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Visit your bishop

by Phyllis Zagano

Just Catholic

The Lord is risen! He is risen indeed! Go tell your bishop. While you're there, let him know that Jesus first appeared to a woman.

The liturgy police have done it again. They've shortened John's beautiful account of the Resurrection so the Easter Sunday Gospel stops short of Jesus' first appearance. That would be to Mary Magdalene.

Why? Ask your bishop.

The fact of the matter is, a woman first witnessed and first proclaimed the central fact of Christianity: Christ has risen. Not only that: The men believed her. Why is it such a problem for women to proclaim that today?

It wasn't always like this. It does not need to be like this.

Oh, you say, don't use the "O word" -- ordination. The law is the law. Well, let me tell you something about law. To begin with, law is not theology. The law reflects practice, which grows from theology, but the law is not theology. The law that effectively keeps women's hands off the Gospel is just that: a discipline, not a theological fact.

So when you visit your bishop, you might point that out to him in case the subject of women ordained to the diaconate comes up. Women were and can again be deacons. Deacons rightfully proclaim the Gospel. Deacons rightfully preach.

The word "deacon," you know, means "servant." Its deeper meanings bring forth "one who carries the message." That would be the hundreds of thousands of women in today's church who serve and teach and

heal. They proclaim the Gospel's teachings by their lives and by their actions, sometimes using words. They are the ones whose hearts are penetrated by the message of Christ. But at Mass, they cannot read the Gospel, and at Mass, they cannot preach.

Does your bishop know why women cannot be returned to the order of deacons? Chances are he's heard the Roman Curia's recitative: 1) Women cannot be ordained deacons because they cannot image Jesus; 2) Women cannot be ordained deacons because the law forbids it; 3) Women cannot be ordained deacons because women deacons of history only ministered to women; 4) Women cannot be ordained deacons because (get this) we don't want to upset the Orthodox.

Glory! Just as with the Gospel, they keep tweaking the facts!

First: Every sacrament is sign and symbol of the living Christ. The deacon does not represent the human male Jesus; the deacon represents Christ the servant. A woman cannot image the risen Christ? That implies women are not made in the image and likeness of God.

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Second: "The law" means Canon 1024 (only a male is validly ordained), which developed to restrict women from priesthood. Very new Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith regulations levy excommunication for women's ordination without distinguishing what is (diaconal ordination) and what is not (priestly ordination) supported by Tradition.

Third: Women can only minister to women? What do you think is going on now? The women deacons of history anointed other women -- for baptism, for extreme unction, for burial. The women deacons of history catechized, prayed with, and gave spiritual direction to other women. How about we stick with Tradition and bring these forward through the ordained ministry of the church?

Fourth: We can't get ahead of the Orthodox. Hello? The Eastern churches have a deep tradition of ordained women, to modern times. The Armenian Apostolic Church has women deacons; the holy synod of the Orthodox Church of Greece voted to restore the tradition 10 years ago. The Catholic church accepts the sacramentality of their orders, so what about their women deacons?

I know your bishop is busy, but why not send him a note or at least give him a call? Remind him of what Pope Francis wrote in *Evangelii Gaudium*: "But we need to create still broader opportunities for a more incisive female presence in the Church."

That might get his attention.

[Phyllis Zagano is senior research associate-in-residence at Hofstra University and winner of the 2014 Isaac Hecker Award for Social Justice. She will speak May 6 at St. Francis Xavier Church in New York City and June 9 at Holy Family Church, South Pasadena, Calif. From June 9 to July 8, she will conduct a free online seminar about women in the diaconate based on the books *Women Deacons: Past, Present, Future* and *Ordination of Women to the Diaconate in the Eastern Churches*. Seminar registration is now open at http://people.hofstra.edu/phyllis_zagano/MOOS.html]

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