second, in the tender motions of mercy, love, and goodness; the penitent offers floods of tears; these Jesus repays with treasures of graces and mercy, by which he makes her soul a heaven on earth, as bright and pure as the angels, and the throne of the whole blessed Trinity. The hearts of the penitent and of Jesus are two sources which perpetually answer each other; the more the penitent pours forth her heart in contrition, the more abundantly does Jesus in return bestow on her his infinite graces. It is at the feet of Jesus that these wonders are wrought; witness this example, and that of the sister of Lazarus, in the house of Simon the Leper in Bethania. It is good for us to make this our dwelling in spirit. The adorable feet of Jesus so often wearied in seeking sinners, and at last bored on the cross for their salvation, are the source of all blessings. Here this true penitent consecrates to him her heart, her mind, her actions, her perfumes, all she is or has; and here he cleanses her soul, and kindles in her his

love, which the rebel angel lost in heaven. All his attention is taken up on her, he entertains her alone, forgetting the master of the feast, and others that were seated with him at table. He even gave the Pharisee sensible proofs how much her fervour and penance surpassed in the sight of God his pretended justice and charity, though it were presumed real. Perseverance in this fervour completed her happiness. Gratitude to God for so great a mercy, and so distinguishing a grace was to her a fresh spur to advance every day in this love with greater ardour and fidelity. Thus the greater the debts were which had been forgiven her, the more earnestly she strove with all her powers to love him who vouchsafed to accept her humble sacrifice. This same motive of gratitude ought to have no less weight with those who, by God's singular grace, have always preserved their innocence; for, whether God shows mercy by pardoning sins or by preventing them in us, we are totally indebted to Him for the grace which we receive. Upon this great principle, St. Austin addresses the Pharisee who despised our holy penitent, in the following words: (1) "O Pharisee! to say you are less indebted to the divine mercy, because less was forgiven you, is a capital ingratitude and pride. For, by whom were you preserved from those crimes which you did not commit? One who hath sinned much stands indebted for the gracious pardon of exceeding great debts. Another who hath sinned less, owes to God the benefit, that he hath not defiled himself with grievous sins. You have not fallen into adultery; but God saith to you, it is owing to me who governed and protected you. If no tempter ever enticed you, this was the effect of my special care and providence in your favour. If you escaped the occasions of dangers from time and place, this likewise was ordained by me. Perhaps, a temptation and an opportunity of sinning occurred; yet I withheld you by wholesome fear, that you did not consent to the evil. You are indebted to me for your preservation from all the crimes which you did not commit; for there is no sin that one committeth, which another person might not commit if he were not preserved by him who made man." We cannot sufficiently admire and praise the excess of the divine goodness towards men who were

(1) St. Aug. Sermon. 99, c. 6, ed. Ben. olim 23, ex. 50.

born children of wrath, and vessels of weakness and corruption. Wonderful is his mercy in those whom he preserves from the contagion of vice and mortal sin ; but its influence appears with the greatest lustre in sinners whom by repentance it not only cleanses from their guilt, but exalts to the highest places in his favour. Of this our fervent penitent is an instance, who, after her conversion, surpassed others in the ardour of her charity, with which she gave herself up entirely to the service of her Redeemer.

St. Clement of Alexandria, St. Gregory the Great, and many other writers both ancient and modern, doubt not but this penitent was Mary Magdalen, of whom St. Luke makes first mention in the following chapter. This surname seems to have been given her from Magdala, a town mentioned by Josephus, or rather from Magdalum, both situated in Galilee.\* She was by extraction a Galilæan, and is reckoned among the devout women who followed Christ from Galilee. St. Luke, after speaking of the conversion of her who had been a sinner, says(1) that certain women who had been cured of wicked spirits and infirmities followed Christ in his travels through Galilee, and up to Jerusalem, and assisted him with their substance ; and our Lord received such good offices from them, to give them an occasion of exercising a gratitude and charity with which he was well pleased. Among these, the evangelist names Mary Magdalen, out of whom our Lord had cast seven devils, Joanna the wife of Chusa, Herod's steward, and one Susanna. St. Gregory the Great, Lightfoot, and some others, by these seven devils understand seven capital vices of which Magdalen was cured by her conversion : but Maldonet, Grotius, and others doubt not but she had been literally possessed by seven evil spirits, by whom she might be agitated at intervals, and which were cast forth at her conversion. Gratitude and devotion having attached her to our Divine Redeemer after so great a benefit, she followed him almost wherever he went, that she might have an opportunity of listening to all his sacred instruc-

(1) Luke viii. 2.

