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Transcript of
“Women Disciples, Leaders, and Apostles: Mary Magdalene’s Sisters”

presented by
Carolyn Osiek, R.S.C.J.

Dr. Colleen Griffith:

Now it gives me great pleasure to introduce our speaker for this afternoon, Sister Carolyn Osiek. Sister Carolyn Osiek is a religious of the Sacred Heart and the Charles Fischer Catholic Professor of New Testament emerita at Brite Divinity School of Texas Christian University in Fort Worth. She holds her doctorate in New Testament and Christian Origins from Harvard University, and taught for 26 years at the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago before continuing on to Brite Divinity School.

Carolyn Osiek is a past president of the Catholic Biblical Association and of the Society of Biblical Literature. She was the second woman to hold the presidency of the Catholic Biblical Association and the fourth elected to lead the Society of Biblical Literature. She has been associate editor of *The Bible Today* and the New Testament book review editor for the *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*. Carolyn Osiek is the author of numerous books, commentaries, articles, and essays, many of which are out front for 20 percent off, folks, at the end of the day. Some of her celebrated titles include *A Woman’s Place: House Churches in Earliest Christianity*, co-authored with Margaret MacDonald and Janet Tulloch and published by Fortress Press. Also the book *Ordained Women in the Early Church: A Documentary History*, edited with Kevin Madigan and published by John Hopkins University Press. The book *Beyond Anger: On Being a Feminist in the Church*, published by Paulist, and *What Are They Saying About the Social Setting of the New Testament*, also published by Paulist Press. She has written commentaries on Galatians, 1 Corinthians, Philippians, and Philemon; also the Shepherd of Hermas. She is the editor of the 15-volume *Message of Biblical Spirituality* series published by Liturgical Press, and one of four editors of the highly-acclaimed resource, *Silent Voices, Sacred Lives: Women’s Readings for the Liturgical Year*.

In addition to her academic work, Carolyn Osiek serves as archivist for her congregation, The Society of the Sacred Heart, United States Province. Over the years, Carolyn Osiek has remained a powerful role model for women, an organic intellectual who loves both Scripture and the Christian tradition and cares deeply about women’s religious experiences and women’s gifts. On behalf of the School of Theology and Ministry, it’s a great delight and privilege to welcome today Carolyn Osiek, who will be presenting “Women Disciples, Leaders, and Apostles: Mary Magdalene’s Sisters.” Carolyn Osiek.

Carolyn Osiek:

I’m very happy to be with you this afternoon. And this is really a very large and impressive group.

Why are we engaged in this celebration, all of this celebrating about Mary Magdalene? Well, we’re talking about this woman whose name was *Maryeh* or *Miryam* or *Maryam* or something like that, from a fishing village of Magdala. It’s the Aramaic name, or *Migdal* is the Hebrew name. The Greek name was something different, *Taricheae*. That’s actually what it was called in her day. But it’s interesting

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that the Gospels preserve the original name. Magdala is Aramaic and Hebrew is Migdal for tower, but Taricheae means something different. It means salt fishing or salted fish, something like that which probably says the major business that went on there.

She's called a disciple. She's called isapostolos, equal to the apostles in the Greek tradition, apostola apostolorum, apostle of the apostles in the West, recipient of revelation from the Risen Jesus, prostitute, reformed prostitute, desert ascetic, sometimes confused with the legendary Mary of Egypt. Much of it... it's very interesting to look at the whole history of portrayals of her because she becomes this person out in the desert with a skull and all this kind of stuff, you know, but still just titillating enough, you know, to stir up a little interest in her. The secret wife of Jesus and the bearer of his child in *The Da Vinci Code*, and today she really is a lightning rod for issues of women's discipleship and ministry.

Will the real Mary Magdalene please stand up? And assuming that she probably isn't going to, I will just reflect for a moment on my own understanding of Mary Magdalene. You know, we all sort of... we all sort of construct our own Magdalene. I see her really as a middle-aged woman, not young and beautiful. And of course the older I get, the older she gets. But probably a widow and probably a person of independent means.

