

Archbishop Salvatore Fisichella
Pontifical Council for the New Evangelization
Via della Conciliazione, 5
00193 Roma, Italy

Re: Magdalene in the prayer for the Jubilee of Mercy

Dear Archbishop Fisichella,

This letter brings many prayers and greetings. Thank you for your work promoting Pope Francis' Jubilee Year of Mercy.

The prayer for the Jubilee Year of Mercy is beautiful. Still, I write to request a correction regarding the references to Magdalene.

In line six of the prayer there is a pairing of Magdalene with the adulteress. Line five and line six read:

*Your loving gaze freed Zacchaeus and Matthew from being enslaved
by money;
the adulteress and Magdalene from seeking happiness only in
created things;*

For centuries St. Mary of Magdala has been misrepresented in our Church. She has been primarily understood as the "sinful Magdalene." Pope St. Gregory I, who did not have the benefit of modern biblical scholarship¹, officially propagated this error, which is still with us today. As a result, Catholic art, hagiography and tradition have often represented Mary Magdalene as a repentant prostitute. Many Catholics still regard her as a sinful repentant prostitute rather than in her role as faithful follower of Jesus and first witness to the resurrection.

Indeed, we know from Sacred Scripture that St. Mary of Magdala was a faithful disciple who remained near Jesus as he died on the cross and was chosen by the Risen Christ as his first witness to the Resurrection.

Modern scripture scholars have shown there is no evidence in scripture that Mary of Magdala was the “sinful woman” in Luke 7 or any other anonymous woman in the Gospel.² There is, however, solid evidence that she was a leader among the disciples.² As a result, in 1974, Church officials recognized the error and changed the Gospel reading for her feast day on July 22nd from Luke 7:36-50, the story of the sinful woman to John 20: 1-2, 11-18 recalling her as the disciple who proclaimed Jesus’s resurrection to the first believers.

Archbishop Fisichella, given modern scholarship’s correctives about the role of St. Mary of Magdala in our salvation history, we respectfully request that the Prayer for the Year of Mercy be amended to reflect her true role and witness. Pairing her with the adulteress in this prayer ignores her true role as a faithful follower of Jesus and continues a tradition that the Church itself recognized was an error in 1974.

Thank you for considering our request and we look forward to your response.

With prayers and hope,

References

Below is a sample of Catholic Biblical Scholarship presenting clear evidence that St. Mary of Magdala was a leader and disciple and not Luke's "sinful woman in the city" (7:37) or any other anonymous woman:

- M. R. Thompson, SSMN, *Mary of Magdala: Apostle and Leader*, 1995, 15, 32. "This false identification is still made in spite of the fact that it is non-scriptural and has no basis in the apocryphal writings through the first three centuries of the Christian era." "Mary of Magdala was so prominent in the early church that it was impossible to change the form by which she was known.... Mary of Magdala was indeed, leader and apostle in the early church."
- R. E. Brown, SS, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple*, 1979, 92. As cited in J. Turpin. *Twelve Apostolic Women*, 2009, 49. "Another proof that women could be intimate disciples of Jesus is found in chapter 20 [John's Gospel]."
- J. Winkler, OFM Conv, *The Gospels Simply Explained*, 2008, 25."In Matthew's account, the women go to the tomb just before dawn as they do in the other gospels. Here, though, there are two women.... The reason for two women is that one needs two to give witness to anything in the Old Testament. ... [But] Women couldn't even give witness to anything in the Old Testament. Even the Gospel of Matthew deemphasizes the role of women. Yet, here we see two women giving witness to the Resurrection. It seems...Matthew is saying that with the Resurrection, the rules are changed. Women are credible witnesses."
- B. E. Reid, OP, *Choosing the Better Part? Women in the Gospel of Luke*, 1996, 204. "The women in the Fourth Gospel—the Samaritan woman, Martha and Mary of Bethany, and Mary Magdalene—enter into theological discussion with Jesus (John 4:7-26, 11:21-27, 20:14-17), make profound faith proclamations (John 4:29, 11:27, 20:18), and act as prophets and apostles (John 4:28-30, 39-41; 12:3-7; 20:18) over the objections of Jesus' male disciples (4:27, 12:5). Such stories would only have made sense in a community in which women acted as theologians, teachers, prophets, preachers, and apostles and were approved for doing so."