

A Woman for our Time

... Marie Madeleine ... a Woman of the Church

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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. She was a woman of the Church

...and it starts with baptism

Where did it all start for Marie Madeleine? As for all of us Marie Madeleine, FCJs, Companions in Mission and friends, it starts with our Baptism. There we are gifted with new life in Christ, brought to birth within the Christian communion and from there we receive our mission to the Church and World.

Which one of us has not stopped and touched the Baptismal Font of Marie Madeleine in the church in Chateauroux? How often we have been there on pilgrimage to witness for ourselves where this wonderful apostolic life of Marie Madeleine started. A babe in arms she was also lain on the altar and consecrated to Mary, Mother of God. Today we don't know too much about her theology but what we do know is that she was born into a deeply Catholic family where prayer together and understanding of God was at the heart of the lives of parents and children. Rather than learning from books, Marie Madeleine let the knowledge of God seep into her, just as it did for many young people at that time. Doubtless she was also deeply influenced by the revelations of the Sacred Heart at Paray-le-Monial. We have witnessed in her life the piety with which she was surrounded and also the mischievous nature that was always on the lookout for adventure and humorous escapades.



Baptismal font, St. Martial,
Châteauroux



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

A Woman of the Church

Was Marie Madeleine

a Woman of the Church?

How did she engage with Church throughout her life as a teenager, a fiancée, a married woman? She and her family were faithful to the Church. We know of her great respect for priests, of her frequent adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, of her uprightness of character and her service of the poor. For Marie Madeleine, being a Christian meant the observation of many humble and well known devotions.

Being a woman of the church for Marie Madeleine was being a good Christian and doing all that the Church of the time required. We know she attended daily Mass. We know she didn't receive communion every day because it was not permitted at the time. In being baptized she became a member of an invisible society of Christians with one invisible head in Jesus Christ. Her allegiance to Pope, Bishops and priests was unequivocal even if she didn't agree with them all the time. Like all baptized Christians she shared in the universality and also the apostolic nature of the church.

This latter is where we see her most active – her apostolic heart was filled with a burning desire to love God more and to serve Him in the people around her. This was not unusual for benevolent aristocratic families of the time. What was different about Marie Madeleine was that she was not satisfied with this – she took it further and let her heart be touched and transformed by the poor cotton pickers around her in Amiens and she gathered other women around to help in this service. Her desire was that those they served would share in the life of Christ – that came first – and then she planned to educate them in a way in which she herself had not been educated.

Her spirit of commitment and adventure led her on. Zeal and thirst for the coming of the Kingdom were at the root of her spirituality and so it was that whenever one hardship blocked her way, she found a way out and pursued this desire to make God known and loved wherever she and the first sisters went.

Apostolic, enthusiastic, determined, Marie Madeleine shows to us today a way forward. Perhaps not so much by piety but by faith – that belief that it is all God's work and we are only instruments. In our Church today we face different challenges but there is one challenge that remains paramount: how in the midst of all the difficulties and disappointments, can we make Jesus known and loved all over the world, especially in the many parts of the world where we are inserted? How do we recognize ourselves as part of the universal church and not get lost in thinking that the abuses and corruption we discover are the whole picture. We pray to Marie Madeleine to 'sentire cum ecclesia' to think with the church in all its dimensions and remain faithful in time of trial and expansion.

Marie Madeleine left us a legacy in the sisters she had gathered to continue her work of education, catechesis and service, a legacy that continues unbroken throughout the world today – in Europe, Asia Australia, the Americas and Africa.

Two hundred years on, the spirit of Marie Madeleine lives on in the lives of her followers – those people we know and don't know who have been inspired by her life. Just as she did much in her day to prepare the sisters at a time of expansion, we too are called as Women of the Church to give life to many more people in so many different countries. We read in her letters how from a distance she would interest herself in the minutest details of the works in each country. As we reflect with Pope Francis on our own baptismal commitment to participate in the mission of the Church we too plan ahead and pray that the works we are engaged in will not die with us either but that we will leave a body of experience, personnel and resources available to those who follow us.

Being a Woman of the Church today has its own challenges but it also gives us so many opportunities of service way beyond the institutional approach. The spirit of Marie Madeleine lives in us as we work in so many different contexts and in so many different ministries.

Christine Anderson fcJ