You know, of course, that in the Eastern Church she never became a prostitute which is very interesting. That only happened in the West. Here's the place she comes from where the blue arrow is pointing. The map says Taricheae and Magdala on the west side of the lake. And here's something of what it looks like today. It is being excavated. The site is being excavated now, and they have discovered just recently a synagogue which they say is a pre-70 synagogue. The evidence I think is still out on that. I'm waiting to see it. But, it would be very exciting, certainly, because people say "Well, is this the synagogue that Mary Magdalene attended?" But, the... there is excavation going on there today which is a great thing, because eventually and some years from now we will be able to visit the site again. But if you want to know more about the excavation, go to magdalaproject.org, and it's a website in both English and Italian, whichever you prefer.

But, we are going to turn now to some other of Mary Magdalene's sisters. And I started out by... with a long list. And it was too long, and I said I can't do all this. And I finally got it down to seven. And in choosing seven, of course, we have to leave out some wonderful people, some wonderful women, but that's just the way it happens. So we're going to talk about Priscilla, Junia, Phoebe, Euodia and Syntyche, Sophia, Guilia Runa, and Victoria. You probably know something or maybe quite a bit about Priscilla and Junia and Phoebe, and maybe even Euodia and Syntyche. But I'll bet you don't know much about Sophia and Guilia Runa and Victoria. So this is... this spans about four centuries and these are women that I think it is really worth our getting to know. And as we go through this, I want to ask you the reflective question for yourselves. *With whom of these women do you tend to identify? Which of them are the most appealing to you? Do you... do you have a favorite?* And that's just for your own reflection.

So let's go first to Priscilla. This is Priscilla the wife of Aquila, of course, and she's part of a couple ministry. They are... they're a missionary couple, an evangelizing couple. Their names are both Roman *cognomina*, that is, personal names... of... that are well known actually in the Roman elite. Aquila, though, is supposedly a Jew from Pontus. Pontus is way up north, north central Turkey, north central Asia Minor. And we really don't know anything about where they came from. They first

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appear in Rome. Paul meets them, however. I shouldn't say that. Actually, they first appear in Corinth because that's where Paul meets them, but they had just come from Rome. We don't know if Priscilla was a mother or grandmother, and we don't know anything about household members traveling with them, which presumably would be the case. They would have a whole household of slaves if they are people of means, and they would all travel together. So, but Paul then later on says that he took up with them because they were in the same trade, being tentmakers or leatherworkers, whatever that means. So they're a business couple as well. And they had this family business of leatherworking and perhaps their movement around is for the sake of business. But where they go, they really become evangelizers. So in Acts 18, Paul in Corinth "found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife, Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome," and we'll come back to that in a minute.

Paul went to see them, and because they were of the same trade, they stayed together. So they meet in Corinth, and then they set off to the East. Paul is going back to Palestine, but in Ephesus in Asia Minor he leaves them. So in 1 Corinthians 16:19 the churches of Asia send greetings to the Corinthians because 1 Corinthians is written from Ephesus. So he says "the churches" ... and it's the capital, the commercial capital anyway, of the Roman province of Asia... "The churches of Asia send greetings." That's what it means. It means just this little... Asia means just this little piece. And, "Aquila and Prisca, together with the church in their house, greet you warmly in the Lord." So we know that Aquila and Prisca have... host a house church. But then, when Paul writes Romans some years later from Corinth he says, "Greet Prisca and Aquila." So it seems as if they're back in Rome. So they must have traveled around a bit. And greet them "who work with me in Christ Jesus, who risked their necks for my life." And we do not know to what that is referring. And it's literal. It's an image that works in both Greek and English. It's literally what he says, "they risked their necks" in Greek "for my life," "and I give thanks and all the churches of the Gentiles of the nations." So something, some event has happened here that put Aquila and Prisca, (Prisca and Aquila in Romans, in that order) in danger for the sake of Paul. And there are a number of stories in Acts where Paul barely escapes. You know, it's a great adventure story. There isn't one about Prisca and Aquila. And so we're left to conjecture, to imagine. But Paul says it very clearly here that he is so tremendously grateful to them for what they did for him.

