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Patron saint of the slandered

by Dennis Coday

NCR Today

Today is the feast of St. Mary Magdalene (or St. Mary of Magdala). My colleague and *NCR* house theologian, Pat Marrin, offers a reflection on this feast, Apostle to the Apostles. You can listen or read more about St. Mary Magdalene at the Web site for *St. Anthony Messenger*, Saint of the Day podcast. This speaker says Mary might be consider the patron saint of the slandered, because of the persistent legend that she is the unnamed sinful woman who anointed the feet of Jesus in Luke 7:36-50.

Scholars today point out that there is no scriptural basis for confusing the two women.

A recent story by *NCR* editor at large Tom Roberts, A map to the future church, tells how Sr. Christine Schenk and FutureChurch set about rehabilitating Mary of Magdala, "the woman who had previously been depicted by male preachers as the reformed prostitute of the New Testament," as part of an ongoing study to raise awareness about biblical women.

Since 1997, groups across the United States, Australia, Canada and the Netherlands -- about 250 on an annual basis -- hold St. Mary of Magdala prayer services.

Since last year, which was the year of the Synod of the Bible in Rome, FutureChurch has used the annual prayer days to campaign to "put women back in the biblical picture." A recent e-mail message from Schnek notes that last October, "for the first time in history, Catholic bishops meeting in a synod 'recognized and encouraged' the ministry of women of the Word, discussed the need to restore women's stories to the Lectionary, and invited the greatest number of women ever to participate as auditors and biblical experts."

To keep this forward momentum moving, FutureChurch is asking participants at Mary of Magdala celebrations this year to send paper and electronic postcards to Cardinal Antonia Cañizares Llovera,

prefect for the Congregation for Divine Worship, encouraging him and the synod committee to:

- Open an examination of the Lectionary to "see if the actual selection and ordering of the readings are truly adequate to the mission of the Church in this historic moment," as recommended by Synod Proposal 16.
- Restore women leaders such as Phoebe (Romans 16) and Lois and Eunice (2 Tim 1:4, 5) to Lectionary texts from which they have been deleted.
- Include stories about other women leaders such as Shiprah and Puah, the midwives who saved a nation of Hebrew boy-children, perhaps even Moses.
- Convene a gender-balanced group of biblical scholars and liturgists to decide which women's stories would be most fruitful for prayer, preaching and catechesis if added to the Lectionary.

A list of Magdala celebrations can be found here:

<http://www.futurechurch.org/marym/celebrations.htm>

Sample postcards can be found here: <http://www.futurechurch.org/watw/>.

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