Bible Study 100

Wednesday, October 25, 2023

“The Women of the Bible.” (continued….)

Because the Gospels are not a biography of the life of Jesus, it is difficult to get an accurate picture of the people in his life. Mary, as we have seen and studied, obviously had a central role. From birth till death she seems to have been there.

We see her intervention at “The Wedding Feast at Cana.” Later we will see her at the Cross of Jesus. All of the Gospels record that it is only the women and John who are present. The scene gives birth to an imagery of Mary mourning her son. The picture is depicted in Michael Angelo’s “Pieta” and by the Reformation Artists, with their Altar boards or screens.

These screens show a very dour, suffering Christ, often with the women mourning in black. This leads to the tradition of Mary as the ‘Queen of Sorrows’ a title that was meant to console Christians in times of death, plague, and persecution.

So who were these women that are spoken of around the Cross of Christ? We read that they are Mary, the Mother of Jesus, Mary the Mother of James; Joanna, Salome; Mary Magdalene. Of these the Magdalene is perhaps the name that is best known.

Mary Magdalene is always going to be a contentious and disputed figure. First because she is often confused with the sinner prostitute in the story of the woman being stoned by the Jews till Jesus intervenes. In this scenario Mary is seen as the repentant sinner. Most scholars would dispute this. Mary is such a common name in Palestine that it is all too easy to relegate the Magdalene and almost destroy her reputation.

Despite the hatchet job that Augustine does on Mary Magdalene in the Fifth Century, she somehow develops a following. Devotion to her grows and churches appear dedicated to her name. Even Colleges such as Magdalene College Oxford carry her name.

What is beyond dispute is that women played a large role in the ministry of Jesus, the Epistles and the Acts of the Apostles. Why? Given the central role that women play in Jewish life, why are they diminished after the early life of the church. I have a theory.

The first couple of hundred years of Christianity were enormously ‘Jewish’: the prayers, the family, the practices. It is only after 312ad the Edict of Milan that things began to change. From that date Constantine, the Emperor signs a law giving freedom of religion across the Empire. Suddenly in Rome and in the major cities it became fashionable to be Christian. But this was a Roman world not a Hebrew world. Men ruled and women were regarded as property.

It was no longer good to give any acknowledgement to women in the story of Jesus.

Read on…

Fr. Bill.