And here is the... here are the distances that they travel, you see, from Rome on the left side of the map they meet in Corinth in the center. And then they took up in Ephesus in Asia Minor. And according to Romans, Paul's letter to the Romans, which we think comes toward the end of his life, they're back in Rome. And they are, therefore, traveling around.

Now when they host a house church, what kind of a "house" are we talking about? And here are five possibilities for the kind of place that they might have had, have owned, lived in, and hosted a group that would come in. This very large and spacious one from Pompeii, a much more modest one also from Pompeii, the house of... so-called House of Diana in Ostia. This is really an apartment building in which there were three floors and private apartments. And so it could have been something much more modest like an apartment but then, of course, the numbers would be greatly reduced. In Rome there is this apartment building that is preserved in part here. Those of you who have been to Rome, you undoubtedly remember what's called "the wedding cake of Rome," the Victor Emmanuel Monument. That's it. That's the big white wall right behind this. So this is just nestled around the corner from that big monument and... and, fortunately, has been preserved. It was one of these apartment buildings that were very frequent in imperial Rome. So... and then here we have in

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Ephesus shops in the front and living quarters behind, again something very small and very modest. And so still a final one in Herculaneum, the courtyard of one of these apartment buildings. This is the only common space in that building. Besides this, its apartments. So starting with that beautiful spacious house and then coming down to something very small, it's a whole range of available space. And so we just don't know exactly what it means when they host a church in their house. Could be very small. Now every time there's a nature picture it's time to pause and reflect before we move on to the next one. And I neglected to say before that this event of Aquila and Prisca leaving Rome, because Claudius had ejected the Jews from Rome; it's an event that probably happened in the year 49, and we don't know that all Jews left Rome; but certainly some of them did.

What does hosting a house church involve? Just let's reflect on that for a moment. Certainly hospitality, not just once a week but ongoing. It's a center for news, for networking, for instruction, for hospitality to visitors, all the while children are being born and raised and business conducted from the house. They don't commute to work. That's not the way it worked. Everything is happening at the same time in this one place. So hosting a house church is not something that is a once a week thing, and that's important to realize. So we have Prisca and Aquila here.

We turn to our second woman, Junia, with her husband Andronicus. This is in Romans 16:7. "Greet Andronicus and Junia, my relatives" (or it could mean people from the same region) "who were in prison with me; they are prominent among the apostles, and they were in Christ before me, before I was." A number of interesting things there. They "were in prison with me," we don't know where. Paul certainly was... seems to have been in prison somewhere when he's writing the letter to the Philippians. There are a number of candidates for that, for where it was. But, "they are prominent among the apostles." Now you can take that in two ways in the Greek as well as in English. Either they are apostles, they're in the group of apostles and they stand out. Or the group of apostles knows them well, but they're not apostles. You understand the grammar can work both ways. And they're... and... and lots of ink has been spilled about this. And probably grammatically the preferred way is to say that they actually are among the apostles. Some people dispute that. But they dispute it on ideological terms. So if we take it that they are indeed among the apostles and they are... "they were in Christ before I was." So they accepted the faith, faith in Jesus, before Paul. Well who are the apostles? That's the question that is provoked here.

