

THE CECILIAN

A NEWSLETTER TO HONOR ST. CECILIA, VIRGIN AND MARTYR
AND A CHRONICLE OF MICHAELA SASSE'S DISCERNMENT AS A CONSECRATED VIRGIN LIVING IN THE WORLD

ISSUE NO. 6 | JULY 22, 2026 | FEAST DAY OF ST. MARY MAGDALENE

Over the summer, I took the course *Praying Sacred Scripture* offered by the St. Vincent College Institute of Ministry Formation in Latrobe, Pennsylvania. The ten-week course was taught online by Fr. Nathanael Polinski, a Benedictine monk. Eventually, I will take courses taught by Fr. Boniface Hicks, and I eagerly anticipate those. Once my formation to become a spiritual director is complete, I will have spent around 11 years enrolled in higher education, most of that relating to science.

Of course, my most valuable lessons in life have occurred outside of the classroom. As an aspirant for the vocation of consecrated virginity, the enemy has provoked me in various ways, some more creative than others, but all rooted in lies. Fr. Timothy Gallagher wrote in *Discernment of Spirits*: "Ignatius affirms that God gives the first lesson, that is, spiritual consolation. With equal clarity he teaches that God does not give the second lesson, that is, spiritual desolation, but simply permits it to be given by another agency, that is, by the enemy. God gives spiritual consolation; God never gives spiritual desolation. God, however, does permit the enemy to give us spiritual desolation at times for reasons that lie within his loving providence" (p. 67).

Knowing that God does not permit anything unless it is for my greater good is edifying, yet suffering is still suffering, and it can be heart-wrenching. In God's wisdom he foresaw my need to grow in relationship with the Word to increase in trust of His will for my life and to have the opportunity to experience renewal every day. Pope Paul VI penned the following in *Dei Verbum (The Word of God)*: "The bride of the incarnate Word, the Church taught by the Holy Spirit, is concerned to move ahead toward a deeper understanding of the Sacred Scriptures so that she may increasingly feed her sons with the divine words... This should be so done that as many ministers of the divine word as possible will be able effectively to provide the nourishment of the Scriptures for the people of God, to enlighten their minds, strengthen their wills, and set men's hearts on fire with the love of God." Although suffering is permitted by God, He is not a casual bystander; He understands us intimately and longs for us to be made whole. "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has similarly been tested in every way, yet without sin. So let us confidently approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and to find grace for timely help" (Heb. 4:15). God continuously feeds us with His Word and will always give us precisely what we need for sustenance; He is *with* us - Emmanuel!

Dei Verbum further states: "The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures just as she venerates the body of the Lord, since, especially in the sacred liturgy, she unceasingly receives and offers to the faithful the bread of life from the table both of God's word and of Christ's body." I could not miss an opportunity to acknowledge St. Mary Magdalene, whose feast day we celebrate today, as a model of contemplation. St. Mary Magdalene knew the brevity of life, and she is often depicted with a skull, a reminder of our mortality. After her exile, she spent her final days in a cave contemplating the Lord. Last week, we celebrated the Feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, patroness of the contemplative Carmelite Order. In the 13th century, Our Lady of Mount Carmel appeared to St. Simon Stock and presented him with a brown scapular, a sign of her protection. As we traverse this difficult life, may we seek the Lord in renewed fervor through His Word and His Presence in the Eucharist; may we also rest in the protection of our Blessed Mother.



OUR LADY OF MOUNT CARMEL - JULY 16TH

PRAYER INTENTIONS

- For the women in the Salina Diocese who are discerning a vocation to consecrated life
- For hearts hardened by sin to be transformed by an encounter with Jesus Christ, especially through His Word

ST. MARY MAGDALENE

Contemplative, Penitent

There are many questions about the person of St. Mary Magdalene. Is she the unnamed woman who washes Jesus' feet in Luke chapter 7? Is she the woman who anoints Jesus' feet before His crucifixion? Is she the same Mary who is the sister to Lazarus and Martha? Throughout the centuries, many theologians have held the belief that the woman in all three accounts is indeed St. Mary Magdalene.

It is believed that she is called Mary Magdalene, or more directly translated as Mary the Magdalene, since she is identified with the town of Magdala. An ancient tradition holds that she was from a wealthy family in Bethany but at a certain point in life went to live in Magdala, which had a high number of pagans living there. Here it is believed that she was led away from her faithful upbringing and seduced by worldly pleasures. It is said that she fell so far that she became known by the Jews as a public sinner, the notorious Magdalene.

She converted while listening to Jesus speak in a crowd. Her sins fell from her, as if they were a former life, as she heard His message of mercy and hope which pierced her heart. From that moment on, when she heard Jesus and he cast demons out of her, St. Mary Magdalene followed closely by her Lord, hanging onto His every word. She joined the group of Apostles who followed Jesus and even helped to support them monetarily.

She was known to contemplate everything Jesus said, which is why there is a strong belief that she is in fact Mary, the sister of Martha, who has chosen the better part of sitting at Jesus' feet and listening to His every word when He comes to visit their family.