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\* Ferrarius, Daniel, Sanson, Calmet, and Monsieur Robert agree in placing the castle of Magdalum near the Lake of Genesareth, called the sea of Galilee.

tions, and of exercising her charity in ministering to him of her substance.\* She attended him in his sacred passion, and stood under the cross on Mount Calvary. For her to arrive at the summit of divine love, it was necessary she should pass through the sharpest trials. "No one," says Thomas à Kempis, "was highly rapt whose fidelity was not sooner or later put to the test; for he is not worthy of the high contemplation of God who hath not, for God's sake, been exercised with some tribulation; and the trial going before is usually a sign of ensuring consolation." A great mystery is contained in those words of the evangelist:—*There stood near the cross of Jesus, Mary his mother, and his mother's sister Mary of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalen.* Happy association! happy state and situation near Jesus on his cross! cries out the devout Cardinal Berulle. This is a new order of souls which consists in the spirit, in the interior, and is invisible to men, but visible and glorious to the eyes of God and the angels. An order of souls crucified with Jesus, and through Jesus, which takes its birth from his cross. The order, at the same time, both of the cross and of heaven; the order and school of love by the martyrdom of the heart; which by learning to die to the world and inordinate self-love, lives to God and his pure love. This happiness we attain to, by being united in spirit to Jesus crucified, as Magdalen was at the foot of his cross. She suffered by love what he suffered in his body by the hands of the Jews. The same cross

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\* Some take Mary Magdalen to be the sister of Martha and Lazarus, of whom mention is made in the life of St. Martha. When Jesus, six days before his passion, supped in the house of Simon surnamed the Leper, whilst Martha waited on him, and Lazarus sat at table, Mary anointed his feet and head with precious ointment which she had brought in an alabaster box. The Greeks and Romans practised the same custom of using sweet scented ointments at banquets. Judas Iscariot murmured at this action out of covetousness, pretending the price of the ointment had better been given to the poor; but Jesus commended Mary's devotion, said that her action would be a subject of admiration and edification wherever his gospel should be preached, and declared that she had by it advanced the ceremony of embalming his body for his burial. Though Christ has substituted the poor in his stead, to be succoured by us in them; yet he is well pleased when charity consecrates some part of our riches to his external worship, to whom we owe all that we possess. But nothing can be more odious than for ministers of the altar, with Judas, to cover avarice under a cloak of zeal. See John xii. 1, 2, 3; Matt. xxvi 6; Mark xiv. 3.

crucified Jesus and Magdalen in him and with him. The thorns pierced her heart with his head; and her soul was bathed in all his sorrows; but the crucifixion was in both a martyrdom of love; and that love which triumphed over Jesus by making him die on the cross, crucified her heart to all inordinate love of creatures, thenceforward to reign and triumph alone in all her affections, so that she could say in a twofold sense: "My love is crucified." Mary Magdalen forsook not her Redeemer after his death; but remained by his sacred body, was present at its interment, left it only to obey the law of observing the festival, and having rested on the Sabbath from sunset on Friday to sunset on Saturday, as soon as the festival was over went to buy spices in order to embalm our Lord's body. Having made all things ready, in company with other devout women, she set out very early the next morning with the spices, before it was light, and arrived at the sepulchre just when the sun was risen.<sup>(1)</sup> As they went they were anxious how they should get the heavy stone which shut up the door of the monument, taken away; but upon their arrival found it removed to their hands. God never fails to be with his servants in what they undertake for his honour; and the difficulties, whether real or imaginary, with the apprehension of which the devil attempts to discourage them, are banished by confidence and resolution, and vanish as shadows in the execution. The pious women looked into the sepulchre, and finding the body not there, Mary Magdalen ran to inform Peter and the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and said to them: "They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and I know not where they have laid him." SS. Peter and John, the two most fervent in love among the apostles, ran immediately to the sepulchre, and were there assured by the holy women who were at the door of the monument, that going in they had seen two angels clad in white shining apparel, and that one of them who sat at the right hand of the place where the body had lain, bid them not to fear, but to acquaint the apostles that Jesus was risen, showing them at the same time the place where his body had been laid. Peter and John having narrowly viewed the sepulchre, doubted no longer of what was