In 1 Corinthians 15:5-8, Paul is enumerating... it's like a creedal statement. It's something he has heard, has memorized, and he's writing it down when he's talking about the Resurrection. "He, Jesus, appeared to Cephus, then the twelve. Then... more than five hundred at one time, most of whom are still alive, but some have died. Then he appeared to James, and then to all the apostles. And last of all... to me." Now if that's a continuous list, then the apostles and the Twelve are not the same. Some people say he's combining two lists: one list is Cephus and the Twelve and five hundred. The other list is James and the apostles, in which case the Twelve and the apostles would be the same. But, you know, it's never appealed to me. I think Paul is intelligent enough to know when he's combining two lists, you know. So for him, the apostles, all the apostles... it's a larger group than the Twelve. And one scholar, Richard Bauckham, has suggested that Andronicus and Junia were among the five hundred, which is possible. You know, he drops this comment that the Risen Jesus appeared to five hundred at one time, and we never hear a thing about it. You know? So it's one of those really great mysteries about all of this. And so that's interesting. See, that would make sense then, that they would be in Christ before he was. And this is just to say that we're not sure who all the

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apostles are, but certainly it's quite clear here, with Paul it's a larger group than the Twelve. So they are then, we assume, among the apostles. Moving now.

But, you may know about John Chrysostom's argument in the late fourth century. He's commenting on Romans 16 and he says what a wonderful woman Junia must have been that Paul counts her among the apostles. So in the late fourth century, Chrysostom, who's a great admirer of Paul and a wonderful biblical exegete, reads it that way, that he's... that Junia is among the apostles. In the thirteenth century a man named Aegidius of Rome, a commentator, says, "Well it can't be a woman if the person is an apostle," and therefore, Junia becomes Junias, a male name. So test your translations when you go home. Romans 16:7, look. If it says Adronicus and Junia, the interpretation is that it's a woman. If it's Junias with an e-s-s, they're following the interpretation which was traditional from the Middle Ages into the twentieth century. Then they're following the interpretation that this is a man. So that's Junia.

We move to Phoebe, Phoebe, who is a local leader in the area of Corinth. We know, again, nothing of her marital status. Again, she might be a widow. She seems to be moving fairly independently. In Romans 16:1-2, Paul is writing to the Roman community and he says, "I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church at Cenchreae." Cenchreae is one of the seaports of Corinth. It's the east seaport of Corinth. "So that you may welcome her in the Lord as is fitting for the saints," (which is a usual word that he uses for believers) "and help her in whatever she may require from you, for she has been a benefactor of many and of myself as well." (This is the NRSV text that I'm using throughout this.) And that's always a stickler, what word are they going to say there. This is "benefactor," which is certainly better than some translations of "helper." Actually, I think the best translation would be "patron of many including myself."

So Paul calls her three things there: sister, *diakonos* (we'll talk about that in a minute), and *prostatis*. He calls her sister and that's simply the familial language, the kinship language, that was used in the communities. Paul often uses that kind of language; and then he calls her a diakonos. We sometimes translate that deacon, and that's okay. There has been some study done of what the word diakonos means that early on, and certainly it's connected somehow with service. It is also connected with agency or representation. And so she could be a deputed agent, a representative of the group, the Church at Cenchreae. Perhaps as a patron she's something like this Eumachia—a famous woman in Pompeii—Eumachia who was a benefactor to many different groups and had a statue erected to her in her honor.

But this... this idea of *prostatis*. It's hospitality, networking, that kind of thing, and the comparison is often made now with Junia Theodora. Junia Theodora was a woman, not a Christian, in the 40s or 50s of the first century. And her tomb was found, a Roman tomb, in 1954, about one mile southeast of Corinth in a cemetery. And there were several inscriptions in her honor on a single block, and they were probably copied from inscriptions that were set up in different places in the city previously. She was from Lycia in Asia Minor, and it said that the citizens of Lycia honor her for her *prostasia*. So you see, if Phoebe is a *prostatis*, what she does is *prostasia*.

