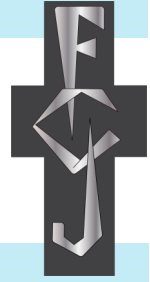


A Woman for our Time

Marie Madeleine and favours, healings, consolations and hints of miracles



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Venerable Marie Madeleine d'Hour is a woman for our time; a French woman of inspiration and courage. She was ... daughter, sister, friend, wife, widow, mother, and ultimately a religious sister and foundress. Her husband, Joseph died before their child Eugène was born and Marie Madeleine faced the future on her own. She did so with courage and not only did she bring up their child, Eugène, she founded a group of Catholic sisters known as the Faithful Companions of Jesus.

Anyone who really knew Marie Madeleine in her own lifetime or those who have read her life, would undoubtedly recognise that she was a truly remarkable person who lived an outstandingly holy life. Even from a young age she displayed deep kindness and the never-ending desire to serve, to help and to heal others.

Marie Madeleine had an extraordinary gift for seeing others' needs and responding to them.

"I have seen a saint ..."

Towards the end of her life, when she was visiting the North of England, crowds of people sought to catch a glimpse of her, convinced that she was a saint. Such was the experience of Alice Mary Goulding, a pupil at Gumley FCJ School. "She made a deep impression on me and I am still convinced that I have seen a saint." Marie Madeleine herself was bemused yet deeply touched by the response of the junior children in Gumley when she visited them. "I do not know what the little ones in this house take me for," she said, "but when I appear they kneel down, join their hands and bow their heads." (Patricia Grogan, *God's Faithful Instrument*, p 215)

Her sanctity was recognised by Saint Don Bosco, her contemporary. "Because of her numerous good works and her enlightened piety, she was always spoken of among us as a person of great virtue, a veritable mirror of Christian perfection." Patricia Grogan *fcJ*, *God's Faithful Instrument*, p 151)

The honest instinct of God's people

When Marie Madeleine died there was a great outpouring of grief and praise. It could be said that she was declared a saint by popular acclaim, her virtues recognised and celebrated by the honest instinct of God's people. They knew she was a truly heroic person and so do we. It is not always so simple, however, to have the instinct of the people, the '*sensus fidelium*', acknowledged and verified by the Church. It tends to move slowly and cautiously in such matters. In Marie Madeleine's case the process of her canonisation, begun twenty years after her death, continues to this day.

An Open-Hearted Woman

For Marie Madeleine, the central purpose of her life was to serve her God lovingly by lovingly serving others wherever she saw their need. Together with the women who had joined her new religious society, she sought out those who, for whatever reason, were neglected and in need. The Sisters established schools and nursed the sick. For working women who were longing to deepen their faith and who could meet in the evening after their day's work or on a Sunday afternoon, they offered companionship, a relaxing space and helpful spiritual instruction.



Medicine and Miracles - both are about the arc of human life

Heroic Virtue and a Miracle

The Church has very precise criteria when it comes to the formal declaration that a person is a saint and since Marie Madeleine's Cause for sainthood was introduced, each generation has been called to share differently in the process. What was required, in 1874, was evidence of her holiness. Then in 1886, tribunals were set up, sworn testimonies taken. Next was the presentation of the material to Rome and intense prayer. And within living memory, in 1970, there was the joy of celebrating the proclamation of Marie Madeleine's life of **heroic** virtue.

Before the beatification of Marie Madeleine we need a miracle; an inexplicable cure, attributable to prayer through Marie Madeleine's intercession.

... we need enduring models

The privilege of promoting the Cause gives us the opportunity of sharing with the People of God the story of a woman who achieved holiness - not in one role, but in several. Marie Madeleine's life speaks to men and women, old and young, married and widowed; to apostolic religious and to contemplatives - she being contemplative even in action. In this age of shallow, ephemeral celebrity culture, our world needs enduring models like Marie Madeleine and it is our privilege to make her better known and loved.

... a Friend in Heaven

It is not surprising that down the years Marie Madeleine has been called upon to pray for those who need her intercession. She had a finely tuned sense of God and was a conduit of God's love in a quite amazing way. Just as her own life was marked by a series of remarkable happenings there is no reason to doubt that remarkable things have happened to those she has prayed for.

A Prayer List ... of human longing

We regularly receive a list of people to pray for through Marie Madeleine's intercession. Since 2005 there have been over 100 people on the list. There have been answers to prayer ... surprising healings ... respite from illness.

It is quite remarkable to spend time with this list, keeping in mind that each name is not only a single person but that in some cases it reflects a whole family, even whole communities.

In each case there is a longing for some kind of healing or consolation.

Miracles and Science

Essentially we need an extensive body of people with devotion to Marie Madeleine, and a miracle.

Maybe we need to ask what is behind the word 'miracle' and to let our understanding be informed by history and science. ***Perhaps we need to ask ourselves 'do we actually believe in miracles?'***

Parallel Endeavours

Medicine and Miracles are not contrary, both are about the arc of human life and attempts to postpone human death.

Jaclyn Duffin, Physician and Historian for the History of Medicine at Queen's University, Ontario has written a fascinating book, *'Medical Miracles: Doctors, Saints and Healing in the Modern World'* : Oxford Uni. 2009

Duffin examined Vatican canonisation records of 1,400 miracles from six continents. Overwhelmingly, the miracles cited in canonization between 1588 and 1999 are healings and the majority entail medical care and physician testimony. She shows that some elements of the miracle change through time. Doctors increase in number, new technologies are embraced, diagnoses shift with altered capabilities. Other aspects are stable. Medicine and religion emerge as parallel endeavours to explain, alleviate and console in confrontation with suffering and mortality.

Modern medicine tends to separate medicine and miracles but their histories are closely intertwined. Both are about delaying death.

Towards the end of the book, Jaclyn Duffin says she is often asked does she believe in miracles? Her answer: ***"After years of hesitating, now I can answer comfortably, "yes, I do."*** It is a historian's belief and it challenges my medical identity."

Her text continues: *"...two ancient human-built traditions of knowledge confront each other on the mysterious terrain of human suffering. Medicine has been elaborated to prevent or relieve suffering; religion to reconcile us to it. Both are positioned to confront the inevitability of death; medicine trying to postpone it; religion, to console us.*

Medicine and religion emerge as remarkably similar belief systems.. applying their ever-evolving canons of wisdom to locate meaning in the careful observation and interpretation of signs, of diagnosis of healing and of wonder. "

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