(1) Mark xvi. 2; Luke xxiv. 1; John xx. 1.



told them, and in great astonishment returned to Jerusalem to the other disciples. Mary Magdalen, who had brought them to the sepulchre of her Lord, made the throne of divine love, would not return with them, or be drawn from the sacred place where the true ark of the testament, the body of her Redeemer, had rested three days, and continued at the monument bemoaning herself for not being able to see her Redeemer, either dead or alive. Not being able to assuage the violence of her grief and of her desire to see her Lord, she stood weeping without the door of the sepulchre. The entrance being low and narrow she stooped down to look into it again and again, and beheld the two angels in white, one of them sitting at the place where Jesus's head lay, and the other at the feet, who thus accosted her: "Woman, why weepest thou?" She replied: "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him." Neither the surprise of this apparition nor the brightness and glory of these heavenly messengers could touch her heart, or divert her thoughts from him whom she loved, and whom alone she sought, and we suffer so many foolish objects to distract us, and carry away our affections. In her answer to the angels she called him *My Lord*, to express the share which by love she had in him, and her title to him as her God, Lord, and Redeemer. Afterwards to the apostles she calls him *The Lord*, to excite their duty and love to the common Lord of all creatures. But why did not these angels inform her that he whom she so earnestly sought was risen in glory? Doubtless, because the Lord of angels would reserve it to himself to give her that comfort. Blessed be thy name for ever, O adorable Jesus! who so tenderly wipest away the tears of thy servants with thy own hand, and sweet voice, and convertest their sorrow into transports of inexpressible joy. Jesus first manifested himself to Magdalen in disguise to make a trial himself of her love; but his tenderness could not suffer a delay, and he soon discovered himself openly to her; for, as soon as she had returned the answer above mentioned to the angels, she turned about and saw Jesus himself standing by her, but took him for the gardener. He asked her why she wept, and whom she sought? She said to him: "Sir, if thou hast taken him hence tell me where

thou hast laid him, and I will take him away." According to the remark of St. Bernard and of St. Thomas of Villa Nova, love made her not to name him, because being full of him alone, she imagined every body else must be so too, and that this stranger must understand of whom she spoke. Love also made her forget her own weakness, and think herself able to carry a heavy corpse, provided she could be so happy any way as to serve her beloved; for to ardent love nothing seems impossible or difficult. Jesus, infinitely pleased with her earnestness and love, manifested himself to her, saying with his sweet and amiable voice: *Mary!* He at first mentions her tears, and the object which she so earnestly sought, to excite her love. All this while she knew him not, though he was present and conversing with her, because these words carried not with them the ray of light to discover him; but her name was no sooner pronounced by him, but his voice excited in her a rapture of light and love, and gave her the most sublime and full knowledge, and the sweetest enjoyment of the most desirable of objects, of him risen in glory who was the life of the world, and her life. Hearing him sweetly call her by her name, and thus knowing him, she, turning, said, *Rabboni*, that is, Master. And casting herself at his feet in transports of devotion, she would have embraced them. But Jesus said to her: "Do not touch me; for I have not yet ascended to my Father; but go to my brethren, and tell them that I ascend to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." That is, my Father by nature, yours by grace, says St. Austin. He bade her make haste to carry his message to his beloved disciples for their speedy comfort, and not lose time in giving demonstrations of her reverence and love. St. Leo explains these words of our Lord as follows: (1) "It is not a time to demonstrate your affection for me in such a manner as if I were in a mortal state; I am with you but for a short time, to strengthen your faith. When I shall have ascended to my Father, then you shall again possess me for eternity." Thus Mary Magdalen, out of whom Jesus had cast seven evil spirits, was the first who saw Him after his rising from the dead. This pre-eminence of grace, this distinguishing favour and love of

(1) St. Leo, Serm. 2. de Ascens.

