

You'll have to prove it to me. The official position of the Grand Encampment is, "*There is no proof of direct connection between the ancient order and the modern order known today as the Knights Templar.*"

There are, however, some clear similarities.

First, both ancient and modern orders are specifically Christian, and both are based on military organization, with distinct levels of command.

Moreover, both the ancient and modern orders celebrate Easter as the central focus of communal worship.

Remember this: except among high aristocracy in the Middle Ages, Christmas was not always a major focus of Christian worship. **Easter**, however, was the central festival of the church. The Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus was (and remains) the single most important aspect of the meaning of the religion itself. Easter, the Feast of the Resurrection, celebrates the event in which we believe by faith, and without which our faith becomes less and less viable. In a simplistic word, without Easter, Christianity is not and cannot be Christianity.

Let me expand on that—and now it's just John talking to you, my Brother and fellow Sir Knight.

As Christians, we believe deeply in the resurrection from the dead of Jesus of Galilee, the Christ, and the expiator for our sins. His death and resurrection are the central focus of our faith, and in the selfless act of our Savior we can ask forgiveness of our sins—if, that is, we honestly and sincerely repent of "our manifold sins and wickedness."

It's wise to bear in mind that the Holy Bible is "the rule and guide of our faith." The point here is not to argue about whether the Biblical report of Jesus's death and resurrection is historically accurate. There are times when faith is stronger than history, and the Easter story is one of those.

Jesus taught us much during his short life on this earth. In the amazing explosion of the Easter story we can become bedazzled, and remember only selectively some of the other lessons our Master taught us.

We know what happened on Good Friday and on Easter. I don't need to rehearse those stories.

What happened right after the angels rolled away the stone that sealed Jesus's tomb, and He arose from death?

Jewish burial rites were—and remain—quite specific. When His body was removed from the cross, He was washed, while prayers were recited. Then, as a newborn infant is wrapped in swaddling clothes, His body was wrapped in white linen.

Let me remind you of one story that happened *after* the resurrection—a story that tells us how we should behave in times of the greatest adversity. We find it in John's Gospel (20:11-18).

Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?"

"They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. He asked her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?"

Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him."

Jesus said to her, "Mary."

She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means "Teacher")

Who was Mary Magdalene? The four Gospels that are now a part of the Holy Bible tell us a part of that story. The gospels that were **not** included by the Council of Nicea (and other Councils of the early church) expand on what we can learn.

Let me start with who she was not. She was not a repentant prostitute. That misconception comes from the sixth century, and results from erroneous reading of several Biblical passages. Nor were Mary and Jesus married, as romantic poets of the Middle Ages and some more recent novelists suppose.

Mary may have been a wealthy businesswoman, and "Magdalene" probably suggests she was from Magdala, a fishing town on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee. "Magdalene" (or "the Magdalene") was appended to her name because Mary was the most common female name for women in first-century Israel. Note that Jesus's mother and several other women in the Gospels share the name.

The Magdalene was one of the Savior's most fervent followers. We first hear of her in Luke's Gospel:

... Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; Joanna the wife of Chuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means.

This suggests that, when she joined the group who followed Jesus from place to place, Mary was suffering from severe physical or mental anguish, and Jesus healed her. It's also clear from this passage, that several women of status were in the entourage that followed Jesus on his ministerial journey.

But back to Mary, early on Easter morning, returning to Jesus's tomb so that she might anoint the body with sweet spices, as one final way of honoring her teacher and good friend.

Her body is **GONE!** Mary bursts into bitter tears. Who could be so unfeeling as to desecrate a grave, and particularly the grave of her teacher Jesus.

There are two people there. She doesn't know they are angels. She suspects they may have had something to do with robbing the grave.

Her tears flow all the more bitterly—enough to blind the poor woman.

Weeping, she asks where the robbers have taken Jesus. So far as we know, she received no answer.

Completely distraught now, she turns to leave—but there's a third person there. She thinks it's the gardener. Maybe he will know where they have taken Jesus's body.

"Sir," she says, "Where have they taken Him,"

She is met with a miracle. "Mary," the man says, calling her by name.

She knows that voice! It's **JESUS**. He **LIVES!** He is **THERE**, right in front of her, calling her by name in that voice she knows and loves so well.

Her deepest grief turns, in the utterance of a single word, to joy we can only begin to imagine.

Think for just a moment about how human, and yet how divine that moment is!

There is a profound lesson there for you and for me, my Brother.

Every man—every person—who reads or hears these words knows grief that far transcends disappointment. I'm not talking about the feeling when you're skipped over for a promotion you deserve at work, or driving a distance to purchase something special, only to find it's sold out. None of that. That's disappointment.

I'm talking about how you feel when a sibling, a spouse, a best friend dies suddenly. You had so much to say, to do, to experience with that person. Now it can never happen in this life.

And the bitter tears flow, blinding you, and it seems they will never end.

Turn then, my beloved Brother, as I have done all too often in my own life, to that source of respite from adversity.

Listen for your Savior's voice. Listen carefully and silently.

I have no doubt you, too, will hear that voice you know and love so well, the voice of your Savior Jesus the Christ, calling your name gently to comfort you, and let you know He is there with you.

Going to church on Easter Sunday is a good thing. So is singing the "Alleluias!" in the hymn *Christ the Lord is Risen Today!*

But I think the true meaning of Easter will come over you when you are alone, contemplating your own relationship with your Father in Heaven and, in the silence of that personal worship, hearing Jesus, your Lord and Savior, calling your own name.

In the midst of your Easter celebration with family and friends, take a few minutes by yourself to consider the God who made you and His Son who saved you.

And with the Holy Spirit at your side, give thanks and praise!

Listen for that still, quiet voice of complete love for you.

Happy Easter to you, my dear Brother and fellow Knight of the Temple, and to your family and friends!

May the peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you, now and forever, and bring you peace and joy in this life as a distant reflection of the life that is to come!

*John M. Klaus
Grand Prelate*

