

A Woman for our Time

... Celebrating Marie Madeleine ... and Gentleness

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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. 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 remarkable!

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 depth of Marie Madeleine's goodness (the heroicity of her virtues) and gave her the title *Venerable*.

Gently heroic in the face of opposition

In her dealings with contentious and often antagonistic Church authorities Marie Madeleine showed a remarkable peacefulness, - a humility which was strong, because she was rooted in God. In the midst of the persecution from hostile clergy in Chateauroux, France, she writes: "*Above all, ... be very faithful to the recommendation I have given you not to listen to complaints, but to react to the harsh criticism you receive only with **gentleness** and **courtesy**. Pray every day for those who cause us suffering.*"

God's Faithful Instrument , Patricia Grogan fcj p.170



March 30th 2020 was the
200th Anniversary of the
FCJ Society

We move into our
third century with gratitude to
God for all that has been, is,
and will be.



**Venerable
Marie Madeleine
d'Houët**

Marie Madeleine is a
'friend' who is
looking out for us,
praying with us and
ready to assist us.
If you need help
with something ask
her to pray with you

Gentleness

*“Let your life be in accord with the call you have received; in all humility and **gentleness**, with patience, support one another in love; do all you can to preserve the unity of the Spirit by the peace which binds you together.” (Ephes. 4: 1, 2)*

There are some words which belong to the vocabulary of the sacred. They include kindness, faithfulness and joy; generosity and patience would be among them too, as would peace and hope. Most of these words are readily understood and are in common usage, but I think it true to say that in the rough and tumble of human discourse, they always have a special significance. When we say them, hear them, read them, reflect on them, they seem to draw us into the realm of the spiritual, into the domain of God. They are proof that although we live in time, we are constantly being nudged to contemplate eternal realities.

***Gentleness**, a precious part of our FCJ heritage, along with humility, poverty and obedience, is one of these sacred words.*

Gentleness dignifies human presence. It creates an atmosphere of kindness and concern. It reminds us that God is with us in our joys and sorrows, in all that happens to us, and knowing this brings peace of soul and true humility. **Gentleness**, as Marie Madeleine knew so well, helps us to walk into the future with hope, not knowing precisely how things will turn out, but trusting in God’s providence.

Without **gentleness**, humans cannot survive infancy, and it is an indispensable ingredient of the health-giving nourishment needed for soul and body throughout our lives. Is it not true that physical and mental anguish visits us if, as day follows day, we have no expectation of **gentleness**? Discreet, unobtrusive, **gentleness** is a gift freely given and it is as essential to us as the beating of our hearts. We receive its benefits, and it shapes us, it sustains and strengthens us. Then we pass on the gift to others, share it with them, and very often we do this non-verbally.

The expression in our eyes, a gesture, a smile, a tear, a gift, a touch, an indefinable lightness or warmth in the texture of our voices – any of these can convey **gentleness**. Wherever there is kindness and tenderness, there is **gentleness**.

Gentle people seem to have a glow about them that springs from that authentic sense of human solidarity which **gentleness** generates. **Gentleness** includes both giving and receiving, and like all the virtues, it is rooted in love. Had St Paul listed its qualities, as he did for love in that famous passage in First Corinthians, perhaps he would have said that **gentleness** is reflective, conciliatory, sensitive, compassionate, accepting of our present imperfection. The gentle “... do not break the crushed reed, nor quench the wavering flame.”

Gentleness goes hand in hand with companionship, for it means opening up with others to our common humanity. When we treat people and things with respect, and when we tread softly upon the earth which is our common home, our words, our touch, our footfall, our caress will be gentle. If our gaze, the way we look at people, is friendly and welcoming, it will communicate **gentleness**. God does not shout, so we need some degree of quietness to hear God’s gentle voice.

Gentleness helps us to listen. It slows us down, encourages us to face the ups and downs of life more calmly, more contemplatively. Friedrich von Hügel seems to imply that a spirit of **gentleness** is an indication of authentic prayerfulness: “Prayer is genuine,” he wrote in a letter to his niece, “if in coming away from it, you find your-self humbler, sweeter, more patient”. **Gentleness** is the ability to look upon those who perpetrate violence and discord without condemnation, and it calms troubled minds and hearts. **Gentleness**, given and received, brings joy, peacefulness and sense of well-being into our lives.

We have a mission to reveal that God is present in this messy, unjust world where the poor get poorer, and the rich get richer. Our desire is to walk with Jesus, our faithful Companion, and with him to make God’s purpose visible in our broken world, which cries out in distress. Faced as we are with the climate emergency, and finding ourselves obliged to live with the consequences of the coronavirus pandemic, the Spirit of gentleness helps us to glimpse a different future, and inspires us to work together in hope to bring it to fulfilment.

“Blessed are the gentle, they shall have the earth for their heritage” (Matt. 5:4).

Teresa White fcj