And here we have some spelling out of what that means. In the case of Junia Theodora, it was hospitality and networking for the people from her home place who came to Corinth on business; and it was maintaining a good relationship with the local authorities. And one person has suggested that she was a lobbyist. So it gives us a basis of comparison, you see, for what Phoebe would be doing for

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Paul and for others. Remember Paul said, “she’s a prostatis for many, including me.” So probably what it means is that when he came into the Corinth area, she first of all took him in, hospitality, but introduced him to the people he needed to be introduced to, you see. And perhaps helped with whatever the trade that he was working, at which Paul himself says he really did at Corinth. He never wanted to be beholden to anybody. He worked with his own hands. So Phoebe may be that kind of a person, I think, and quite likely was, if that’s the kind of thing that she did.

Now when you go back to what he says to her in Romans, you see that Paul is now introducing her. It’s a reciprocal thing. She now is going someplace where she presumably has not been before, where Paul knows some people. Read Romans 16. Sometimes he’s namedropping. He names 26 people that he knows in Rome. He wants them to... he’s not been there before. He wants them to know I know some people there. You know, I’m not coming in totally unknown. And Phoebe, it seems, is the bearer of his letter. And so he is introducing her and saying, “do for her what you would do for me,” you know, because she has been really good for me. Now if she is the bearer of his letter, then she probably is also the reader-interpreter of the letter because that was the usual thing. The person who carried the letter was also then entrusted with reading it. And, I mean, you could kind of imagine this session of reading. And somebody stops and says, “Now what did Paul mean by that?” And you have to answer what you think he meant by that. So there’s interpretation going on as well as the reading.

Now I just put in here a couple of things to illustrate what that means. Remember that they’re using capital letters at this point, no punctuation, and no spaces between words. So I just picked out a passage from Luke, which is Luke’s version of the Our Father, and because that’s familiar language, you probably can read it pretty well. But that one’s not quite so familiar and it takes a while to try to read it. So reading is quite a skill. It’s a very different skill than we do lecturing at church on Sunday morning, you know. There’s a whole... you have to know the text, really, to be able to do it well. So our friend, Phoebe, who is entrusted by Paul with his letter, a person obviously of means and with connections.

We turn to Euodia and Syntyche. Their names mean Happy Travels and Lucky. So Happy Travels and Lucky are two women in the Philippian community. Paul, in his letter to the Philippians in chapter one, he sort of talks about himself. And then in chapters two and three he launches into this appeal for unity. It is in the course of that in chapter two, that he gives what we call the Philippian Hymn, “Let that mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus, who did not consider being in the status of God something to cling to, but emptied himself.” So that’s part of his whole appeal to relinquish some of your claims in order to have harmony, mutual agreement. And just at the beginning of chapter four he says this. Now many commentators take this as an “Oh, by the way.” You know, Paul has launched this beautiful argument for unity. Oh, and then Euodia and Syntyche who aren’t getting along very well, yeah, you do it too. I read it differently, that Euodia... the disagreement between Euodia and Syntyche is the thing that is tearing the Church apart. So he says to them, and it’s very solemn language because he repeats the verb, “I urge...” That’s NRSV. I beg. I mean, it’s strong language. “I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion. . .” And that really... the real word is yokefellow, and nobody knows who’s being referred to there, but obviously the Philippians did. “...Help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the Gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are written in the book of life.” We don’t know who this Clement is either. It is not the Clement later on from Rome.

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Origen, the great third century biblical interpreter, thought that this loyal companion was Paul's wife whom he had left behind in Philippi. That's an interesting conjecture. But somebody there is supposed to referee between these two women, Euodia and Syntyche, who seem to have this very serious disagreement with each other. Now it has also been suggested, and it's possible, that their disagreement was not between each other but it was them together against Paul. That is a possibility. I think the larger possibility is the other way, that they are not agreeing with each other. And it's... the only... they're the only people he sort of singles out in the Letter. Now he mentions Epaphroditus before that and he's sending him back, etc. But, I mean, there's this kind of focus on the appeal that these two women should work out their differences.

