



Celebrating

Venerable Marie Madeleine d'Houët

On November 19 1970 Pope Paul VI signed the declaration that Marie Madeleine Victoire de Bonnault d'Houët, had lived a life of heroic virtue. In this 40th anniversary year we celebrate with joy this holy woman's contribution to the life of our world and Church.



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Marie Madeleine - wife, mother *and* religious foundress

The foundress of the Faithful Companions of Jesus, was both a mother and a religious sister. Her story is unusual.

Marie Madeleine Victoire de Bengy was born in France, in 1781 and experienced the social unrest that followed the Revolution. She married Joseph de Bonnault d'Houët in 1804 but after just ten months was widowed. Their baby was born a month after Joseph's death.

As a young, single mother she lived a committed Christian life. She cared tenderly for her child, proved

herself a responsible daughter and a loving sister and showed a strong social conscience. Marie Madeleine enjoyed a social life too and seriously considered remarrying. But deep in her heart she sensed she was called to something else and step by step followed this call. Mary Magdalen and the women of the Gospel were an inspiration to her. The words "I thirst" spoken by Jesus on the Cross touched her heart deeply. This ardent young woman known for her generous spirit, zest for life and firm will became what she was called to be, a faithful companion of Jesus.

God himself led her to form a Society of apostolic women who would incarnate in a feminine way the ideal of St Ignatius Loyola.

The Faithful Companions of Jesus began in a small way in Amiens in 1820 with the education of poor children and the instruction of factory workers.

At the time of Marie Madeleine's death in 1858 her Society was at work in several European countries and over the last 150 plus years has extended its apostolate in Australia, the Americas, and South East Asia.

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Marie Madeleine's vision was inspired

Lots to celebrate ...

by Mary Magdalen and the other Gospel women. These companions of Jesus ministered to him out of their own means, companioned with him in the ordinary day to day, stood by him in the face of torture, tended him in death and proclaimed his resurrection. Luke 8 1-3

Over the years the Faithful Companions of Jesus have devoted themselves to certain ministries confided to them by their foundress; the education of youth, especially the poor, the work of retreats and missions. But above all, following her example, the sisters are Companions of Jesus who desire through their lives to reveal Jesus to the world. When seeking Papal approval for her congregation Marie Madeleine said: **'to have the name, Faithful Companions of Jesus, 'I would give everything, all that I am.'**

Marie Madeleine's vision lives on
Read more about it...

One day Marie Madeleine will surely be canonised. But how does this happen?

Often we hear it said of someone 'She's a real saint!' – in other words her goodness is recognised by those among whom she lives and works and serves as a challenge and example to them. And that is good. But the formal naming of a person as a Saint must follow a definite canonical process.

Normally at least five years must elapse between the death of the person and the beginning of the process. (In the case of Pope John Paul II and Mother Teresa of Calcutta this time lapse was dispensed with by public acclaim.) The responsibility for the investigation into the person's life and writings falls on the bishop of the diocese in which the person died. After preliminary investigations, an official Tribunal is set up to gather sworn testimonies as to the holiness of the 'Servant of God.' These are then

forwarded to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints in Rome where they are examined by a panel of nine theologians.

In Marie Madeleine's case the testimonies were accompanied by letters of support from no fewer than 14 Cardinals, 33 Archbishops and 127 Bishops from around the world.

If a majority of the assessors are in favour then the Cause is passed to a second scrutiny by a group of cardinals and bishops; the third step at this stage is the recommendation to the pope that the Servant of God be proclaimed to have lived such a life of exemplary virtue ('heroic' is the word used) that she is to be known as Venerable and presented to the People of God as a model of Christian virtues.

Marie Madeleine has reached this stage. She died in Paris April 5th 1858. In 1874 the Cardinal Archbishop of Paris, asked Father

Apollinaire de Valence to gather together the memories of those who had known her and in 1886 Cardinal Richard sanctioned the erection of an ecclesiastical tribunal in Paris for the examination of witnesses bearing testimony to the heroic sanctity of the Servant of God.

