

# Do Not Cling To Me

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Newsletter)

**C s for Cling, as in "Do not cling to me." (Jn. 20:17)**

So says the risen Christ to Mary Magdalene outside the empty tomb. Not that she should not "touch" him, as the older translations put it. In fact, in the very next scene he literally dares another of his followers to touch him, nailprints and scar and all. What he is saying to Mary is, Do not hold onto me...yet, "because I have not yet ascended to the Father." His glorification was almost completed but not quite. Now, at this last moment, was no time to hold him back. Not only for his sake but for Mary's a well. There would soon be time for real clinging, quite bodily clinging. But to cling now, just short of the finish, would be settling for less than the whole resurrection. To cling to only this much Christ was premature, static cling. The risen One was finally out of the woods and on the home stretch, precisely for his clingers. They must not stop him now, so close to home.

Why could Mary Magdalene not let go? For the same reason none of us can. This Christ to whom she clung was, to put it bluntly, a bird in the hand, a sure thing. Let go of that

and you're left empty-handed all over again. Mary Magdalene knew about such emptiness and the cynicism it breeds. At least this risen Jesus in the garden was till her kind of flesh and blood. Who knows what would become of him were he to leave her now and, as he says vaguely, "ascend to the Father?" At least this Christ in Mary's arms was still bodily the way she was, as bodily as her "Rabbuni," as bodily as any garden variety gravedigger or – aye, there's the rub – as bodily as any resurrected Lazarus who could always die again. Still, rather to have and to hold him here and now than to give him up to heaven, wherever that is.

There are whole theologies that think as Mary did. And don't we all? If Christ is in heaven, so we assume, he is not on earth. Or if he is on earth he is here only as divine, "personally" maybe but no longer as one of us. Bread and wine? Sure. But flesh and blood? God with a human body? Here and now, still? In the Lord's Supper? Once he's gone off and "ascended?" That sounds suspiciously like a "line" you've been handed before if you've ever been jilted. Mary Magdalene had reason to cling. But our Lord had better reason for her not to cling, just yet.

**0 is for Our, as in "our Father."**

Said the risen Jesus to Mary Magdalene, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." In fact wasn't that how Jesus' Father

became also our Father,  
by Jesus' presenting God with a new offspring, himself as one of  
us? He ascended back  
to the Father the same Son of God as always, yes, but this time  
as the Son of God made  
flesh, our flesh. The Son whom God had earlier sent into the  
world came back very  
different from the Son who had left. In the meantime he had  
become every bit as human  
as he always was divine. This was the Son, the evangelist tells  
us, who had snuggled "in  
the bosom of the Father." (Jn. 1:18) (How motherly of God to  
have a bosom.) Faith can  
imagine God now welcoming the Son back, "My, how you have  
changed, and really for  
the better; how like dear Mary Magdalene you now are and like  
all her dear flesh and  
blood siblings; on you they look good; any Parent of yours is  
delighted to be a Parent of  
theirs."

An old Christian confession urges us to "rejoice without  
ceasing" because the Christ who  
now reigns at the right hand of God is "our own flesh and  
blood." (FC-9) That being so,  
that our kind of earthling has made it all the way to Godhood,  
we can be sure that that  
flesh of ours, now deified in Christ, is no longer the old  
garden variety, biodegradable  
body that Mary Magdalene was willing to settle for in the  
graveyard that morning. That  
was why the risen Lord urged her not to cling just yet. True,  
the flesh and blood he bears  
is still ours, thank God, but now wondrously recycled through

the death of his cross,  
through his open sepulcher and into the very bloodline of the  
Trinity. It was a good thing  
that Mary Magdalene, gutsy believer, let him go when she did. He  
has never been the  
same since. Nor has God. Nor have we.

That is why Jesus on Easter morning could now begin calling his  
disciples his siblings.

“Go and tell my brothers,” he says to Mary Magdalene, who also  
would now become his  
sister. That is the first time in the whole long Gospel of John  
that Jesus referred to them  
in that family way. The God to whom he was about to return, but  
now return as one of  
them, would thereby become their Parent as well. And they would  
become God’s junior  
deities and the very Son of God’s own blood relatives. Pretty  
vast connections for such  
small earthlings as us!

**I is for Intake, as in “Take and eat, this is my body,” “Take  
and drink, this is my blood.”**

Or, as Jesus is quoted in the Gospel of John,

*Anyone who eats this bread will live forever; and the bread  
that I shall give is my  
flesh, for the life of the world...Anyone who does eat my flesh  
and drink my  
blood has eternal life, and I shall raise [her] up on the last  
day. (6:51,54)*

To **this** flesh and blood, dear Magdalene, dear gutsy believers,  
feel free to cling – this

flesh and blood which has risen not just from death, like Lazarus, but into God and back to us again. For this flesh and blood is no longer terminal like ours. The Eucharist is not cannibalistic magic. This flesh and blood is for the life of the world forever.

This body of his **is** meant for clinging, for dear life. "Take" it, we are urged. Take it on faith but take it quite bodily, into our own hands, to our lips, into our weak and mortal bodies. It may come as a shock to the system, but only as life is a shock to death. Take it

for what it is worth, the death and resurrection and the joy forever of the offspring of God. Easter morning is happy, yet not as happy as it gets – on all the mornings after, in the Eucharist. And even that is only a foretaste of the feast to come.

**G is for Geo-phile, which means Earth-lover.**

G could as well stand for God, the original Geophile, who, as the evangelist says, "so loved the world." This year, 1990, the world celebrates Earth Day in the same season that Christians celebrate Easter. That figures. For a God who not only creates earth but whose only-begotten becomes an earthling personally and bodily, sharing the earth's curse and death and surviving it still an earthling and still God, and all in order to nurse the poor earth back to health on his own flesh and blood – such a God must surely qualify

as one tough environmentalist.

Not only ought we follow suit with godlike love of the environment, as if we were the center and everything else were our surroundings. No, we **are** the environment. To God, we are, who is the center around whom we gather, we and the sun and moon, the dew and frost, the lightning and clouds, the beasts and cattle, the whales and all who move in the waters. Then why do we prefer to distance ourselves from the rest of God's environment? Is it merely because we are self-centered? Isn't it rather that we are self-centered because, as Walker Percy puts it, we feel "lost in the cosmos" and so feel threatened by the rest of creation? Yet isn't that also why the Creator, the very Centre of all, moved in with us, at home in our flesh, Christ the earthling? Ever since, any home of his is home for us.

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