



Fr. Matt's Musings

July 22, 2017

Labels and Reputations

In the Church's liturgical year, today we remember St. Mary Magdalene. The Scriptures tell us that Jesus cast out seven demons from her. In Mark, she is one of three women looking on from a distance at the crucifixion. In all the gospels, she is the first person to witness the resurrected Christ and entrusted with the message to tell the disciples that Jesus is risen from the dead. Because of this, she is given the title, "The Apostle to the Apostles," and she is the patron saint of preachers.

There is another tradition that grew about her. In the celebration of a saint's day in the liturgical calendar, there is frequently a designation after that person's name. On January 24th, the celebration of Saint Francis de Sales, after his name it states: Bishop and Doctor (of the Church). Until the 1960s, on July 22nd, after St. Mary Magdalene there was the designation, "Penitent." That is because she became associated with the "woman with a reputation" who washed Jesus' feet with her tears. There is no Scriptural evidence for this; nonetheless, the attribution persisted.

This presents a good opportunity for us to examine the people who may need a re-evaluation in our lives. Who has received a label or a reputation, warranted or unwarranted, which needs to be updated, discarded, or simply set aside to allow for growth or a second chance? How better to imitate the love and mercy of God on this celebration of St. Mary Magdalene than to examine closely the labels, biases or reputations we have accepted about others and to look at that person with new and fresh eyes. Our God always gives us second and third and millionth chances. Should we not try to do the same? The Church helps us in this regard. Now, on July 22nd, the liturgical calendar simply says, St. Mary Magdalene. There is no designation after her name. However, her celebration has been raised from a Memorial to a Feast. That is a much better label and saintly reputation.

Live Jesus!

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