Then came the official introduction of her Cause in Paris. Because she had travelled so widely, and was known to so many still alive, distance necessitated the establishment of subsidiary tribunals in France and elsewhere.

In 1970 Pope Paul VI proclaimed the heroicity of Marie Madeleine's virtues. The next step on the road to Canonisation is called 'Beatification', when the Servant of God will be known as 'Blessed,' a title which can only be bestowed after a miracle has been attributed to her. A second miracle is then needed for the final step in the process - canonisation, proclamation as a saint.

... who loved children



In 1839 at Menotey, France, at the first opening of the little school, thirty or forty poor village girls turned up and 'the appearance of these dear little ones bespoke their extreme poverty.' In harsh conditions for families in the industrial towns of the North of England, Marie Madeleine encountered wives and children bearing the brunt of the 'breadwinner's' drunkenness - 'nothing for his family but prodigality abroad and misery at home.' Food, clothing, shoes, remedies for illness, all these as well as spiritual support were offered to the families.

One of Marie Madeleine's aims in choosing properties with large Parks or gardens was to enable her to gather young people together – for fresh air and exercise, for catechesis, for social and personal development.

In Amiens, Nantes and Nice we know that she entered wholeheartedly into the children's games; in Châteauroux she played 'Goose' with them, sang songs with them, told them interesting stories. ... **In modern parlance she was combating anti-social behaviour, stimulating community cohesion and developing the whole person.**

Work with children continues today -

In Galați, Romania, Sister Gabriela fcJ (Gabi) works with children from dysfunctional and poor families. They are between 6 and 14 years of age and come to the Day Centre to do their home-work, and for other educational activities (art, general culture, English language, games and excursions.) This is where they learn to become true human beings.

Gabi is not always aware of what she is giving the children and each day has to ask herself the purpose of her being there among them. 'I need to beg for gentleness, patience and compassion every day. Sometimes I find it hard to hear

"Gabi, I can't do this exercise, I just don't know!", "Gabi, I'm hungry!", "Gabi, I'm thirsty!", "Gabi, I have stomach-ache!", "Gabi, I have a head-ache!", "Gabi, I have tooth-ache!" I know that each one is looking for a personal response of love.

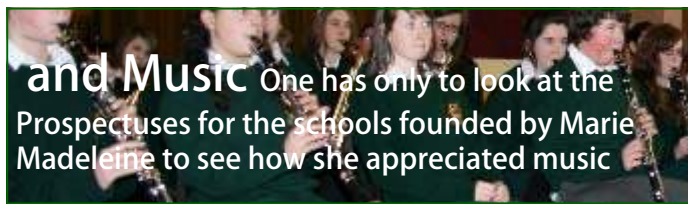
When I succeed in seeing signs of God's presence, God who is suffering in these children, then I ask for the

grace "to exclude no-one and no thing from our love and compassion". But I don't always see these signs and then I am not able to ask for anything. I just try to be patient, but I realise that the patience I show does not come from me. Another sign of God's presence is when I ask for the grace to be a companion and then discover that in fact, the people around me have been companions for me.

There are other signs, too, of God's presence in the children when they see me happy and joyful and say to me, "Gabi, you are happy even when you're sleepy!" "Gabi, you're always smiling!"

Being more full of compassion, gentleness, patience – this is what I have received through our charism, through our General Chapter Decree. I need to keep asking for these gifts to be fresh and new in me.

Sr Gabi continues: 'I wonder "What would make Marie Madeleine rejoice over me?" - She would rejoice to know how much inner strength and joy I receive from these children.



and Music One has only to look at the Prospectuses for the schools founded by Marie Madeleine to see how she appreciated music

Carouge and Lingdale House, for example, list music among the 'accomplishments' offered to the young ladies; at **Laurel Hill, Piano, Harp, Guitar and Vocal Music are listed**. - But it was not solely as a social accomplishment that Marie Madeleine valued music. When the community in Paris (1855) asked for an organ, she agreed saying 'Yes, if it will be the cause of even one more act of love of God.' When it came, she was the first to play it – spontaneously playing 'O Céleste Flamme.' From the beginning sacred music was an important element of novitiate formation.

