

Women Did Not Abandon Jesus

The role of women in the history of the Church was the theme chosen by Benedict XVI for his catechesis at today's general audience, which was held in the Paul VI Hall in the presence of 20,000 people.

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"Jesus chose 12 men as fathers of the new Israel, 'to be with Him and to be sent out to proclaim the message',"

said the Holy Father, "but ... among the disciples many women were also chosen. ... They played an active role within the context of Jesus mission. In the first place ... the Virgin Mary, who with her faith and her maternal care worked in a unique way for our redemption. ... Having become a disciple of her Son, ... she followed Him even to the foot of the cross where she received a maternal mission for all his disciples in all times."

After mentioning other women who appear in various parts of the Gospel - such as Susanna, and Lazarus' sisters Martha and Mary - the Pope pointed out that "the women, unlike the Twelve, did not abandon Jesus at the hour of His Passion. Outstanding among them was Mary Magdalene ... who was the first witness of the Resurrection and announced it to the others." Pope Benedict also recalled how St. Thomas Aquinas referred to

Mary Magdalene as "the apostle of the apostles."

In the first Christian communities, Benedict XVI went on, "the female presence was anything but secondary." St. Paul "starts from the fundamental principle according to which among the baptized 'there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female'."

Furthermore, "the Apostle admits that in the Christian community it is quite normal that there should be women who prophesy, in other words who pronounce openly under the influence of Holy Spirit for the edification of the community."

Let us give "thanks to the Lord because He leads His Church, generation after generation, indiscriminately using men and women who know how to bring their faith to fruition..." Therefore St.

Paul's subsequent assertion that "women should be silent in the churches" must "be relativized," said the Pope, and he explained that "the problem ... of the relationship between these two apparently contradictory indications should be left to the exegetes."

"The history of Christianity would have developed quite differently without the generous contribution of many women," said the Pope and he recalled how John Paul II had written: "The Church gives thanks for each and every woman ... for all the manifestations of the feminine 'genius'."

"We share this appreciation, giving thanks to the Lord because He leads His Church, generation after generation, indiscriminately using men and women who know how to bring their faith to fruition ... for the

good of the entire body of the Church."

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