

## ***DID YOU KNOW...***

**(Sept. 2<sup>nd</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup>)**

### **Blessed Among Us: St. Phoebe, First Female Deacon**

St. Phoebe is recognized as the first female deacon. She is honored as being the prototype for female deacons just as St. Stephen is the prototype for male deacons.

St. Phoebe came from a port called Cenchreae where those traveling from Syria or Asia Minor often stopped. It is where St. Paul wrote his Letter to the Romans and it is said that Phoebe was the one entrusted with the delivery of the letter.

It is interesting to note that St. Paul regards her as a “deacon,” (*diákonos*), the same word used in Acts 6 to designate those men appointed to serve the local Church, particularly referring to the needs of the poor. There has been much debate concerning what her actual duties were as a deacon, but it is clear that St. Paul regarded her as such and urged others to help her with the ministry as “a deaconess of the Church of Cenchreae.”

St. John Chrysostom also praised St. Phoebe’s work many centuries later, calling her a saint, a holy person who served the Church through the office of deacon. In his Homily on Romans, he says, “Note how many ways Paul dignifies Phoebe. He mentions her before all the rest and even calls her his sister. It is no small thing to be called the sister of Paul! Moreover, he has mentioned her rank as deacon as well.”

Women were definitely called to serve in the early Church, especially through charitable acts and dedication to the church community. Others who have been recognized for their various ministries include: St. Poplia (4<sup>th</sup> century); St. Sophia (5<sup>th</sup> century), known as the “second Phoebe;” St. Tabitha, noted in the early Acts of the Apostles and known for her almsgiving; St. Mary, St. Mark’s mother who opened her house for Christian meetings in Jerusalem; St. Lydia, who gave hospitality to St. Paul and his companions; and St. Priscilla who was involved in missionary work. Female deacons are mentioned in the salutations of the epistle to the Philippians (1:1) and the first epistle to Timothy (3:8, 12).

Since the beginning of the Church, women have been using their talents and gifts from God to serve, and continue to do so to this day.

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