And houses founded later than Marie Madeleine's own time have continued the tradition. Denise Mulcahy fcJ writes:

A few months before I turned five, I began school at Genazzano, Melbourne and remained there for the next twelve years. I walked into a long standing tradition of music. In fact, there is an early record that in 1895, pupils sat for the Trinity College of Music (London) Theory and Practical Examinations. Outstanding in my memory from my earliest years was the class singing, chapel singing, choral items for Reverend Mother's feast, the massed school choir for important visitors, the Catholic Schools' Festivals, the sounds of music lessons for piano and other instruments (mainly strings), the orchestral practices and performances, the lessons in musical appreciation, musical perception and theory, and, twice a year, the hush settling over the area surrounding the room where the instrumental music examinations were taking place.

Glancing at the anniversary edition of the Yearbook (2009) celebrating the school's 120 years, it is clear that music has diversified, opportunities are available to learn many instruments, and the scope for students' talents and skills to develop is remarkable. Choral singing continues to flourish. Mention is made of a great variety of concerts within the college both for soloists and ensembles. An account is given of the Annual Musical Concert held in 2009 in the Hamer Hall. There are photos of the various ensembles – guitar, flute, saxophone, percussion, brass and piano trio, to name a few. In addition, we read of the musicals performed with the students of neighbouring boys' schools. Other highlights of the musical calendar for the celebratory year were the music camp and the *European Choir Tour*.

... delighted in gardens

Given the natural beauties of Pouplin where she grew up and of Parassy which was her dowry, it is no surprise that **Marie Madeleine loved gardens, flowers and trees**.

Where she could, she bought or leased properties like Châteauroux, France or Lingdale House, England, where the gardens would not only be restful for the Sisters but provide an opportunity to invite factory women and girls in at the weekends for fresh air and recreation. Where there was no Park of Garden she encouraged Mother Legrand, for example, to make one. At Ste Anne d'Auray in 1828 she set about reclaiming land there.

They began by fashioning a kitchen garden, later they planted groves and made many meadows.' (Annals 1828) Frequently the community there took their meals in the garden (1835). When in London, Marie Madeleine loved to say her rosary in the garden at Gumley House.

As she travelled from house to house, Marie Madeleine was always aware of her surroundings and thinking of others who would delight in seeing what she saw. In 1850 she wrote saying how she wished Sister Reine Bournot could see the garden at Lingdale with its rhododendrons 20 feet high and full of blooms, and the superb sycamore trees. In Nice she rejoiced in 'three walks lined with orange trees' when she went to Carouge she was generally loaded with shrubs, plants and cuttings from Turin and Nice. In 1838 she sent M. Euphrasie Delaporte, who was superintending the laying out of the garden at Carouge, 460 rose trees, 400 different shrubs, jasmine etc, 2 beautiful oleanders, orange and olive trees besides cuttings and seeds. Later she wrote to M. Euphrasie who had left Carouge: "*Now I must give you news of our children the trees. The limes that you set in front of the House are superb; the chestnut trees, fine, and the grove also; but the summer-house is still without creepers or greenery. What will surprise you more than all is that the fig tree has, this year, yielded three dishes of excellent figs... The children have a charming conservatory for their winter plants*".

... delighted in gardens continued



Were Marie Madeleine d'Houët to visit the FCJ convent in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, she would be very happy with the transformation of the grounds. When we first moved here, there were no gardens, just gravel-covered parking space and wilderness, filled with poison ivy, scrub trees, volunteer privet bushes, thorny vines, and parts of a rusting cyclone fence. Now the garden is a showcase from late January through mid-July. Sister **Madeleine Gregg fcJ** reports that '*every place has something eye-catching, whether in shape of leaf, color or flower, size or habit of plant. The city condemned the garage some years back and it was removed. Now the wilderness and back areas are filled with herbs and vegetables, and off-spring from iris, daisies and other plants from around the garden. Each year I transform a little more of the available space. Slow progress is a given in nature and I feel in sync with Marie Madeleine, who also knew what it was to wait patiently for things to develop! I do not have a master plan, but react to a local circumstance. Trading plants with friends and colleagues keeps the cost of gardening down, as do composting and using our new 55 gallon rainwater tank. Marie Madeleine would rejoice with me that so many of the plants in the garden were gifts from people wanting to express appreciation for all that the FCJs have done for them. She would love it that our garden has become a sacred space in which so many people reconnect with the Creator of All.*'

... cared for the sick



It has often been remarked that humanly speaking, Marie Madeleine might have been expected to found a Congregation of nursing Sisters.

