

**Weekend Mass Reflections Offered by
Women of the Church of St. Francis Xavier
Honoring the Feast of Mary Magdalene**

17th Sunday in Ordinary Time

July 23-24, 2022

www.sfxavier.org

Nancy Fava - Saturday 5 p.m.

Yesterday we celebrated the feast of Mary Magdalen. Someone who was seeking Jesus after his death. She was one of the women who saw him die on the cross and went to his tomb following the sabbath. She was the first person to see the resurrected Jesus, but when most people think of Mary Magdalen, they think of the legend of a woman with a tarnished reputation, a woman with 7 demons. None of these accounts are actually in our scriptures. To me, Mary Magdalen is someone who loved Jesus unconditionally. A best friend of Jesus. An Apostle. And Jesus cared deeply for her. We never hear Jesus saying to her "get behind me Satan" or "How much longer must I put up with you?". Can you imagine going around for 3 years with just a bunch of men? Scriptures show us that the men around Jesus had a lot to learn. These men were fish out of water. Jesus needed someone he could confide in. Someone that heard him when he said he would be killed.

In his book, *The Diary of Jesus Christ*, Bill Cain writes a first person narration of what might have happened when Jesus named the 12 apostles. In this telling, Jesus consults first with MM, and after those chosen 12 were called, MM was upset and tells him why: "it never occurred to me that I wanted to be in that group. Never. Until you started to read the names. Then, as the names were called, I found myself

waiting to hear my name.” Sometimes we don’t know what we want until it’s offered to someone else. That doesn’t mean we should stop asking—first of all, asking ourselves, What do I want? What can we imagine MM asking of Jesus? Or Jesus asking of MM? Did he ask her to go to his tomb after he died? Did she ask him not to leave? In those last days, leading up to the cross, what were the conversations like between the 2 of them?

I’ve been fortunate to journey with a few people who knew they were dying. Some wonderful parishioners. Lucy, Eileen, Alesh. And at times they seemed so brave, so fearless. I remember Lucy saying matter-of-fact about her move to Calvary hospice "i'll be there about 4 weeks". Or Alesh, when told that his vision issues meant that the cancer had progressed to his brain. "Oh, this is dying? So interesting!" It gave me courage to ask them all something. I said to each of them "I want to hear from you when you're gone. Promise me that i'll hear from you. Let me know you're ok." Did Mary Magdalen ask that of Jesus? Is that why she was the first person to see him when he rose? Why didn't she recognize him right away? I know for myself, it's not obvious when I'm hearing from my friends but I've come to realize that they are present. Lucy and Eileen are present now, with a woman at the pulpit. The door was of the tomb was open for MM but it wasn't until Jesus said her name that she recognized him. It's comforting to hear our name said

by a loved one. Take a second now to hear your name said by someone you loved that is no longer with us.

The day before Alesh died, he kept calling me Mary, even though as he said, he knew my name wasn't Mary. I was going to be the executor of his will and I was desperately trying to get things in order before he died. After he passed, I realized in his calling me Mary, he was invited me to sit with him, to be present in those last moment—to be Mary, not Martha. Hearing that reading last Saturday, on Alesh's birthday, i teared up and i smiled. And listened to his invitation to be present. So this week i invite you all to not only to ask, to seek and to knock, but also to listen. Watch the door open and see what's on the other side.

Sr. Charlotte Raftery, S.C. – Sunday 9 a.m.

Today I invite us to reflect with Mary Magdalen on the meaning of being a disciple, of being sent as she was, to proclaim the good news of Jesus.

Mary of Magdala understood her role of disciple as she sought to find the body of Jesus in the Garden. It seems clear that she had learned from Jesus in his public ministry, the importance of presence and persistence in being in a disciple relationship with Jesus.

In our myriad ministries here at St. Francis Xavier, we witness ministers who integrate presence and persistence into their disciple relationship with Jesus as he sends them forth to proclaim the Good News to their brothers and sisters.

