



*Marie Madeleine*

## Marie Madeleine

There was a woman sent from God; she came as a witness to the light, to the Word who was in the world, through whom the world was made ... Her name was Magdalen! Marie Madeleine Victoire de Bengy de Bonnault d'Houët. I want, she said, to be associated with religious who will be called Faithful Companions of Jesus.

When Venerable Marie Madeleine was asked by those she accepted as holding the place of God for her to record the history of the founding of our Society, she, like Ignatius before her, recounted the story of God's action in her life. The friends, the chance encounters, the faith-filled relationships, the prayer, the good times and bad, the times of *repugnance*, of being *desolate* and *inconsolable*, the times of consolation and gratitude, of *peace so perfect and beautiful*, the times of **knowing** and the times of **not knowing**—all these are the stuff, for her, of God's self revelation to her and in her, of God's ongoing creation of her and through her.

The very first experience Marie Madeleine recounts is a time of "not knowing"; *Never mind*, says her confessor, "*some day you will see....*" A few years later a woman friend gives her a message, *God wills to give you great graces, but [God] requires your cooperation ....* Shortly after, she meets, by "chance", a missionary priest:

**“ God wants your whole heart. You must give it to [God] without reserve. ”**

As she recounts her experiences, tells her story, resonances with the **Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius** abound and we can watch her openness and availability to God increase. **Our Lord, however, helped me to be resigned and to offer myself wholeheartedly for the accomplishment of his holy and adorable will.** *It is essential, says Ignatius, for the one who is to go through the Exercises to enter upon them with magnanimity and generosity towards her Creator and Lord, offering her entire will and liberty, that God's Divine Majesty may dispose of her and all she possesses according to God's most holy will.*

Her awareness of the creative action of God in all of her life grew more sensitive and, in November 1816, she made a retreat under the direction of Father Sellier, SJ. **Actually, she says, it was God himself who directed this retreat.** *The director of the Exercises ... should permit the Creator to deal directly with the creature, and the creature directly with her Creator and Lord* (Spiritual Exercises). Marie Madeleine had a profound experience of how a generous and loving Creator deals most intimately with each person, inviting us to communion and to partnership.

Continuing to recognize God dealing "directly" with her in all the circumstances of her life's journey, her own response deepened. She experienced God eliciting from her, her own deepest desires:

## “ My God, I only desire the accomplishment of your holy will,... grant me the grace to accomplish it as soon as it is made known to me. ”

Here is a woman who knows what she wants, but knows too that to live out that indifference, that desire for what is more conducive to the end, is a gift of grace. Only God, she says later, could change my heart and conquer my resistance.

Some months later she renews her same prayer: I only desire the fulfilment of your will... Give me the grace to accomplish it *faithfully* ... As she responds *faithfully* to God in the circumstances of each new day, each new experience, each new relationship, she begins to have a sense of what is being asked of her in the long term.



Contemplating the crucifix on the feast of the Sacred Heart, she is permeated by the I Thirst she sees revealed there, and in her own words:

*I offered myself to God with my whole heart for all that he asked of me.*

About a year later, she made another retreat, this time directed by Fr. Varin. All during the retreat I experienced great spiritual aridity and darkness. The next day, Christmas Eve, *suddenly I felt myself completely transformed. I neither saw nor heard anything extraordinary, but the sermon and the three Masses seemed to last but a quarter of an hour. I was inundated with unsurpassed and indescribable peace. My will was entirely changed and changed forever. From that day... I ceased to bargain with God; neither did I think of giving up the whole project as I had hitherto repeatedly done. I was calm and resigned to everything that God asked. I realise that the words I use are an inadequate expression of what took place.*

But the story is not over; over two years of suffering and trial, of struggle, of challenge, and of gradual confirmation are to pass before the *foundation*, the birth, the new creation, of the Society in the heart of Marie Madeleine. She is warned that God's work will be done in her through crosses, desertion and humiliation; she accepts: **I neither refuse these means nor any others, nor anything else that God chooses for us.** With a compelling, moving reticence, she shares, simply and directly, the pain-filled story of these two years. She trusts her companions with this dark history to show that she has **counted for nothing in the foundation of the Society** and to let them see how **God in his goodness did everything himself.**

At some point in this period Marie Madeleine spent time in the novitiate of the Religious of the Sacred Heart in Amiens. She herself does not tell us anything of this experience; the information comes to us from the Sacred Heart archives. She knows that we discover the specifics of our vocation by praying over our history and the way that God has shown his goodness and kindness to us throughout our lives. She knows that the gentle, sustaining, creating power of God is present to us, strengthening us, even in the bleakest, most testing of times.

Towards the end of this period, she made another retreat and once again she prayed: **Let me know your holy will and give me the grace to accomplish it with fidelity and joy as soon as it is made known to me.** *Take, Lord receive, all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, my entire will ... You have given all to me... Give me only your love and your grace and I will have need of nothing more.*

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## You might wonder what Marie Madeleine looked like

We know that she was small in stature and was never described as pretty or beautiful. But with her sparkling eyes and radiant smile, her vivacity and wit, she was always considered attractive.



We know that after her husband Joseph's death and in accordance with custom of the time, she dressed as a widow, with a black veiled bonnet and with a black shawl. This widows' dress was formalised into the habit worn by the Faithful Companions of Jesus.

The image shows Mère Julie Guillemet, one of the first companions of Marie Madeleine (1807-1858) wearing the bonnet and black shawl.

Across the years as the sisters made minor changes to the habit, portraits of Marie Madeleine were adjusted accordingly, the sombreness of the portrait hiding, perhaps, the vivacity of the person.

In recent times we, like her, wear the dress of our time, and have chosen to portray her as woman....as daughter, sister, wife, widow, mother, as foundress and religious sister.

[Read more about Marie Madeleine's life ...](#)

[Read about her Cause for Canonisation ...](#)



“ Jesus is our hope. Nothing—not even evil or death—is able to separate us from the saving power of his love. ”

*Pope Francis*

## Faithful Companions of Jesus

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