Her experiences in the Hospice at Issoudun, followed by the tender nursing of her husband and later of her son and his friend, all show which way her personality was drawn. But under God's guidance she founded a group of women who were to be faithful companions, not just to the sick but to all whom they meet. Nonetheless she must look kindly on those FCJs who minister in nursing homes, hospices and hospitals.

She herself trained some Sisters as infirmarians drawing on her own experience. As a novice, M. Clotilde Dupont was put in charge of a Sister who had scalded her foot. When it festered M. Clotilde says she turned 'quite sick' whenever she had to dress it and Marie Madeleine quietly took over the case herself. Similarly when Mother Assumption Slaughter broke a needle in her hand 'which became very bad,' Marie Madeleine herself went with the young novice to the Doctor in Paris

'when it had to be lanced and she held my hand trying by talking to me, to distract me from feeling the pain too much.' When Sr. Catherine Moreau was taken ill whilst travelling with the foundress in 1832, Marie Madeleine says that during the three days through which Catherine lingered, *'I left nothing undone which could have helped her.'*

In her letters she refers to plasters, leeches and bloodletting as standard remedies; she even recommended hard cake as good for coughs! Above all she was aware of the benefits of one's native air, of sea air and sea bathing and knew that London fogs were dangerous for French Sisters.

From the Philippines, Sister CionycfJ writes: the essence of nursing is caring. As an FCJ I have felt a deep call to care and to live companionship with Jesus through the ministry of nursing.

This commitment to care becomes part of me, part of my life, part of my choices, as an FCJ nursing student. Caring for people awakens in me a deep desire that they will be well not only as a result of the procedures and medicines given, but also because of the loving companionship I am able to offer them in the few minutes that I

spend at their bed side.

In the Neurology ward I feel very close to my patients. There are many times that I call on Marie Madeleine to intercede when a patient's case is hopeless and sometimes when a person is dying. Many times I feel helpless when I know that the family is terribly poor and cannot afford what the patient really needs to get well. All I have to offer is my prayer and my compassion.

When I work in the delivery and operating sections I marvel at God's goodness and love for each one of us. I delight in the moments when every member of the health care team suddenly becomes quiet for I believe that in the silence we put our trust in Jesus' caring hand.

Caring for the newborn and welcoming them is always a great joy. Each baby is so precious and I love to welcome them to the world!

Caring for the sick with love and compassion, and with a friendly attitude really makes a difference in the healing process. My experience of nursing makes me very grateful to God.



... for those coping with economic hardship

The question of economic hardship is complex, as is the way that people cope with it.

Marguerite Goddard fcJ tells us that in **Salta, Argentina**, mothers try to find a soup kitchen for their children. The one organized by **Stephanie fcJ** receives up to 170 mothers and children, five days a week. After this In return, the mothers cook and clean, and are required to pay \$20.00 per month (to make one meal for six people costs more than \$20.00). They can learn to cook wholesome meals with economical and nourishing food and there are always waiting lists for the Parish soup kitchen. There are clothes for sale as well, which have been donated and are sold at very low prices and the funds used for the soup kitchen. Some mothers make a small income by selling clothes, shoes and other items at the weekly fair, usually displaying their wares on the ground. Many of the women sew, clean and cook to earn extra income. If they have seven children, the women re-

ceive a fixed amount of money each month!

Many of the men are builders or builders' helpers and their aspiration is to get permanent work with all the benefits of child allowance. It is sad to see queues of men hoping for a chance to work. Some are reduced to taking out loans, or pawning items. Neither of these is helpful! Others learn to steal - an even worse solution!

