

Where Marie Madeleine's Story Meets My Own

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*A reflection by Sr Tyas, fcJ,
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Just as God called Marie Madeleine and prepared her for the foundation of the FCJ Society, so God calls me to be an FCJ for the continued growth of this Society.

[Marie Madeleine d'Houët](#) was born in Chateauroux, France on 21st September 1781, and grew up during the French revolution. As Marie Madeleine's family belonged to the aristocracy, the revolution was a difficult time for them. Their personal safety, possessions, and freedom of worship were threatened. Marie Madeleine's father was imprisoned, and to escape the persecution her family moved to Pouplain, in the country. Because of the uncertainty of Marie Madeleine's future prospects, her mother trained her in management practice and domestic work so that she could one day earn her own living. This skill would prove useful later in life when she ran the affairs of the FCJ Society.

Despite the turbulent socio-political situation that she grew up in, Marie Madeleine received much affection and love from her family. She was baptized on the day she was born. When she was 23 years old, she married Joseph, a young man who appreciated the same values as herself: personal prayer, public worship of the church and opportunities to serve Jesus Christ in the poor and unfortunate. However, while serving typhus victims, Joseph became infected with typhus and died, just 11 months after their marriage. Seven weeks later, their son was born and named Eugène.

After Joseph died, Marie Madeleine was heartbroken. Eugène became the light of her life, and she took care of him and their estate. When Eugene was 11 years old, Marie Madeleine sent him to the Jesuit College in Amiens. Because of that, Marie Madeleine had the opportunity to enjoy spiritual conversation with several Jesuit priests. Later on, the spirituality and traditions of the Society of Jesus and their way of life influenced her very much. Accompanied by several Jesuits, Marie Madeleine discerned her call to religious life. Eventually, in 1820, she established a female religious Society, the Faithful Companions of Jesus, who like the Jesuits also lived out Ignatian spirituality.

In the last few years, to commemorate the approaching **bicentenary of the foundation of the Society**, all the professed members of the Society were invited to go on pilgrimage (in different groups), in order to be immersed and refreshed in the spirit of Marie Madeleine. I joined the pilgrimage in 2018 with a group of younger sisters. On this pilgrimage, the senior FCJ sisters bringing the group around shared with us their love of Marie Madeleine and the Society, and were untiring in their service to us. In their

hospitality and service, we experienced real companionship, almost like the embrace of Marie Madeleine and the love of God made tangible. In visiting significant places in the [life of Marie Madeleine](#), we could sense her desire and efforts to establish and maintain this Society.

We also visited a cemetery where 150 of the first FCJ sisters were buried together in a single plot. There, we could feel the big sacrifices of the sisters who had gone ahead of us in living out faithfully the charism of our Society and spirituality. We realised our obligation to continue the life of the Society into the future. But, with the decreasing number of the sisters in the Society, just about 195 sisters, serving in 14 countries in around the world, the biggest question is: who then will continue this service of love that we have committed to – to quench the thirst of the world?

As an international institution, living in the 21st century, across many cultures and generations, we younger FCJs are moving forward with our collective story and gift: the [FCJ charism](#) of companionship and the gift of mission. Despite coming from different backgrounds, we are invited to work with together in the spirit of companionship. The most important challenge is to put Jesus at the center of our Society and to identify the everlasting spiritual truths of previous worldviews that should be conserved and carried forward.

Each FCJ sister has a personal gift, but no one has all the gifts. They all serve one purpose, as *to each is given the manifestation of the spirit for common good* (1 Cor 12:7). Recognizing that each one is a gift of God to the other, and living in a spirit of gratitude and love, we support each other in the divine service, responding to the world's thirst for companionship.

With wise use of developments in information technology, we are now able to promote this life more widely.

“ Will you continue to quench the thirst of God with your many gifts, living out your mission in love? This question continues to be addressed to every FCJ and all young women.

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It is a call to me to be like an empty vessel, ready to receive all graces from God and ready to give this gift to others. With open heart and mind it will be possible, for nothing is impossible for God. I say, *Yes, here I am Lord, send me.*

What about you?



“ Soyez dignes de votre beau nom par un grand amour pour Jésus, un amour qui se montre non par des paroles ou des désirs stériles, mais par le courage dans son service. ”

Marie Madeleine d'Houët

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