In our Genesis reading today, we hear Abraham remaining present to God, persistent in his questioning of God's forgiveness. We hear of Abraham's learning of God's unbelievably merciful response of mercy and forgiveness. We are inspired to acknowledge God's mercy in our own lives. We ask ourselves how we forgive others, what is the depth of mercy and forgiveness in our own hearts?

Paul reminds us in Colossians that in our Baptism we are buried and raised with Jesus, through faith in the power of God, who raised Jesus from the dead. Our sin is forgiven. It is this new life and this forgiveness that we disciples are sent to share with our sisters and brothers.

As we hear Luke's Gospel, we can just picture Mary of Magdala standing with the disciple who asks Jesus "teach us to pray." She is listening and learning... "Father, hallowed be your name..." Once again she hears Jesus call God "Father"... she hears Jesus say that asking for forgiveness and forgiving others is integral to prayer...she hears Jesus include "asking for our daily bread..."

Mary also hears the very practical story of the friend who receives what he needs in the middle of the night because he stays present and persistent...she hears Jesus describe in detail how crucial is asking to receive... knocking to have the door opened...seeking to find...in other words, presence and persistence.

Mary hears the down to earth story about the earthly father giving good gifts to his child, and how much more the Father... our Father... gives the Holy Spirit to us who ask.

So ... when in the Garden with the empty tomb, Mary of Magdala stays present and persistent...asks, knocks, does not go home; stays present... Jesus says her name...MARY... Jesus teaches her about his risen presence.

Mary is ready to hear Jesus explain his risen presence as his “going to my Father, and to your Father.” She is ready to learn when Jesus says, “to my God and your God...”

She is now a Disciple of the Risen Jesus. Jesus chooses to send Mary to proclaim to his sisters and brothers, the Good News that He risen.

This may be a good moment to acknowledge that since the sending of Mary Magdalen countless others have been sent to proclaim the Good News- some of whom we know, others of whom we have heard.

Among our newly installed Icons we might mention a few:

Thea Bowman, a contemporary of many of us, who incorporated black spirituality and music into Catholic Spirituality...

Rani Maria Vittalil...a contemporary who was a strong advocate to revise financial systems for people in economic need...

Pierre Touissant ...not a contemporary, but a neighbor who lived on Franklin Street and with his wife took care of neighborhood orphans and started St. Vincent de Paul school for black children on Canal Street... He was instrumental in building our Old St. Patrick's Cathedral right down here on Mott St.

And ... not among our icons, but a contemporary Disciple, Simone Campbell, Sister of Social Service, who was just awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom because of her years of leadership in the Catholic Lobby, Network, on issues of poverty, family, health care and immigration.

And just open today's Bulletin to read and name our ministries in which countless parishioners, Disciples, proclaim in countless ways the Good News of Jesus Risen.

Colossians assures us that these Marys of Magdala we have known and those we have not known are all Jesus' disciples. That includes all of us here this morning. We are buried with Jesus in Baptism. We are raised with him through the power of God who sends the Holy Spirit into our lives. Yes, we are disciples of the Risen Jesus.

Today we experience the deepening of our own relationship with Jesus in reflecting about his teaching about prayer and forgiveness.

Today, as disciples...

- Together we reflect on the Word of God,
- Together we pray “Our Father,”
- Together we “share our “Daily Bread” of Eucharist,
- And together we are sent forth as “Disciples to the Disciples,” to live the Good News and together to be open to the Holy Spirit as She comes to us, calling us in new... and perhaps surprising, future directions.

“Woman, Why Are You Weeping”
by Stephanie Castillo Samoy
Sunday 24 July 2022 - 11:30 a.m.

“Woman, why are you weeping?”

Mary (called Magdalene) replied, “They have taken my Teacher, and I don’t know where.”

Magdalene, who was healed of seven demons.

Magdalene, who accompanied Jesus on his ministry throughout the Near East.

Magdalene, who stood at the foot of the Cross when they crucified her teacher and friend.

Magdalene, who trembled and was bewildered upon seeing the empty tomb.

“Woman, why are you weeping?”