Education is the only way to enable people to turn survival into a dignified life style even with economic hardship. Many of our neighbors, writes Marguerite fcJ, are excluded from the system as they do not have basic educational qualifications.

Since this was prepared for the press, Stephanie Earl died in Salta as the result of an accident. May she rest in peace

It was for the same reasons and in the same situations that Marie Madeleine and her sisters worked

so hard in the deprived areas of the

19th century towns and cities.

Work was often seasonal or entirely unobtainable in areas of religious discrimination. In most of the parish schools breakfast was provided and in Chester, England, where 150 might be served the telling comment was *'this was the only meal they got.'* Warm clothing, boots and shoes were collected and distributed since in many cases children were prevented from coming to school by lack of clothing. One of the thrusts of night-classes was to help develop what we now call 'parenting' skills of the mothers including cookery and dressmaking lessons. And **Marguerite's** comment that *education is the only way to enable people to turn survival into a dignified life style even with economic hardship* reminds us of the attention given to basic education and vocational training by the first generation of FCJs whose approach was truly holistic.

... and for abused women



From the early days in Amiens and Châteauroux, it was clear that under-privileged women and girls were the object of Marie Madeleine's special concern. She played games with them, sang with them, instructed and trained them. When her 'missionary sisters' went to England, it was to political (French) and economic (Irish) refugees and to the indigenous oppressed victims of the Industrial Revolution that they were directed. In Liverpool, Birkenhead, Chester and Manchester she loved to hear of the good her Sisters were doing in the Poor Schools; as M. Scholastica Conolly said 'her countenance appeared radiant with joy' as she listened. Alms, clothing, health care – all were provided but so too was the moral care she knew to be necessary in an uncompromising world. She refused to send even to her own daughter-in-law girls whom she considered too young for service 'they could so easily be lost in the world' (1839) and never would she risk sending young girls into households with men servants.

Has the lot of women improved since Marie Madeleine's time in many parts of the world? The **FCJ Refugee Centre in Toronto** was founded to help women and children forced to leave their country to protect themselves and / or their children. Some have lost husbands in a war situation, others are fleeing an abusive spouse. In seeking asylum, they must travel, often in dangerous situations, not knowing if they will arrive alive. They experience many hardships, such as separation from children and family, difficulty of learning a new language and adapting to a new culture. But they also experience the joy of being accepted in a new country, being reunited with their children, going to college, seeing their children well married.

The motto of the FCJ Refugee Centre is: ***Walking with uprooted people.*** What does it mean to be uprooted? Lois Anne fcJ remembers going to the bus stop to pick up Aisha who had made an asylum claim at the Canadian border. 'Our colleagues there had put her on a bus to Toronto, where I met her. She was carrying her son who was about six weeks old. She had left Burundi when he was three weeks old, having had to leave behind five other children. Before she left, she sent two of the children to friends in Rwanda, two to Tanzania and one to Kenya, as she believed her husband had been killed. We welcomed her to our shelter, where she

stayed for about a year. It took two years for her to have her claim heard, and accepted. It was another five years before she was able to welcome her five children to Canada! During these seven years she had to parent the children in Africa by telephone. Many times she was so worried about them that she would be about to return to Africa, but then she would renew her courage and wait patiently for the process to be completed. I did what I could to push along the process, but to no avail. Seeing the joy of Aisha with her children is what makes the journey worthwhile.'

Thousands of miles away in Eastern Europe, Maeve fcJ had had the opportunity of following a course entitled: 'The struggle against the trafficking of Human Beings'. She describes it as 'an eye-opener' and found herself wondering 'how could such an evil exist? What could we, Sisters, do about it? What would Marie-Madeleine have done about it, had she lived in our time?' Believing that this could really be one of the prophetic roles of religious today and knowing of other FCJs who also felt called to this ministry, I decided to get involved.

