

Homily based on the readings from July 22, 2025 (Song of Songs 3.1-4b; John 20.1-2, 11-18)

As some of you know, I spent much of last week at a Benedictine monastery in Ohio. I am immensely grateful to the Benedictine brothers for their hospitality and for allowing me to participate for a few days in the life of their community. As one would expect, the rhythms of life in a monastery are dramatically different from what most of us encounter on a daily basis. Several years ago, when I was trying to describe a similar experience to one of my friends, I kept getting caught up in the superficial details: the clothing the monks wore, the food they ate, the specific schedule of their daily prayers. It finally occurred to me that the distinctive aspects of monastic life – while important – are only a means to an end. On a fundamental level, the reason someone chooses to reside in a monastery or a convent has nothing to do with wanting to live in isolation or to follow a prescribed set of rules and regulations. The *purpose* is incredibly simple – to devote the *fullness* of one's *being* to the love of Jesus Christ.

It is tempting to pretend that such a goal is just the responsibility of a few chosen men and women – those who are called to a particular form of religious life. Nevertheless, we all know that is not the case. The most important relationship in the life of *any* Christian is not with his parents, not with his children, not even with his spouse – but with our Risen Lord and Savior. Remember our Lord’s own admonition:

Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me,  
and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of  
me.

Regardless of any other covenants or kinship, Jesus Christ *must* be the *one* true love of our life.

If there is *any* individual who totally embodies this principle, it is Mary Magdalene – whose feast we celebrate today. As we know, she was one of Christ’s most fervent disciples – who bathed his feet with her tears and wept for him outside the empty tomb. In recent years, many self-professed “Biblical scholars” have tried to argue that Jesus and Mary

Magdalene had some sort of romantic relationship – or even that they were covertly married. Besides being *utter* nonsense, this assertion completely misses the point. To say that these two were husband and wife would actually be *downgrading* their relationship. As wonderful as married love is, it does not hold a *candle* to the intimacy we see in Holy Scripture between this sinful woman and her beloved teacher.

One of the most beautiful consequences of loving Christ *completely* is that this love, in its own remarkable way, radiates outward to the people around us. Our love for our families is not *diminished* by our love for Christ, but is fulfilled. Likewise, the love of Christ does not *negate* the love the Benedictine monks have for their brethren, but perfects it. One cannot find a saint in the *history* of the Church whose love for Jesus took away – even to the slightest degree – from his or her love for other people. Nevertheless, we must *always* remember who belongs first and foremost in our hearts: our Crucified and Risen Lord, whose *unquenchable* mercy satisfies every thirst and whose *unfathomable* compassion wipes away every tear.