

## **Feast of Mary Magdalene, 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2024**

### **Words of thanks at Mass of Celebration to Honour the Contribution of Women to the Archdiocese of Armagh**

Dear sisters and brothers, this evening's Mass for the Feast of St Mary Magdalene, taking place as it is in the 1500th anniversary year of St Brigid, has allowed us a graced opportunity to give thanks for the contribution of countless women - past and present - to the life and mission of the Archdiocese of Armagh, the Diocese of Dromore, and to the Church more widely.

We are grateful to God for women who, like Our Blessed Mother, St Brigid and St Mary Magdalene, have said 'yes' to God's will and God's gifts in their lives, and who have witnessed so strongly and so unselfishly to the faith.

On behalf of Bishop Michael, the clergy, religious and lay faithful, and on my own behalf, I applaud you - the mothers and grandmothers, the sisters and wives, the consecrated women, the married and single women, those women here present and those joining us online - I recognise, celebrate and thank God for the way you have selflessly witnessed to what faith, hope and love are all about.

You - the women of our archdiocese and beyond - are the backbone of family, Church and society.

To mothers and grandmothers in particular, I thank God for the irreplaceable qualities of motherhood that you display, and for the essential role that you exercise in handing on the gifts of faith and prayer to the children and young people of our parishes, dioceses and country; in such a natural way you embody the core virtues and values of the Gospel - like understanding, forgiveness, reconciliation and especially, mercy. You are the chief evangelists, educators and stalwarts of the faith.

Like St Brigid and her community of sisters, who kept a fire lit at Kildare to symbolise Christ the Light of the World, it has been you, and other women of Ireland, who have played the greater part in keeping the flame of faith alive in our families and parishes.

Like St Mary Magdalene - Apostle to the Apostles - you have shared your love for Jesus; you have walked the Way of His cross many many times by standing by suffering people in our hospitals, care settings and family homes; and also like Mary Magdalene, many of you have dedicated your lives so that the Good News of new life might reach the ends of the earth.

When I think of my own mother - God rest her soul - I see the strong leadership and service shown so vividly by St Brigid - I think of my mother's deep commitment to prayer and to her family; and, like so many other Irish women, her example of selfless love. Her beauty, character and strength was never inferior to my father's, but was complementary: together, mother and father, female and male, they did their best to provide a home where faith, love and hope were alive and active. My mother convinced me that it is women who teach us men how to be better fathers, brothers, grandfathers, husbands, single men, priests and bishops.

If St Brigid and St Mary Magdalene were around today I think they would encourage each one of us - female and male - to fulfil our highest calling - to be a saint. Just as he laid down his life for us, so we are called - women and men - to give our lives completely over to him, offering every thought and word and action, all the joys and sufferings of each day in unity with our Saviour.

Thank you: women of the Archdiocese of Armagh, the Diocese of Dromore, and beyond. May God continue to bless and reward you for all you do for the Church, for society and for the world.

**+ Archbishop Eamon Martin**

**Archbishop of Armagh, Primate of All Ireland**