'My most moving experience was in 2009 in The Ukraine, when, I actually lived for 3 days with someone who had been trafficked, listening to her story, admiring her openness and her courage. Vikki's story (not her real name) is horrendous! Her father was murdered aged 39, her mother died at 49, so that Vikki and her siblings were orphaned at a young age. Unwittingly, she accepted an offer from a so-called family friend to travel to Dubai, where she would earn enough money to create a 'better' life for herself. On arrival, she found herself caught in a web of prostitution, where she was physically, psychologically and sexually abused. She ended with a self-imposed abortion, several weeks in hospital, a prison sentence, followed (happily) by expulsion from a country where abortion is a crime!'

Vikki is among thousands of young people who fall victim to false promises, deceit and violence, 'trafficked' for purposes of begging, forced-labour or prostitution, while their traffickers and clients go free. There is no self-pity, just a desire to rebuild her life. She tells her story in the hope that others may be more aware of the dangers that surround them...'



... would empathize with those who experience the hazards of travelling

Marie Madeleine would empathize with the Indonesian Sisters.

In June 1835 the heat had been very great for several days, and the river Loire was too low for boats. Marie Madeleine was expected at Châteauroux but she had to delay her journey until the waters rose. This was two or three days later and then a terrible storm burst during the night, accompanied by a water spout which caused serious flooding. The party left Nantes at 6am. In the middle of the river the current became too strong and the debris of bridges, roofs and animals swept along by the river threatened to destroy the boat. They had to hug the banks of the river all day and even that was dangerous, since the water had flooded the shore more than 180 feet and it was impossible to keep clear of the land. They reached Angers at 8 pm and a little unnamed town three hours later. There they found the roads leading to Tours were flooded. At 3 am they arrived safely at Saumur, but leaving Saumur and nearing the Loire they saw that the waters had again poured over the roads and risen to the Vineyards to a height of 30 feet.

In Indonesia, there are few dual carriageways except in and around the large towns; overtaking is a constant hazard, with the risk of colliding with oncoming traffic. It is more risky to sit on the left, as people drive on the left, and the driver may be forced to swerve to avoid oncoming vehicles. One evening **Agnes Dinihari fcJ** was going by overnight bus from Yogyakarta to Jakarta. The bus was passing through a hilly area and light rain was falling. Agnes was asleep. Ahead was a truck from which oil was dripping. When the

bus driver braked, the bus skidded, fell off the road and rolled down into a field, falling on its side, door side down. The passengers were trapped. Agnes continued to sleep peacefully, held by her seat-belt on the side of the bus which was now the ceiling. One passenger broke the rear window while others shouted: "*Be careful! Mind the glass!*" These shouts woke Agnes who wondered why she was hanging in mid air! She managed to climb down, unhurt, find her missing shoe and bag and then tried to help an older woman climb up to the road.

In **Flores**, when the roads are too rough for ordinary buses, people use motorbikes or "*bis kayu*" (wooden bus) a truck with rows of seats in the back. Sometimes the passengers have to get out and walk; villages can be cut off in the rainy season as the roads are treacherous and landslides are common. When **Meita fcJ** and other social science students went to Kamubheka on the north coast of Flores for field work they traveled by *bis kayu*. Meita likened it to traveling by sea only bumpier. They had to cross a river; there was no bridge. On their return journey, the water was almost waist deep.



... those who suffer the trauma of natural disaster



Australians are still trying to come to terms with the Black Saturday fires of 7th February 2009.

The Royal Commission has finally presented its Report and despite the pain of reliving the trauma, there is relief that maybe now they can move on. But one bereaved husband and two surviving children still live in someone else's house, their 'rebuilt house' remains only a slab of concrete. They are not the only ones; others are spending another cold winter in sheds or caravans; others again, are with relatives and friends. The Sisters share their frustration at government "red-tape" and empty promises. Travelling to Melbourne, on a 15 kilometre section of the highway, **Margaret Claver fcl** still sees tall, stark, black trunks reaching to the sky in the west, reminding her every time of the 173 people who died when the fire swept so many kilometres east across the highway to distant rural communities. But, most trees have new shoots, symbols of hope.

