

# A Woman for our Time



Venerable Marie Madeleine d'Houët  
... .. and good example



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**For anyone in Paris, during the Olympics and Paralympics** it was a delight to simply experience the joy and exuberance of the two Events. The TV coverage was excellent and in the evening one could walk along the Champs Élysée at sunset as the Olympic balloon gently rose into the sky. *It was a truly beautiful sight.*

The fact that each event was in a magnificent setting added to the enjoyment and surely helped make it one of the best Olympics ever. Despite all this, dare one suggest that whilst the Olympics were superb the Paralympics were mind blowing.

The sight of the players of 'blind football' dribbling and passing with totally obscured vision was dumbfounding. They passed the ball with pinpoint accuracy, dribbled the ball while avoiding opponents and even shot with considerable speed, making it hard to believe that they were acting on voice and sound alone.— And it is surely a first class miracle that a football crowd was able to maintain silence until a goal was scored! Seeing a one-legged athlete do the high jump, a blind archer score well, swimmers with vision impairment keep to their lanes, were all incredible sights.

The Paralympics bond and inspire yet the origins of the movement are in the atrocities of war. World War II numbers of disabled people in its wake, and the need for rehabilitation and reintegration into society was acutely felt in many countries. It was in this climate that Sir Ludwig Guttmann, a German-British neurologist, laid the foundation for what would become the Paralympic Games.

The Paralympic Movement follows four major values: Courage, Determination, Inspiration and Equality. These principles frame the athletes, their talents and their accomplishments, and, as a result, the athletes become role models for the vision and aspirations at the heart of the four values.

Inspiration is a powerful force that can drive us to achieve greatness and to strive to positively impact the world. When we are inspired, we feel motivated, empowered, and capable of achieving anything we set our minds to. Furthermore, by inspiring others, we can help them unlock their potential and achieve their dreams.

**The Foundress of the Faithful Companions of Jesus Venerable Marie Madeleine d'Houët put this sentiment very simply when she said, 'Good example does much good'.**



Argentina celebrates their win over Brazil in the blind football semifinals © Aitor Alcalde/Getty Images



Arjola Dedaj, Italy, in the women's long jump photo credit EMILIO MORENATTI / AP

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## Values and Virtues — the same or different?

Virtues and values are commonly treated as having the same meaning, but there is a difference.

Virtues are lived values, values in action. Virtues are behaviours focused on taking action for others, not for one's self. They are values lived regularly, habitually.

Values are ideals or goals based on outcomes important to an individual. They tend to be personal and aspirational. Not uncommonly, they fail to be achieved on as regular a basis as desired.

An important goal in life is to actualize values, to make them virtues, by living them in our daily lives on a consistently regular basis. Living our values, in large part, contributes to our sense that our lives are meaningful.

*Madeleine Gregg fcl*

**In her time and milieu,  
Marie Madeleine lived  
the Cardinal Virtues -  
prudence, fortitude,  
justice and temperance,  
with heroicity.**

*It is good to ask what these virtues  
might look like for us in our time?*

Rowan Williams\* suggests the following:

**Prudence:** being a discerning person of good judgement.

**Fortitude:** showing courage without being deflected by circumstances .

**Justice:** giving what is due to the individual, society and the environment

**Temperance:** showing emotional intelligence, understanding our desires and bringing them into self-critical awareness

*\*Rowan Williams a theologian  
and former Archbishop of Canterbury*

## Marie Madeleine d'Houët - a woman of heroic virtue.

**In November 1970 the Catholic church proclaimed that Marie Madeleine d'Houët lived a life of heroic virtue .** In other words, the Church recognized that her values were lived consistently for others. .



The Church document proclaims that 'beyond any doubt, in the case of the Servant of God, Marie Madeleine de Bengy, Viscountess de Bonnault d'Houët the theological virtues of Faith, Hope, and Charity towards God and neighbour and the cardinal virtues of Prudence, Justice, Temperance and Fortitude and other virtues associated with them, were present to a heroic degree'.

'Virtue' is not a word we often use or hear today. Perhaps we actually detect a hint of hypocrisy in it? Also, it has to be said that its derivation - the word literally means something like 'manliness' from the Latin 'vir' may not appeal to at least half the human race! Yet maybe, as Rowan Williams, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, suggests, we would do well to reclaim it. For the fact remains that a virtuous life is quite simply a God-centred life, a life inspired by the desire and readiness to recognise God's presence on the road of life, even in unpromising circumstances. Virtuous people are 'tuned in' to that presence, and so the direction and rhythm of their lives is transformed by the energy of the Spirit. They are committed to what St Ignatius calls 'finding God in all things'.

'Virtuous people, wrote St Augustine, give us 'lessons of encouragement' to choose the good, to walk with them along the 'right' path. They leave a trail of light behind them, and by that light, we see the way we ought to go, and we feel a strong pull in that direction. Our own Marie Madeleine, who encourages us to 'go straight to God without hesitation and by the shortest way' (C. 3), was one of these holy people. Even in times of suffering or distress, she clung to the belief that God was always with her, her companion and guide. Her deep faith made her attentive, alert to the signs of God's presence in all that happened to her and to the Society, which after so many setbacks she finally founded in 1820.

*Teresa White fcl*



Marie Madeleine d'Houët, foundress, Faithful Companions of Jesus

**Marie Madeleine is a 'friend' who is looking out for us, interceding for our needs and inspiring us as a role model. Good example does, indeed, do much good! If you need help with something, ask her to pray with you.**