Jesus, was the recompense of her ardent love, by which she attended last his body in the sepulchre, from which she was only drawn by the duty of the Sabbath ; and she was the first who returned thither : she sought him dead, and found him living. In obedience to his commands, she immediately departed to acquaint the apostles with the joyful message.(1) Jesus, who suffered her so long at his feet to satisfy her ardent love and compunction, when he received her to mercy, here allows her after her long search, scarcely to remain a few moments in the state of enjoyment ; but he separates himself from her to return into the secret of inaccessible light, invisible to mortal eye. Why does not he who is Life itself allow her to live in his happy presence ? Why does not he allow her at least as many hours of enjoyment as she had spent in her search of him ? But this separation itself is an effect of his greatest love, this life being a state of action, of conflict, and of trials for the exercise of virtue ; and Magdalen in this separation itself, which was from him, by his appointment, and for her greater advancement in his love, found by obedience, zeal, and resignation to his will, her comfort, life, and great increase of his love and all graces. The other devout women who had seen the angels at the sepulchre, in their return to Jerusalem, were also favoured with an apparition of our Lord. He having met and saluted them, they prostrated themselves at his feet, and embraced them, worshipping him, though they were greatly afraid.(2) Jesus bid them not fear, but go and tell his brethren that he would go before them into Galilee, where they should see him.\*

(1) John xx ; Calmet's Vie de J. C. ch. 57

(2) Matt. xxviii. 9 ; Luke xxiv. 10.

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\* Certain Greeks, writers who lived in the seventh or later ages, tell us, that after the ascension of our Lord, St. Mary Magdalen accompanied the Blessed Virgin and St. John to Ephesus, and died and was buried in that city. This is affirmed by Modestus, patriarch of Jerusalem in 920,\* and by St. Gregory of Tours. St. Willibald, in the account of his pilgrimage to Jerusalem, says, that her tomb was shown him at Ephesus. Simeon Logotheta mentions that the Emperor Leo the Wise caused her relics to be translated from Ephesus to Constantinople, and laid in the church of St. Lazarus, about the year 890. But these modern Greeks might perhaps confound Mary the sister of the Blessed Virgin, or the

\* Hom. in Marias Unguenta ferentia.

It is an ancient popular tradition of the inhabitants of Provence, in France, that St. Mary Magdalen, or perhaps Mary, the sister of Lazarus, St. Martha, and St. Lazarus, with some other disciples of our Lord, after his ascension, being expelled by the Jews, put to sea, and landed safe at Marseilles, of which church they were the founders, St. Lazarus being made the first bishop of that city.\* The relics of these saints were discovered in Provence in the thirteenth century, those of St. Mary Magdalen at a place now called St. Maximin's, those of St. Martha at Tarascon, upon the Rhone, and others in St. Victor's, at Marseilles. They were authentically proved genuine by many monuments found with them in these several places. Charles I., King of Naples, and brother of St. Lewis, was at that time sovereign count of Provence; but he being then in Naples, engaged in war with the house of Arragon, his son, Charles of Anjou, prince of Salerno, governed Provence. This prince was beaten at sea by the fleet of the King of Arragon in 1284, and taken prisoner; and though his father died the year following, he could not recover his liberty before the year 1288. He ascribed his deliverance to the intercession of our saint, the discovery of whose relics had excited his devotion to her: he had already founded the church of St. Maximin's upon the spot where they were discovered, and assisted at the solemn translation of them in 1279. He committed this royal foundation to the Dominican friars, and the prior, who is nominated by the king, is exempt from the ordinary jurisdiction both of the archbishop of Aix, and of the immediate superiors of his order. The chief part of the relics of this saint was translated from the subterraneous chapel in the middle of this church, and being put in a porphyry urn, the present of

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sister of Lazarus, or some other Mary among those who are mentioned in the gospel with Mary Magdalen. The relics shown in the monastery at Vezelay in Burgundy, ten leagues from Auxerre, in the diocese of Autun, may be a portion of the body of St. Mary Magdalen, or of some other Mary mentioned in the gospel. This famous ancient monastery of Vezelay was secularized in 1537; and the church, which is longer than that of our Lady at Paris, is now served only by ten canons.