Reading a newspaper heading listing the estimated cost of the fires, totalling over four billion dollars, she feels outrage as she sees:

"Valuation of lives lost: \$645 million. Valuation of timber losses: \$658 million." How, she asks, can we value a human life in dollars? Is the wood worth more than a human person? Was the wood of the Cross worth more than the Crucified?

There is still scorched earth which shows no green growth at all because the loggers cut down the burnt trees and cleared all the land. It is now desolate and barren... like the homes where the voices of the children are no longer heard and a lone parent grieves an irreparable loss.

Marie Madeleine never experienced a bush fire but she was victim in two domestic fires.

One evening in 1841 the curtains in the narrow chapel in Amiens caught fire and the flames were soon of frightening proportions but Marie Madeleine stopped Sisters who were running for water telling them that human efforts would not avail - only God could save them. They recited the Litanies of Our Lady and whilst they did so the flames burnt themselves out.

Marie Madeleine's response seems rather strange to us now and is not what would be encouraged, but it shows *'the faith of the little ones'*; (... and it is possible she realised that opening the doors to run for water would fan the flames!)

The house at Tottenham burnt down in 1854. There was no loss of life but even so it was a devastating blow. Marie Madeleine, however, remained calm, perfectly accepting of what she saw as the will of God.

This same calm was remarked in her more than once when the River Loire was impassable, the middle of the river being blocked and the drift and width of the swollen river preventing their seeing the banks. Her grand nephew wrote admiringly of *'the heavy gliding of the sleighs, when, in the piled up snow and to the cracking of the storm-twisted larches, she fearlessly crossed the menacing Alps, as all the great conquerors had done before her.'*

... and life in a hostile environment

Much could be written on Marie Madeleine's experience of living in difficult times.

Enough perhaps to reflect on two years 1837-1838.

In 1837 the Bishop of Amiens advised that it was time to return to Rome to seek the definitive Approbation of the Society without which it was difficult to persuade parents and gallican* clerics that all was well. As in 1826 Marie Madeleine met with determined opposition, not least from the Jesuits who marshalled their might against her. The Brief of Praise which she obtained from Gregory XVI stopped short of Approval though it was promised for a later date. The Foundress returned to France to find that in her absence the hostile forces had gathered strength.

In January and March 1838 the houses in Châteauroux and Langres were forced to close. In Bourges the Community *'were subjected to humiliation, treated as heretics and schismatics, deprived of the Sacraments. Public prayers were offered for their conversion.'* (P.Grogan: *God's Faithful Instrument*).

Marie Madeleine urged them to remember that those who suffer persecution are blessed... and she remained true to what she believed was the way God wanted for her and the Society.

As Brid fcl reflects on 'The Dark Night of Ireland's Soul' she struggles to believe as Marie Madeleine did that 'Le Bon Dieu tout conduit Lui-même'.

Brid quotes the voice of an adult survivor and a parent of an abused child, "For

years I have felt guilty, dirty, unlovable and silenced. Sexual abuse as a child took away my dignity." "He did not just abuse my daughter, he raped her, she was five years old."

Attempts by authorities to "protect the church" and to "avoid scandal" had the most dreadful consequences for children and were deeply wrong. There was and still is a betrayal of values of elementary human and gender decency. The prevailing culture is being challenged by the people we thought our enemies. Yet, it is they who are *"bringing us to the well."*

I am torn between feelings of sadness, compassion, vulnerability and anger. I experience power, control and exclusion in action. I am ashamed at how we human beings, members of the baptized community, can behave. We are all tainted and share in this suffering. We recognize our finite nature as we hold ourselves and others up to the "ideal." We bemoan, torment and judge. We learn to let go of expectations and our need to control.

In the church there is darkness and silence. *"No speech, no word, no voice is heard."* The abused and the abuser, the leaders and the community are all on the cross. We are learning to listen with humility, to understand and recognize anew the incompleteness of relationships. We are learning to love even when we are afraid, let down, disappointed. Jesus on the cross shows us that it is through compassion, not condemnation that he can be humanly alive but also fully participate in God's saving love and mission. Are we prepared to be wounded healers? Can we trust in the power of God who makes all things new?

