

Women Witnesses - Mary Magdalene Series

"Feast of Sts. Julia and Praxides"

July 21, 2003

by Fr. Brian Joyce

This week, we reflect with Mary Magdalene. We did at the eight o'clock Mass yesterday, and each morning through Thursday we will have women of our parish sharing their witness and reflections.

You know, there is no question about the importance of women in the life of our Church, remarkable women. And we can all name some, if we think, in our own lives, of those who have touched us. You think of the hospitals. You think of the schools. You think of the monastic communities. You think of music, for example, so much the witness and work of women in our Church. And yet, along the way, it keeps getting silenced or forgotten. Just to think of remarkable women, all you have to do is use the name "Theresa," and we have Theresa of Avila, Therese the Little Flower, Teresa of Calcutta, all great examples.

And yet, if you look through the two thousand years, they seem to be getting silenced. Mary Magdalene is an easy example because we know she quickly got confused with the sinful, penitent harlot, and then everyone from artists to Hollywood made hay with that and forgot that that wasn't that Mary at all. Mary Magdalene was the one who was sent by Jesus to the Apostles to mission, to preach the Good News, and the one loyal to Him even at the cross. There are others forgotten along the way. And I don't suggest this to take a position on anything, but rather just to see how remarkable things are out there, and we never even hear about them.

Today is also the feast of a saint you seldom hear of. Her name is Praxides. Praxides was the daughter of a Roman senator. They had a wealthy home, and she took care of the martyrs and the early Christians, when they were suffering for Christ. They built a church on her home and it is the Church of St. Praxides. About the year 800, they built a larger church there with this mosaic (slide shown on the wall). And it would be almost as if, outside, we had pictures of the bishops, Bishop Begin, Bishop Cummins and now Bishop Vigneron. The first person on the far left is the sister of Praxides (Her name was "Pudence."). Mary, the Mother of God, is in the center, and then Praxides is the next one over. They have halos around their heads, showing that they were holy and that they are dead. The last one was the acting pastor of the church at that time. The last one on the left was "Theodora, the Bishop." That is what is printed over her picture. Isn't that kind of remarkable that in the 800's the pastor of the church was a woman and labeled as "Bishop?" We don't exactly know what that meant in practice, but we don't hear about it. It gets silenced. And that's why we are sharing this witness during this week.

We'll put Mary Magdalene up now (another slide) who was loyal to Christ at the cross when the other disciples were not. There's a saying that men relate to each other shoulder to shoulder and women relate to each other face to face. I think when I talk about the importance of the witness

of women in the Church it is not asking for equality as much as that everyone share their gifts, because we need both. And that is what we celebrate during this week, the need for everyone's gifts, and this week especially, that of women.

I have a personal insight into this. I want to share it with you. When I left on my sabbatical, (I left on March 9.) I was going up to the snow to ski for a week. I drove first into St. Joseph's Church in Berkeley. They were having a welcome back for Father Bill O'Donnell from prison. I parked outside a little community house and went inside, and after about an hour of the singing and speech-making, came out to drive up to the snow. Father Bill Leninger was with me. Another man came along. My car had a big black Cadillac slammed right up against it, and in front there was just about a foot from a Honda. The three of us, three men, looked at it and said, "I think you can get out of here." I started pushing it, back and forth, back and forth. They were directing, yelling. After about twenty minutes of this, I had moved about three inches over, and a woman came along and said, "Why don't you ring the doorbell and ask them to move their car?" I rang the doorbell. They came out, moved their car, and I went skiing.... The three wise men don't always have all the gifts. And that is another reason for reflecting on the witness of women this week.

Let us give thanks to the Lord Who is so good.