Mary (called Magdalene), “the Apostle to the Apostles,” who supported Jesus through her own means,

who was, as Sister Christine Schenk wrote, “the primary witness to the most central events of the Christian faith, named in exactly the same way (Maria e Magdalena) in each of the four Gospels, written for diverse communities throughout the Mediterranean world,”

who was a “strong female disciple and proclaimer of the Resurrection,”

gradually transformed into a prostitute, a public sinner, female sexuality at its most shameful and sinful, a bare-breasted harlot. . . .

“Woman, why are you weeping?”

Mary (called Magdalene) lost her identity. Her story merged and blurred with the woman whose tears washed and anointed Jesus’s feet at the

house of a Pharisee (Luke 7:36-50) and with Mary of Bethany who anointed Jesus with nard (John 11:2).

Magdalene was suppressed as a leader of the Good News by Peter and the other male disciples, by the early writers of the new Gospels, by social codes, by the Roman emperor Constantine (AD 312), by the Council of Laodicea, by Pope Gregory the Great (AD 540-604), by time, by misogyny.

“Woman, why are you weeping?”

Today, together, we have greeted one another, sung songs, confessed our shortcomings, asked for mercy, listened to Scripture, professed our faith, prayed, and broken bread.

Soon, together, we will pledge to support each other, dismantle injustice, eliminate prejudice.

Together, we will bless one another, go in peace, and try our best to live our lives in Love.

In the first reading, we learned that in the ancient time of Sarah and Abraham, the Holy One declared no destruction to a city riddled with grave sin if there were even just a handful of innocents. This after Abraham’s insistence and determination and asking for mercy six times.

In a letter to the Colossians, attributed to Paul, followers of Christ are reminded that though they died, they are raised in Christ; though they are sinners, they are forgiven.

And in the Gospel of Luke, Jesus teaches his disciples to pray and to persist. Ask and you will receive. Seek and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened to you.

“Woman, why are you weeping?”

Mary (called Magdalene): in Hebrew, *migdal* means “tower,” “fortress,” “raised pulpit.” As biblical scholar Dr. Lizzie Berne DeGear poses: could it have been Jesus’s pet name for this woman to whom he resurrected and commissioned?

“Woman, why are you weeping?”

Mary (called Magdalene) replied, “They have taken my Teacher, and I don’t know where.”

To the women who stay (Ethelyn, Danila, Nancy, Lynn, Eileen, and numerous others) and to the women who leave (Jackie, Mary Jane, Patricia, Arlie, Kara, and countless others), we understand that it is in good conscience that we make this choice about an institution that does not trust us to make our own choice.

We lament and we rage that the Roman Catholic Church silences our voices and does not recognize us as full members of the body of Christ because of our own bodies.

It took 1,983 years to get to this moment of acknowledging and honoring one of the Church’s Patron Saints of Preachers with a feast day on July 22. This from an establishment that has a man as a Patron Saint of Childbirth [Saint Raymond Nonnatus, 1657]!

And a woman preaching from the pulpit? This happens once every few administrations—if we are lucky; if we have a bold and prophetic ally of a pastor who welcomes, from the pew to the pulpit, voices that are not male.

So, yes, we weep. But in our determination, in our steadfastness, in our courage, and in our willpower, we continue to journey with Jesus.

The Church may have taken our teacher, our companion, our friend, but we know where to find the Resurrected One.

We pray. We persist. We ask. We seek. We knock.

Mercy. Forgiveness. Openings. All of these gifts and more are ours to claim.

So, “Woman, why are you weeping?”

Danielle Nista
Church of St. Francis Xavier
07.24.22
Sunday 5 p.m.

My name is Danielle Nista, and as a 28 year old, I am one of the ever elusive “young adults” the Church seems to be so interested in keeping engaged and active. That said, I am not overly fond of the phrase “young adult.” Perhaps it is because I am a librarian, but for me the term young adult equates to teenagers and coming-of-age novels rather than folks who are stepping out on their own, beginning to establish themselves in the world. Despite the word “adult” being in the name, there has always been something infantilizing about the term. I’ve sought out alternate words to use, for a while saying “millennial” though that generational term is no longer quite accurate as so much of Gen Z now fits into this category. Among friends, I do call myself an adult, and people over the age of 35 are “real” adults. For the purposes of this talk, I will refer to folks in the age range of 18-35 as “new adults.”