* French bishops and priests who wanted more local autonomy

faithful follower of Jesus

Marie Madeleine's believed passionately in her vocation to be a Faithful Companion of Jesus. So strong was her desire that she and all her sisters would have this name of Companions of Jesus that she was prepared to make any sacrifice for the privilege. She wrote in her memoirs, *'I would give everything to have this name'*.

Contrary to the accepted wisdom of her time she was convinced that women as well as men had the ability to work effectively for the spread of the gospel of Jesus. She believed that she and her sisters were called to this ministry. In her deep love of the scriptures she found immense inspiration in the lives of Mary Magdalen and the other women of the gospel, who followed Jesus all the way from Galilee and were faithful to him to the Cross and beyond. Having been given the names Marie Madeleine Victoire at her baptism she chose to be known in religious life as Marie Madeleine.

'My name is Magdalen,' she wrote, and this succinct saying encapsulates her understanding of her vocation and that of all Faithful Companion of Jesus: *'I will follow my patron saint who so loved Jesus, . . . as to accompany him in his journeys and labours, ministering to him even to the foot of the cross with the other holy women who did not, like the apostles, abandon him, but proved to be his faithful companions'*. (Madeleine is French for Magdalen).

This is the inspiration that links all those of us who try to follow Jesus closely in fidelity and companionship as we go about our work and ministry.

The astonishing truth of Mary Magdalen's story is that it was she, from among all of Jesus' disciples, who was chosen by God to announce the resurrection, the mystery at the very heart of our faith. And each one of us, like Marie Madeleine, is called in our own way to announce the good news of resurrection, the good news of hope, of love, of peace and justice to our suffering world.

Two beautiful works of art bring out this message in a wonderful way. In Pedro de Mena's lovely sculpture made in Spain in the 16th century, *'Mary Magdalen Meditates on the Crucifixion'*, her face is sorrowful at the thought of Jesus' suffering but her pose is dynamic and there is a sense of movement as she steps forward into the future. Her dress, although seemingly made of lowly straw matting, is a brilliant gold colour – the colour of resurrection!

The second sculpture, *'Mary Magdalen'* by Louis Tapia of Albuquerque, USA comes from our own century and shows her with a small figurine of the risen Christ in her outstretched hand *'graphically imaging the historic vulnerability of the Easter message and the church's debt to her preaching.'*

(Friends of God and Prophets E. Johnson p 261)



... and our friend

Many have devotion to Marie Madeleine, this faithful follower of Jesus and our friend.

A sister writes from Indonesia, 'We pray for those whose names come to us from the wider Society.'

In prayerful companionship with Marie Madeleine we place a variety of people before God. Some of whom are very seriously ill, others have minor illnesses. At times we have the privilege of accompanying the dying through our prayer. Occasionally we are asked to pray for pregnant women or people with psychological problems. We pray for families in distress and for individuals in difficulty.

There can be as many as thirty names on the list we keep in chapel. Each time we pray we read out five of the names to represent all those for whom we are

currently praying. Occasionally we have Mass offered for all those for whom we have promised to pray.

Do miracles happen through the intercession of Marie Madeleine? All the time – for those who have eyes to see!

We often hear how our prayers have been answered. We hear of many people who get progressively better, of children brought safely to birth and of people who come through terrible crises. We hear of others who are greatly helped and comforted by the knowledge that we commend them to the intercession of our foundress. It often strikes me how often the people we pray for are reminiscent of similar people Marie Madeleine helped when she was alive. I am certain she continues to minister to all those we bring to her through her prayer. I don't think there is any lack of response on Marie Madeleine's part, nor on God's.'

Prayer for healing

God, our Creator, Jesus our Companion
Holy Spirit, Source of Wisdom
Marie Madeleine believed in your
power, hoped in your promises
and lived for your glory and service.
We ask her to pray with us for...
Through her prayer may your
healing presence be shown
and your name glorified.
We make our prayer
in the name of Jesus the Christ.

Amen

If you wish to tell of favours granted through prayer to Marie Madeleine Write to:

The Secretary General
Stella Maris Convent FCJ
Broadstairs
Kent, UK CT10 3NR