

Fst. of St. Mary Magdalen (16<sup>th</sup> Sun. in OT)  
July 20-21, 2019

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As I was “percolating” on what I wanted to share with you this morning from our Gospel reading regarding Mary Magdalen, sometimes referred to as Mary of Magdala, I couldn't help but think of how we are all called to speak the truth of our own experiences with the Risen Christ just as Mary Magdalene did in our gospel stories over 2,000 years ago. By her very life, she was not afraid to challenge the religious and social norms of her day.

So, just who is Mary Magdalene? I'm sure many of us grew up being taught that Mary Magdalen was a public sinner, a prostitute. Nothing could be further from the truth! This was especially promoted by Renaissance art, which was little more than pious pornography! Yet the biblical account of Mary paints a far different portrait. Nowhere in scripture is she identified as a public sinner, but even in our own time, a while back, in productions such as JESUS CHRIST SUPERSTAR, Mary was misrepresented. It was Mary Magdalene who retained her influence throughout those early years and significantly shaped our understanding of not only Jesus, but the early community found in the Acts of the Apostles. Today we heard from John's Gospel, but in Luke's Gospel we hear how Mary traveled with Jesus, along with Joanna and Susanna, supporting his mission from their own financial resources! Actually, Mary Magdalene was one of Jesus' most influential apostles who was faithful to him throughout his ministry and was the first to proclaim his resurrection. She was called an “Apostle to the Apostles” by the early Church Fathers, which is saying something, a title reiterated by Pope Francis as he elevated her celebration to a Feast Day, like the male apostles have, which we will celebrate tomorrow.

In a prayer service for the Feast of Mary Magdalen, these words ring so true to me, and I quote, “We give you thanks, O God, that in every generation You have raised up prophets and truth tellers. These voices that challenge call us as Church and society to conversion and reconciliation, to power to move us from despair to hope, from grief to healing, from fear to courage, and from death to new life.” Such a meaningful prayer. May we open our ears to hear voices that challenge; open our eyes to see the possibilities and obstacles in our midst; and open our hearts to a new Church.

Gina Messina Dysert, a Catholic theologian says this:

“As a Catholic feminist, I believe in the full humanity of every person – women and men alike. I believe that we must end sexism and all oppressions; **one must uproot all in order to uproot any.** And so, while I am grateful for a pope who is deeply committed to social justice and demonstrates a true love for humanity; I dream of a pope who recognizes that the injustices committed against women based on gender and fueled by the teaching of the Vatican must be addressed in a crusade for a socially just society.”

Gina ends by addressing Pope Francis – referring to the Year of Mercy that he called a few years ago – “With utmost respect, I wonder will this be a time when the Vatican confesses its sin against women?” I totally agree with that statement!

In lifting up voices that challenge, Deb Rose-Milavec, Co-Director of Future Church, who recently spoke here at All Saints on **Cracks of Hope in a Rigid Institution: Don't Throw in the Towel** wrote:

“Mary Magdalene challenges us today – just as she did some 2000 years ago. Speaking to us from Scripture, she challenges our notions of what's possible with God; whom God chooses to minister; whom God calls to speak, testify, and preach; and with whom God entrusts the Good News. They are people of every age, race, religion, and situation in life - speaking truth in love – often to power – challenging Church and society.”

So as we celebrate the July 22<sup>nd</sup> Feast of St. Mary of Magdala, we also lift up and celebrate today's voices that challenge and pray that their words also will bring about change.

In Michele Obama's book, **BECOMING**, she comments that after visiting Nelson Mandela who had worked and waited, was tolerant and under discouraged, Michelle was propelled by that spirit of what his life was teaching her “that progress and change happen slowly; not in two years, four years or even a life time.” Mandela was teaching her “we were planting seeds of change, the fruit of which we might never see. We had to be patient.” However in the Roman Catholic Church, women have been patient for over 2,000 years for ordained ministry!

So where are we today regarding the role of women in the Church? I truly believe that Sister Joan Chittister is a prophet in our day who is not afraid to speak her mind as Mary Magdalene did so long ago. In her latest book, **THE TIME IS NOW – A CALL TO UNCOMMON COURAGE**, Joan wrote of the Psalmists who taught us that God is with us always. “Then came Jesus, the One who models for all of us what it means to live outside the norms of a society that has forgotten its soul. Jesus did justice for Samaritans, for Romans, for sinners in the very face of injustice. He spoke the language of equality in everything he did. He laid down his very life in the cause of healing the outcast, commissioning the women, raising the weak to life again, and cleansing the temple. Jesus left for us to follow, **whatever its end**, however rejected by many, no matter how long it takes.”

Let's look to our present day prophets. Joan points out in her book how Thomas Merton was rejected even by some of his brothers in his community. Dorothy Day was scorned by the bishops but she kept on in shining a light into the dark corners of poverty. Theologians like Fr. Roy Bourgeois supported women's arguments for Roman Catholic ordination and was denied teaching positions in the Church. Sister Theresa Kane way back called on the Pope to expand ministries to women and was censored for it, also. But not one of them backed down and went on to lead in other ways. “It is the paradox of prophecy that what calls us to newness also provides a sense of boundaries that marks the distance between rebellion and prophecy” as Joan Chittister put it so well! These are the people, like Mary Magdalene, who continue to give us hope.

So as we celebrate the Feast of St Mary Magdalene tomorrow, we turn to Mary, and many like her, that as we continue on our journey – we will be guided by the Spirit, who by virtue of our Baptism and Confirmation has given us the gifts of Courage and Hope, and has filled this generation of women, men, and our gifted young people with those same gifts of Courage and Hope for the future of our Church.

The Spirit, she is a movin' and she is wild! Amen.