I admit when I first looked at the readings for today, as a queer woman, I was disappointed to see that I’d be preaching on a reading about the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. But upon reflection, I realized that God gave me a gift to think about how this story aligns with new adults’ relationship with the Church. On one level, Sodom and Gomorrah is a story

about when to stay and when to leave. In the story we heard today, Abraham is asking God to spare these cities on behalf of some innocent people and even as that number diminishes, God still relents and agrees he would stay his wrath on their behalf. To me, this parallels the experience of people who choose to stay in the Catholic faith in spite of the many shortcomings of the Church. It isn't that people are ignoring the bad. It's that they see there is still good there and that good is worth staying to preserve and expand.

This parallels my experience of my own faith. Time and time again, I have had people ask me why I, an outspoken feminist and an openly queer woman, choose to continue to be a practicing Catholic. This is not a decision I take lightly nor passively. I was raised Catholic, attending CCD, volunteering at Bible Camp in the summer, and going to mass each Sunday. I actively chose to go to Boston College to continue to grow and explore my faith in college. I grappled with my faith as I learned about the horrors the Church helped perpetuate via colonialism and wondered how we could possibly atone for those sins. I struggled in my own journey of realizing I was bisexual and knowing the Catholic Church's negative stance on queerness but still finding spiritual fulfillment in receiving communion and being a practicing Catholic. I love the awe and wonder the traditions

inspire, but I chafe against the limitations forced on women. (As an aside, as a little girl I used to play Church with my stuffed animals, gather them around my makeshift altar, open up my bible and preach, so speaking before you this evening is something of a dream come true.) I deeply believe that the Church can best be changed from the inside, and that is why I continue to be Catholic.

I am grateful to have found my reasons not to smite my relationship with the Church, and most of those reasons are ones that I have found in this very building in partnership with the magnificent members of the parish. Statistically speaking though, I am in the minority. According to a 2014 study by the Pew Research Center, 13% of American adults are former Catholics. According to their research, Catholicism has the dubious honor of being the religion with the highest rate of attrition in the U.S. Among Catholics, only 17% of them are aged 18-29 years old. I think this trend of movement away from the Church dovetails with the rest of the story of Sodom and Gamorrah, particularly Lot and his family packing up and leaving once they realize the city is going to be destroyed. I think a lot of new adults are at this stage of the story, thinking it better to abandon ship and try again elsewhere rather than remain in a place that seems destined to be heading for destruction.

Since this has not been my experience in the Church, and I didn't want to come up here purporting to speak for all new adults, I decided to poll my friends on Instagram to gather more information about the experiences of new adults and their relationship to the Church. The prompt was simple: I want to know the reasons you choose to stay in the Catholic Church or why you chose to leave. I promised all the results would remain anonymous, but that responses would inform my preaching. I put it out there not expecting much beyond the circle of friends I usually talk to. Isn't there the old saying there's 3 things you should never discuss with friends? Religion, politics, and money. And here I am inviting folks to talk.

I should have paid closer attention to the Gospel for this week: ask and you shall receive because I received more than I could have imagined. People from all areas of my life showed up with sincerity, passion, and deep honesty. Some were hesitant to enter the space only because it had been a while since we had spoken or were concerned their opinions would offend me and my faith. I assured folks that what I wanted was their honesty. Once invited, people did share.

Out of the 18 respondents, 7 are still practicing, 4 still attend mass occasionally but don't consider themselves practicing, and 7 are either a different religion or no longer religious. They were raised in different parts

of the country and currently live all over too. While folks who responded are of many sexual orientations, the division between who is still practicing and who is not was not along those lines. In fact, of the queer folks who responded, most are either still practicing or at the very least still participate in the Church in some way. Every single respondent sent me multi-part messages and most engaged in fruitful discussion after the initial response.