St. Mary Magdalene was present with the Blessed Virgin Mary at the foot of the Cross and then went three days later on the morning of Easter Sunday to anoint the body with oil when she discovered the empty tomb. Jesus chose to appear to her before any of the other apostles, and He gave her the important mission to proclaim the truth of His resurrection for the very first time in history.

Around the year 41 A. D. she was exiled from Jerusalem with a group of Christians to France. She lived out the rest of her days in contemplation of the Lord in a grotto halfway up the mountain of La Sainte Baume. Local tradition states that she eventually ate nothing but the Holy Eucharist and died in a eucharistic ecstasy after receiving Communion for the last time.

There are very few books written about Mary Magdalene, especially in English since she is buried in France. However, the best book to read about her life is entitled, *Saint Mary Magdalene: Prophetess of Eucharistic Love* by Father Sean Davidson. This book is distributed by the order of priests who keep her Basilica in which she is buried and have been tasked to do so for hundreds of years, so there is much thought, research, and prayer that has gone into the telling of her story.¹

REFLECTION

“So I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven; hence, she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little.”

Luke 7:47

Sr. Mary Grace of the Sisters of Life said the following, “Where we stumble can be the greatest point of our conversion.” I have also heard it said that God loves us where we are at, but He loves us far too much to leave us there. How does God desire to use your sin for deeper conversion and an opportunity to encounter the outpouring of His mercy?

St. Mary Magdalene, pray for us.



LECTIO DIVINA

Steps to Praying with Sacred Scripture

Choose a text of the Scriptures that you wish to pray. I typically use the daily Gospel reading.

Place yourself in a quiet environment. Calm your anxieties and thoughts, and acknowledge God's presence.

Offer a prayer to the Holy Spirit for inspiration and guidance: Come, Holy Spirit!

1. *Lectio*: Read the text slowly and prayerfully, constantly listening for that word that God has prepared for you. You may want to re-read the same text multiple times to help quiet yourself interiorly and focus on God's voice. Listen and receive the Word that God speaks to you.

2. *Meditatio*: When a word or phrase strikes you, stop and rest with it. Repeat the word or phrase to yourself. Allow it to speak to you in a personal way by pondering the word in your heart, reflecting on what it means to you. Memorize it and repeat it to yourself, allowing it to interact with your thoughts, hopes, memories, and desires.

3. *Oratio*: Prayer is your response to God's word. It begins your dialogue with God that comes from your heart. Formulate a prayer, as a response to God. What do you want to say to the Lord in response to the Word spoken to you? Enter into this loving conversation with God.

4. *Contemplatio*: Rest in God's presence and receive His transforming embrace. Sit still with God, realizing that in this deep and profound relationship, words are not necessary. Be content and at peace with a wordless, quiet rest in God, which brings joy to the heart. Remember that contemplation is not your action or doing, rather it is allowing God to act in you.²

And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was sitting at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment, and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment. Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw it, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner." And Jesus answering said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he answered, "What is it, Teacher?" "A certain creditor had two debtors; one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they could not pay, he forgave them both. Now which of them will love him more?" Simon answered, "The one, I suppose, to whom he forgave more." And he said to him, "You have judged rightly." Then turning toward the woman he said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house, you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little." And he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." Then those who were at table with him began to say among themselves, "Who is this, who even forgives sins?" And he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace." Luke 7:37-50



UPDATES FROM THE OFFICE OF CONSECRATED VOCATIONS

- A Meet and Greet for religious sisters will occur from 5-7 PM on Friday, July 31st at Gross Memorial Coliseum during registration for the Salina Diocese Eucharistic Conference. All are invited to attend. Please make the religious sisters who are in attendance at the Eucharistic Conference feel welcome!
- The St. Bernadette Fund for Consecrated Vocations was recently established to support and promote consecrated vocations and religious life in the Diocese of Salina. Fund distributions may be used for discernment opportunities, retreats, visits to religious communities, educational programming, outreach, promotional materials, formation activities, and other initiatives that encourage and support religious vocations consistent with diocesan priorities. Checks can be made out to the Catholic Foundation for Diocese of Salina with the fund name in the memo line. The mailing address is PO Box 1696, Salina, KS 67402.
- I have created brochures regarding discernment of consecrated life and the *Ordo Virginum*. Please let me know if you would like to receive some.
- If you are interested in learning more about the promotion of consecrated life, please visit the Salina Diocese Consecrated Life webpage at <https://salinadiocese.org/office/vocations/consecrated-life/> or the Friends of the Bridegroom website at <https://www.renewreligious.org/>. I have created a book list and other materials that may aid a young woman in her discernment. The Friends of the Bridegroom will launch a program this fall to help facilitate conversations regarding consecrated life in a parish setting. If you have questions regarding consecrated vocations, please contact me at michaela.sasse@salinadiocese.org.



¹ St. Mary Magdalene. The GIVEN Institute. (2022, October 25). https://giveninstitute.com/saint_stories/st-mary-magdalene/
² The Steps of Lectio Divina. (n.d.). <https://www.conceptionabbey.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/lectio-divina-card.pdf>
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