

Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father

Some people have been asking why did Jesus say to Mary Magdalene, “Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father” but, allowed Thomas to do so. Different people have interpreted this verse variously. What does this verse really mean? This verse is found in the Gospel according to St. John, chapter 20, verse 17. And it states, “Jesus saith unto her, **Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: But go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God.** Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that he had spoken these things unto her.”

So, why did John quote Jesus as having said, “Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father”? Should this be understood to mean that Mary Magdalene wasn’t allowed to touch Christ after His resurrection? To properly interpret this, it is important to realize that, as is frequently the case, John’s account offers a unique perspective on the event. His take offers more about what Christ sees in a person’s heart, rather than the synoptic accounts of sense perception. Compare John’s version with St. Matthew’s (28:9-10): “... Jesus met them, saying, All hail. **And they came and held him by the feet,** and worshipped him. Then said Jesus unto them, ‘Be not afraid: go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me.’”

St. John’s coverage of Christ’s initial appearance to St. Mary Magdalene might be better understood by reading the following paraphrase. Since you already believe that it is I, speaking to you, and that I have arisen, be assured that I will be around for a while, so that we may talk further. But, now, your assignment is to go and tell my brethren about my resurrection from the dead. Otherwise, this Bible citation is apt to be misinterpreted as meaning that she (a woman) should not touch Him after His resurrection and before His ascension. All the Gospels confirm Mary Magdalene to have been the first one to see Jesus after His resurrection. If the real issue had been that she wasn’t good enough to touch Him, Christ would have shown Himself to one or more of His disciples. It does not make sense to suppose women who discovered His resurrection before the rest of His followers; weren’t allowed to touch Him. Because Mary Magdalene had told the disciples the good news, she is known both as the apostle to the apostles, and as an equal to the apostles.

In another instance, Jesus invited Thomas to touch him. Thus, he, who had not been with the other disciples when Jesus appeared earlier, might realize our Lord knew what was in his heart, even while he yet doubted. In the same chapter, John reported “The other disciples, therefore; said unto him, ‘We have seen the Lord.’ But he said unto them, ‘Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.’ On the eighth day after the resurrection while the doors were shut, Jesus appeared again in the midst of His disciples and this time Thomas was in the house. Jesus said to them ‘Peace be unto you’”. Since there is nothing hidden from Our Lord Jesus Christ, He knew what Thomas had told the other disciples. And that is why after He greeted them said to Thomas, “Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing (John 20:25). Reread the whole thing carefully. Note, this Gospel does not indicate

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whether or not Thomas touched our Lord. Instead, it records his faith statement, “My Lord and my God.”

Therefore, by comparing the above citations, we should learn that Christ desires all, including us, who have not seen what they saw, to receive the blessings of belief, rather than remaining faithless. We should appreciate Christ’s sensitivity to individual needs, in receiving the seed of faith, rather than gender differentiation, preferring that only men (the disciples) should touch Him after His resurrection.

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