

Pastor's Message

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July & August 2009

Saints and Sinners

July and August are months rich in Christian history. Four personalities, two from the New Testament and two from subsequent ages, are intriguing.

On July 22, we celebrate the memorial of Mary Magdalene. On August 15, we note the end of Mary of Nazareth's life in the very ancient feast of the Assumption.

These two extraordinary women come to us from the pages of the New Testament. We know nothing about them except what we read there. They are the two most prominent women in the New Testament. Mary Magdalene is the great disciple of Jesus, perhaps the greatest. Only she, no other person, man or woman, is mentioned as having been at the cross of Christ by all four Gospel writers. She is the great disciple who, John tells us, was the first to behold the Risen Christ. She becomes the Apostle to the Apostles, announcing Easter to the Christian world.

And there is Mary, the mother of Jesus, whose testimony to her son is treasured in her heart. Mary the woman of the Magnificat sings a poetic song of liberation and freedom for the sons and daughters of God. The New Testament tells us that she was the first to hold Jesus in her arms and she gives him to the human family as Gentile Magi and Jewish shepherds come to her side.

There are two other personalities, both men, neither from the New Testament whose stories and lives we celebrate in July and August. August 28th. is the feast of Augustine, bishop and doctor of the Church, a North African, and

one of the greatest minds in all human history. And there is Ignatius of Loyola, a Spaniard, who founds the Jesuits and lives a gentle life of service and love.

Both men are converts. Augustine describes himself as a great sinner, writing the Confessions, the first autobiography ever written. Ignatius writes the Exercises, a masterpiece of spiritual theology.

The men are different from the women in many ways. They are converts and scholars who write books and who battle adversaries. Augustine goes after heretics; Ignatius was a soldier and, later, a defender of orthodoxy in the heat of the Reformation.

The women seem to have less to be converted from, less a desire to fight, less a need to record their lives. There are no biographies possible of Mary Magdalene and Mary of Nazareth. We have rather images of them and a few memories. It is enough for us to admire and love them. Of the men, there are major biographies. We know a lot about their lives. We have clear portraits, not a few memories but a plethora of data. It is enough for us to experience who they were and what they accomplished.

There are many ways to Christ and to God. These four personalities make that obvious.

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