\* See Nat. Alex. sæc. 1; and Solier the Bollandist, Julij, t. 5, who confirms the tradition of the inhabitants of Provence, (p. 213, § 14,) and rejects that of Vezelay in Burgundy, whither some pretend that her body was translated out of Provence. Ib. § 11, 12, 13, p. 207,

Pope Urban VIII., was placed over the high altar. King Lewis XIV. and the principal noblemen of his court were present at this translation, which was performed with great pomp in 1660. The saint's head, with many other relics, remains in the subterraneous chapel; it is set in a gold case, enchased with large diamonds, and surmounted with the royal crown of Charles II., styled King of Sicily or Naples. Before it is a curious statue of Queen Anne of Brittany, on her knees, made of enamelled gold. Three leagues from St. Maximin's, towards Marseilles, is a famous solitary convent of Dominicans, situated on a very high rock, encompassed on every side with wild deserts and mountains. It is called La Ste. Baume; which in the Provençal language signifies Holy Cave. It was anciently a celebrated hermitage, and is a place now resorted to by pilgrims, out of devotion to this glorious saint. Both Latins and Greeks keep the festival of St. Mary Magdalen on the 22d of July; it is in some places a holiday of precept, and was such formerly in England, as appears from the council of Oxford in 1222.

The pious Cardinal Berulle was most tenderly devoted to this great saint, whom he called his principal patroness; and nothing can be more affecting in sentiments of compunction and divine love than the discourses which he has left us in her honour.\* She is the excellent model of penitents. If we have sinned, why do not we by her example speedily lay hold of the sovereign remedy of penance? If violent temptations, and terrible enemies seem to stand in our way, if the world allure us, if the devil fight fiercely against us, and unbridled passions are rebellious and clamorous, other penitents have courageously surmounted greater obstacles than we can meet with. God incites us no less than he did them, and he is no less ready to fight in us, and for us. Jesus holds out the crown to encourage us, and has already prepared the banquet of spiritual joy and sweetness for us at our return. If we arise in earnest he will come, and will make his solemn supper in our soul; and

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\* These are the fruit of his pious meditations in the chapel of the Magdalen, the favourite retired place of his devotions, in which an excellent marble statue of this great man on his knees, is erected in the church of his Carmelite nuns at Paris. See his Works, pp. 369 to 405.

there will be exultation and a voice resounding praise through the whole heavenly court; but we must never think our penance accomplished, must never put a stop to our tears so long as we remember that we have sinned: God prolongs our life that we may continue to weep for our ingratitude in having offended him. If our conversion be sincere, to make amends for past losses and offences, we must consecrate to the divine service with the utmost fervour all our time, and all that we are to do. The Magdalen, after Jesus Christ had rendered himself master of her soul, had neither heart nor liberty but to give herself entirely to her deliverer.

### ST. VANDRILLE, OR WANDREGISILUS,

ABBOT OF FONTENELLES, IN NORMANDY.

He was nearly related to Pepin of Landen and Erchinoald, the two first lords in the kingdom of Austrasia; and in his youth was made count of the palace under Dagobert I. He was humble on the highest pinnacle of honours, and mortified amidst pleasures. To retrieve himself from the dissipation and other ill effects, of which hurry and much conversation with the world are dangerous occasions, he frequently retired into his closet, and there conversed much with God by devout prayer, and with himself by serious consideration on his own duties, condition, and spiritual miseries. In compliance with the will of his parents he took to wife a virtuous and noble lady; but, on the very day of his marriage, obtained her consent that they should both consecrate their virginity to God, which they did by a mutual vow on the same day. Vandrille, in 629, took the monastic habit at Montfaucon, in Champagne, an abbey then lately founded by St. Baudri. He afterwards built a monastery upon his own estate, called Elisang. In order to perfect himself in the most approved rules and exercises of an ascetic or monastic life, he took a journey to Bobio and to Rome. After his return into France, he spent ten years in the monastery of Romans, on the Isere. After which term, with the blessing of his abbot, he repaired to St. Oüen, archbishop of Rouen, by whom he was some time after ordained priest. In 648 the saint founded the famous monastery of