

A Woman for our Time

...Celebrating Marie Madeleine and the FCJ Bicentenary

February 2020

A newsletter issued by
the Faithful Companions of Jesus
Gumley House Generalate, TW7 6DN, UK

This is issued by the Faithful Companions of Jesus, (often simply known as the FCJ sisters). Through this newsletter we hope to make more widely known the life and work of Marie Madeleine, the Foundress of the FCJ sisters.

Marie Madeleine is a woman for our time; a French woman of inspiration and courage. Through this newsletter we tell more of her story, suffice for here to share that she was daughter, sister, friend, wife, widow and mother, and ultimately a religious sister and foundress. Her husband, Joseph died before their child Eugène was born and Marie Madeleine faced the future on her own. She did so courageously and not only did she bring up their child, Eugene, she founded a group of Catholic sisters known as the Faithful Companions of Jesus. Her story is our story!

As a religious sister she travelled extensively founding communities in France, England, Ireland, Italy and Switzerland. After her death in 1858 FCJ communities were founded in Belgium, Australia, the USA and Canada. In more recent years communities have been founded in Indonesia, the Philippines, Argentina, and Romania. The most recent foundation is in Myanmar.. The FCJ sisters work in different ministries and share life in community.

But above all we are **Companions of Jesus** whose lives long to reveal Jesus to the world.

A thoroughly good woman

Within her life time, Marie Madeleine was known for her deep goodness. In fact both in life and in death people spoke of her as a *saintly* woman. In 1873, only 15 years after her death the Apostolic Nuncio in Paris obtained support from Rome to begin an official inquiry into the holiness of Marie Madeleine's life. This **process** of taking evidence from people and of examining the way a person lived can, eventually, through the gift of God's grace, lead to the canonisation of the person, and is known as a "**Cause**". In 1970 the Church recognised the heroicity of Marie Madeleine's virtues and gave her the title **Venerable**. The next step in the **Cause** of Marie Madeleine is her beatification. Before this can happen we need to have proof that through her intercession something wonderful has taken place, something that is surprising and welcome; something that is inexplicable by natural or scientific laws! In other words we need proof that through her intercession a **miracle** has taken place. .

Whilst this seems an enormous task, one way to begin is to ask for favours of her in our every day life. Marie Madeleine is a 'friend' who is looking out for us, praying with us and ready to assist us. So ask her to pray with you for what you need.

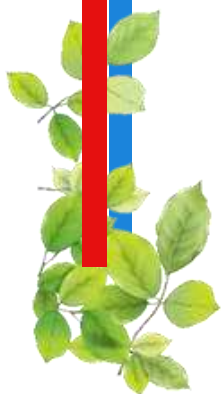


Venerable Marie Madeleine
d'Houët

On March 30th 2020
it is 200 years since
the FCJ Society was founded.



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If you need help with
something ask her to
pray with you



The Young Married Couple

Victoire de Bengy and Joseph de Bonnault d'Houët were married in Bourges cathedral on May 18 1804. They were a deeply happy couple, outstanding in their work for the sick and destitute but within just months of their marriage Joseph's health began to deteriorate and after just fourteen months of marriage he died of typhoid. The illness was traced to his visits to the destitute sick. Victoire was stunned by grief and the town was shocked by the untimely death of this generous and loving young man. Among the letters of sympathy Victoire received was one from a girlhood friend, Constance de Rochfort. 'Dear friend, you have such living faith, you are so wise, that it is within your own self that you will find the greatest source of comfort. In the two states in which up to now God has placed you, you have been an example to daughters and wives. Very soon you will be the same for mothers.' Victoire's child was born three months after Joseph's death father and was called Eugene.

A profound love of children

Throughout her life, both as mother and as religious sister, Marie Madeleine's care and concern for children was deeply loving. At Amiens, in the early days of her religious congregation, she recognised the plight of some local children and succeeded in securing from the Civic Authority the use of a disused building. This former factory became a centre of care and instruction for these disadvantaged and often sick children who came carrying baskets of cotton ends to be unravelled and taken home at night. This somewhat thankless task was an indispensable contribution to the family income. To these poor children the Foundress and her sisters gave all their care. In different ways and inspired by the example of Marie Madeleine, the FCJ sisters continue to support families in the education of their children.

Reading more about Marie Madeleine

There are several publications about Marie Madeleine, for example:

'*God's Faithful Instrument*'

by Patricia Grogan fcJ

'*Faithful Companions of Jesus*',

by Mary Campion McCarren fcJ

'*The Story Continues*'

by Katherine M. O'Flynn fcJ

'*The Faithfulness of God*' in the end section of this perpetual calendar of quotations

You can also read more about Marie Madeleine on the FCJ Sisters' website

[WWW.fcjsisters.org](http://www.fcjsisters.org)

Finding a good school

Strange as it may seem, the consequences of Marie Madeleine's choice of school for Eugene had life-changing consequences for her. In 1814, the Society of Jesus was re-established and the Bishop invited the Jesuit priests to open a school in the old Abbey of St Acheul in the city of Amiens. Victoire rejoiced at the news and decided to send Eugene to the new school even though it was a long way from home. Victoire arranged to stay in Amiens to help her young son settle in and soon found herself doing voluntary work in the school. Victoire came to know and appreciate even more deeply the Jesuit fathers. They made a profound impression on her and under their guidance her prayer life flourished and she eventually felt attracted to the Jesuit ideal of total self-giving to the Lord. But she had a teenage son whom she loved deeply and from whom she could not be separated. However her experience of God was so strong that she could not ignore it. Eventually and despite many obstacles, in 1820, a group of women came together with Victoire to live as *faithful companions of Jesus*. And all the while this loving mother nurtured Eugene into young adulthood.

The ways of Children

Children have great potential for giving unexpected responses to the simplest of questions. We all know of situations where a parent expects the child to impress and the child does that but in an unexpected way. Young Eugène was no exception and enjoyed a measure of celebrity for his answer to one of the Jesuits when class groups were being sorted at the beginning of the school year at St Acheul. We can imagine the scene as the small boy child stands in front of big desk of the Prefect of Studies and is asked, "Now where shall we put you? What do you know?" "Me?" Replied Eugène quite modestly, "nothing; but ask Mummy, she knows everything."

What's in a Name?

Baptised *Marie Madeleine Victoire*, the foundress was called *Gigi* as a child, *Victoire* as a young woman and *Madame Joseph* as a young wife and widow. To others, she was *Madame d'Houët*. However she herself wrote, "My name is Magdalen. 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 of Jesus.

This is the reason we call her Marie Madeleine.