So why is their disagreement so important? Well at the very beginning of the Letter in the first verse: "Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the episkopoi and *diakonoi*." Eh, nobody knows exactly how to translate that. Are you going to say bishops and deacons? Well, okay. But to use the word bishop... *episkopos* is the word that becomes bishop, but to use the word bishop is just so anachronistic at this point, you know, in the 60s of the first century and not anything like what we imagine a bishop to be. So superintendent, overseer, manager. It's a secular word that means those things, you see. But, this is the only letter that Paul addresses to a community and singles out roles like that, functions. All the other ones, it's just to the holy ones, to the saints in (da da da)... So maybe this community was sort of one of the leaders in identifying certain roles and having... leadership roles and having sort of a job description for them. Many people think that the leaders of the house churches were the people who eventually formed, as this rolls on, eventually formed like a council for the city out of which eventually down the pike, not here but later, one is elected as a first among many. And then you evolve into the office of bishop as we understand it, you see. So I just wonder if Euodia and Syntyche are perhaps *episkopoi*, that is, leaders of house churches who have... who bear that title. And it... is their disagreement that is causing all this difficulty.

Now I put in here 3 John 1:9-10, which is by another author, entirely different situation, but I think it illuminates this. This is the Johannine author. "I have written something to the church; but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority." (That's the NRSV translation.) Literally, it says he does not receive us. "So if I come, I will call attention to what he is doing in spreading false charges against us. And not content with false charges, he refuses to welcome the friends, and even prevents those who want to do so and expels them from the church." Do we have here, an entirely different situation, an echo of perhaps what's going on with Euodia and Syntyche in Philippi? In other words, that they are very influential leaders in the community, but they're not saints. You know? And Paul appeals to them to resolve their differences.

I might just comment on diakonos there because I meant to on Phoebe and I forgot. You know, Phoebe is called... in Cenchreae is called a diakonos. She is the only person named a diakonos of a specific church in the New Testament. And here we have diakonoi but they're not named, unless Euodia and Syntyche are also diakonoi. That's a possibility. Do they have families? Do any of these women have families? Would they have portrayed their funerary monument something like this family connection? This is in the Pio Cristiano Museum in the Vatican. Or this one, also a Roman depiction of a family. I think the pictures bring them home a little bit to us.

We turn now to people that you're probably not at all familiar with unless you've been reading some of this literature about women in the early Church. A woman named Sophia in Jerusalem, late fourth

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century we think. In 1915, this monument, this inscription that you see on the left was discovered in several pieces on the Mount of Olives, in a cemetery context on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem. It was pieced together. You have a transcription of it on the right side so that you can read the letters a little more clearly. And it says, "Here lies the slave and bride of Christ, Sophia the deacon, the second Phoebe, who fell asleep in peace on the 21st of March..." And then it gets broken off. There's something later about the Lord God so it's probably something like, "May the Lord God give her peace," or something like that, you know. And we don't have the year, just the day of the month. But it's late fourth century, is what the archaeologists think. So here we have someone who is a deacon and it's... the word is again diakonos, not deaconess. But by the late fourth century, she is the same as a deaconess, and I'll talk about that in a minute.

I want to talk first about this second Phoebe. The second Phoebe. It's fascinating because first of all it tells us they're reading Romans and they are also remembering the character Phoebe, the person Phoebe. She has somehow become a heroine to them, and we have very little evidence of that, of people remembering some of those New Testament characters. You know? And so she's... Sophia is called the second Phoebe. And there's been a study on that expression, the second something or other. It's usually said of men and it's usually male, of course, male heroes. And it... usually it means some kind of an imitation of the qualities, or imitation of the deeds, of the first one. And so is Phoebe... is Sophia, sorry... is Sophia someone who is known for her hospitality? Is it because she travels? Which Phoebe also did. We don't know exactly why that is. And so we're left again with the question: where did they come up with this?

