



FEEDING FIVE THOUSAND

Honoring St. Mary Magdalene as Apostle of the Apostles Through Art

Imagine a Catholic Church where the name of Mary Magdalene immediately evoked images – not of a repentant prostitute -- but of the first witness to the resurrection joyfully announcing the Good News to the Apostles and friends of Jesus. Imagine a Catholic education system where artistic representations of such a Mary Magdalene as “Apostle of the Apostles” were just as ubiquitous as representations of the male apostles. Imagine what it would mean for young girls in Catholic schools, for young women in Catholic universities, for men studying to be priests... now imagine the lives you could change, the Church you could shape just by helping to make such a vision a reality.”

Why Feeding Five Thousand?

FutureChurch has been working to restore St. Mary of Magdala to her rightful place as the Apostle of the Apostles for more than 20 years. We have offered a variety of educational and prayer resources correcting the record on who she was in Christian history and recovering her key role as primary witness to the Resurrection and evangelizer to the other apostles and disciples. FutureChurch has raised awareness about her leadership role in the early Church and, yearly, has offered original resources for Catholics to celebrate her July 22 memorial, now elevated to a feast day each year.

The positive response to these celebrations and resources has been heartening.

According to FutureChurch co-founder Christine Schenk, CSJ, perhaps the most important aspect of retrieving and celebrating the historical memory of St. Mary of Magdala's leadership is that contemporary believers who are women, can for the first time, see themselves in the Gospel stories and in early Church history. Sr. Chris recounts the early years.

They Wept...

Unrestrainedly.

In a class at St. Mary's seminary on the New Testament, I was stunned to discover there is no evidence whatsoever that St. Mary of Magdala was a prostitute, but ample evidence in all four Gospels that she was the first witness to the Resurrection. But who knew? No one! And I vowed then to let people know about her faith-filled leadership if ever I could.

Enter God's inscrutable providence. In 1997, as director at FutureChurch, I was at last able to fulfill my vow by launching FutureChurch's international campaign to restore St. Mary of Magdala to her rightful place as the apostle to the apostles. We asked our supporters to sponsor special celebrations on or around July 22 at which a biblical expert would trace Mary's unparalleled fidelity in accompanying Jesus through crucifixion, death, burial and resurrection. This would be followed by a prayer service at which a woman would preside, preach and encourage attendees to reflect on their own encounters with, and witness to, the risen Christ. Our first Cleveland celebration attracted 200 people to a local parish where my New Testament professor and priest spoke. A friend encouraged about eight women from her 12-step group to attend.

To my surprise, they wept unrestrainedly throughout the beautiful prayer service created and led by a woman, a pastoral minister who was clothed in a white alb. It dawned on me that we were touching something very deep within the Catholic female psyche. A long-buried wound was slowly being brought to the Spirit's healing light.

Annual celebrations of St. Mary of Magdala exploded after that, going from 23 that first year, to 150 the following year to between 250 to 400 celebrations worldwide in each of the last 18 years. Every summer, thousands of women and men help correct an egregious injustice done to a great woman leader in our church. And every summer, more women wept as wounds of unconscious misogyny were healed by the Spirit's gentle touch.

The transformative power of contemporary scholarship about Mary Magdalene and the celebration of her feast day continues to be a force for healing and empowerment.

The Feeding Five Thousand project seeks to expand that transformation and create greater awareness among all Catholics of the importance of Mary of Magdala's formative role by offering the art of Mary of Magdala Proclaiming the Resurrection by artist Sr. Margaret Beaudette to students across the United States in at least five thousand Catholic schools, universities, and seminaries across the United States.
