

Mary Magdalene

In yet another place, Patricia and I look upon traditional religious scenes and symbols and are moved with awe at deeper meanings. This time we are looking at the grand painting hanging on the wall space at the end of a room in the Museo Civico in Sansepolcro,

Italy. It is a scene of the Last Supper by an unknown artist of the 17th century, painted for the minor observant church which is now closed and *not* open for visitors. The church was built in 1560 or roughly a century before the painting adorned its wall. We stand before this painting, stunned by its beauty, even its existence, and its placement in this room!

Apparently recently refinished, the painting has a striking resemblance to Leonardo Da Vinci's famous painting(s) of the same Last Supper. There are 13 at the table, mostly all facing the painter. Jesus is in the center. To his left (not right as in Da Vinci's rendition) sits the only unbearded person, with braided hair and a very feminine appearance. The title of the painting is "Suppressed Magdalene of the Minor Observant church" and is recorded on the sign describing the painting in both Italian and English. It is an intriguing title, and we eagerly turned our earphones to the appropriate English translation.

The voice says something like, "Now on the far wall in the next room you'll see a painting of the Last Supper. On the wall facing it..." Then began the customary long explanations of the other pictures in the room. Our friend Ted Hunter had done the same tour with a guide. He had a similar experience and noticed that questions about the painting were not answered!

Mary Magdalene is an important New Testament figure. According to the New Testament, she was at the crucifixion and was the first to "see" Jesus resurrected. She was, arguably, the one who anointed Jesus (one of the rare events mentioned in all four gospels.) She was close to Jesus. In the Gnostic Gospel of Philip (not chosen in later centuries as one of the "orthodox" scriptures) she is referred to as his companion "who he often kissed on the mouth." A strong tradition exists in southern France that she was his wife and bore Jesus' daughter, Sarah. Some claim she was, more than anyone, his successor.

continued in the book...