But it's a piece of continuity, you see, from the New Testament period into the fourth century in which they're remembering the person of Phoebe, the friend and the patron of Paul. Now she's also a deacon or deaconess. The words are... the titles are interchangeable. *Diakonissa* is deaconess. Or sometimes the same person is called a deaconess in one place and a deacon in another. They use deacon also for women throughout this whole period. The office of deaconess in the third to the fifth centuries. It's a true ordained ministry. It's instituted as a... for ministry to women by women. It is not the same thing as the male deacon role. It is a ministry of women to women. And some important roles include assistance at baptism, baptism of women, because remember baptism was by immersion which means you take off all your clothes and various parts of the body are anointed during the ritual. And so... and the office of deaconess was much, much more prominent in the Eastern Church than in the West. And it's typical... it was typical of the culture and still is in many parts of the East, that male and female don't mingle easily, you know, that there are sort of separate spheres. And the idea of a male deacon or bishop anointing the body of the deaconess was not kosher. And so one of the major roles of the deaconess was to be there to carry out that part of the baptism. But also instruction, religious instruction, pre-and post-baptism and taking charge of female catechumens, for instance.

In the story of St. Mary of Egypt which I mentioned before, Mary Magdalene gets confused with Mary of Egypt who is this legendary figure from the fifth century, probably. She's a famous prostitute and goes... decides to go on pilgrimage to the Holy Land. And she tries to enter the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and some invisible force keeps her back. She cannot walk in. She's instantly converted and then goes to the bishop. And the bishop turns her over to a deaconess, a woman named Romana. And so that, you know, is another little insight about the role of deaconesses, of taking care of women who need to be taken care of and then gradually instructed and prepared for baptism, etc. Pastoral ministry to sick women was a very important part of the deaconess's role. And

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accompaniment of women who were traveling on business or other reasons for travel, pilgrimage too. There is a deaconess who was buried at the Monastery of St. George Koziba in the Wadi Qilt on the way between Jerusalem and Jericho. In the cemetery there which was excavated, there was a deaconess who was buried there. Now that's a male monastery. What is that deaconess doing buried there? Well, she probably died there on her way to Jerusalem or on the way back home. So, you know, another indication of a deaconess who was traveling. So all of those roles were important for the deaconesses. If you want to know more about that, the book by Kevin Madigan and Carolyn Osiek *Ordained Women in the Early Church*, it's back there. So that's Sophia.

And we turn now to Guilia Runa, *presbiterissa*, who lived about 40 years. It's a Latin inscription and it comes from the church of St. Augustine in Hippo, but it comes from after the time of Augustine. Guilia Runa, as you can guess from the name, is not Latin. She's not Greek. She's not Jewish. She's Vandal. The barbarians from the north who had come across through Spain, across Gibraltar and into North Africa, and they were making their way across North Africa heading east. As Augustine lay dying in 430, they were coming really close to Hippo. And the Vandal invasion happened just after he died; I think about a month after. And we don't know much about these people. They were Christians. They were Aryan Christians. We know very little about their liturgy or about their church organization. And the interesting thing is that the inscription is in Latin. So they picked up Latin when they got to North Africa. Latin was the common language. And so we have a woman here who is called a *presbiterissa*. *Presbyter* would be enough to make it feminine, but *presbiterissa*, an extra feminine ending on it like *diaconissa*, deaconess. Again we know so little about her.

It's possible... with these inscriptions of women presbyters we have... you have to be very, very careful, because *presbyter* and the female feminine *presbyter* can mean simply "elder." So it can mean just an older person. And yet sometimes it seems not to mean that. It seems to mean something else. For example, there's another inscription from south Italy of a woman named Leta, *Leta presbyter*, whose husband dedicates the inscription to her. She has died, and the husband doesn't even give his name. And the argument goes that she must really have had the office of *presbyter*, whatever that means, because otherwise he would be the important person in the inscription. You see? Or there's a woman from Dalmatia up north, Croatia, that area, named Flavia Vitalia, *presbyter*. There's an inscription that's not a funerary inscription. It's an account of how a man named Theodosius bought a piece of property, of church property from her hands. She was the agent. And so again you say, if she represents the church in the sale of property, it's not just that we're calling her an elder person. I mean, she's... she has the title of *presbyter*.