Though my sample size is very small, I think it is hard to dispute that there is genuine interest in the new adult community to talk about Catholicism and religion in places that they feel safe and welcome. So where exactly does that leave us? I get the feeling that the response to the same question posted on the St. Francis Xavier instagram wouldn't have garnered the same responses, particularly because the folks who are no longer practicing likely wouldn't have seen and responded. There's also a difference between speaking with a friend and speaking back to an institution. Even though SFX itself is extremely welcoming and inclusive and does a great job to sustain that environment, without a personal connection people will not enter that space. This is especially true when they see the Church with a capital C as reinforcing the power structures they see played out in society. For some, even those who grew up devoutly, the ugliness of this hypocrisy in the face of what should be a

Gospel of Love, at best makes them distrustful of outreach and at worst drives them away.

Building trust is a long and slow process, and absolutely must happen on an individual level. Building that trust forges community, and that was a common theme throughout the conversations I had with my friends. For those who left, they either sought community elsewhere or said they were still struggling to find it, but it is something they miss deeply. For those who stayed in the Church, the communities they found within their parishes but also across time via tradition are what led them to stay. Human connection helps us to see the divine in one another. It is this shared faith, like what we saw in the Gospel, that community that we crave, that elevates the Church from merely a hierarchical institution to living witness to God's love for us all. The disciples specifically ask Jesus how they should pray, especially since *John* told *his* disciples what to do. Clearly that moment of building a faith community meant something since we still gather and hold hands and say those words to this very day at every mass.

But how do we build and continue that community? This is not the sort of thing that has an easy solution and is one and done. I'd like to demonstrate the impact of the profound community on my faith formation that I found with Catholic Lesbians here at Xavier. After working up four

months worth of courage, I shyly walked into the West Room in January of 2019 to my first meeting, late I might add. I was immediately embraced with a cloud of earnest love. Everyone was sat in a circle and given a chance to talk. I felt heard and listened to in a way that made me feel safe and valued. It was easy to see that this was normal for the entire group. I remember returning home after being signed up to lead the next month's meeting, and my friends asked me how it had gone. I paused for a moment, and said "I think I may have just been adopted by a dozen lesbian aunts." Without fail, every single Catholic Lesbians meeting I have attended rejuvenates and reinspires my faith. Every single woman in the group bears witness to the love of Christ through the laughter, joy, teasing barbs, sacrifices, fear, and honesty they bring to our meetings. I do not take this community for granted; it took many years to build that trust with each other so that they could be vulnerable. I have walked into it and merely echo back what I see. I am grateful to have been trusted with caring for that spirit too. I and some of the other new adults in the group now have a group chat that we affectionately call the hatchlings, as an homage to the ways we are emerging in the group as the next generation. It took time to get to know one another but I'm so glad that we did.

A key part to community building and trust requires vulnerability. Vulnerability goes beyond taking the leap to share something personal or private about yourself. It is bearing your soul and its hurt, and believing that you will be received with care. Vulnerability is safety. I think this is what makes it challenging for many folks in my age group to take the step in the Church to building community and ties. It is not seen as a place that is tolerant of dissent or criticism. People clearly care deeply and want to see change but are afraid to express it lest they be ejected from the community. But new adults, we need to still try. We need to embrace the parable in today's Gospel that encourages us to boldly ask. We need to speak our needs whether or not they are convenient for others, particularly others in positions of power. We have become increasingly disillusioned but the faith we learned has kept us hopeful that if we knock long enough we will either move someone to act out of care for us or just to get us to hush.

New adults need to see Jesus's Gospel of love reflected in the institutions and traditions of the Church in order to stay, and it is up to those of us still in the Church to be a living testament to that Love. This is how Jesus calls us to act. And as we invite others into community and continue to encounter doors, we need to work together to take turns knocking when others get tired. No matter what we cannot stop. This is how we effect

change to shape our Church. One day the new adults will become the “real” adults in the Church, and therefore we need to be present now to have a Church community to grow into and to offer to those who come next. I pray that in that moment I will have the grace to listen to new voices as I desire to be listened to by my community. I believe in building that future for the Catholic Church now, and I will stay to bring about change that better reflects God’s love for all creation. I now ask you, members of the Xavier Community of all ages, will you knock on the door with me? I do hope someone will answer.