And you may know about the famous letter of Gelasius, bishop of Rome around 494, to the bishops of south Italy saying, "Things have gotten so bad there that we hear that women are allowing... to stand at the altar and to assist at the altar. Stop it!" So something's going on in south Italy, you know. And so we sort of put all this together and, you know, it's here and there in the Mediterranean we've got these pieces of evidence of women as *presbyters*. And we really are not sure what that means. I mean, this is at a time when the normal "celebrant," shall we say, of the Eucharist is the bishop. And *presbyters*, we think, may be out in the country... or out of the city... are the celebrants. So it's an evolving situation, obviously. But we do have these interesting pieces of evidence of women who had the title *presbyter*, and here is Guilia Runa, the Vandal.

Finally, Victoria *Sanctimonialis*. I know you have not heard of her unless you've heard me talk about her, because this is someone I discovered, and we know not enough about her to say a whole lot.

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I've always thought in another lifetime I would write a novel about her, maybe. She lived in fifth century Thougga, or today it's Dougga, North Africa. It's in Tunisia today. It was quite an extensive city. Sanctimonialis is a word that is known in the early Church in the West and it means a consecrated virgin. So whether she was living in a community or whether she was as a hermit or an anchorite, I mean, we don't know exactly. But that's what the word sanctimonialis means. This cemetery was excavated in 1915, and the only thing I've ever found published on her was about one page, a report on the excavation of the church. It's a small church as you can see. On the top left you can see two people standing there, one of whom is yours truly. And then to their left, as you go down to the left side of the picture, you see the apse of the church. So it's a small... it's a chapel. And you may be able to see as you look directly below the two figures, there are two sarcophagi at the bottom along the side of the wall there. You see these empty sarcophagi, stone sarcophagi? And there are actually more than that. You can see those two. Both walls on the outside of the chapel walls are lined with them. They are all over. Lots of people wanted to be buried right in that area.

Now top right picture that's yours truly again standing there, and you see the steps that go up into the apse, into that little apse. And between them you see an opening. Hmm? And the opening as you... if you look down at the opening you see, miraculously, I'm down there at the bottom again. But that's what you see. There's a staircase from the side, as well, that goes down into this opening. So when this church was in use, you had the small nave and it had columns. It was supported by columns. You can see some of those column bases in the top right picture. And it had that opening right below the altar. And to get up to the altar to the sanctuary, you had to go up those little steps to go up into the apse of the church.

And so what's down there below? Right below the altar is this tomb which was broken open. There's nothing in it. Tomb robbers got to it a long time ago. But you see the tomb itself on the left picture and a close-up of the inscription on the right. And it says (it's in the dative case which funerary inscriptions are) to Victoria Santimoniale. It's misspelled. The *c-e-e* should be in there. Victoria Santimoniale in pace, in peace. So, to Victoria Sanctimonialis, in peace. And as I walked around that church... and I've been there twice now; and as I walked around it, what I realized was everyone wanted to be buried as close as possible to this tomb of Victoria. So who was she? I mean, we know she was a consecrated virgin. Too late for her to be a martyr, you know. She's not a martyr. She was probably an ascetic, a holy woman, who was venerated in the city, and no written sources about her that anybody knows of. But it led me to reflect how many holy women have come and gone, and we have no record of them.

So what do they all have in common? And what do they have to teach us? All these nameless women who married and bore children and raised children and educated children and produced food and made clothing and ministered to the needy and instructed believers and led prayer and presided at meals and assisted at baptisms and even stood at the altar. They teach us that forms of ministry arise according to need, that family and community life is apostolic, that everyday life is holy, that women leaders arise in every generation and do not let obstacles prevent them from addressing needs, and so much more.

If Mary Magdalene could have only known who was going to come after her and remember her and go and do likewise. Thank you.