

Fifth Sunday of Lent Weekend of 5–6 April

Pope Francis has spoken a great deal about our need for more women to occupy positions of leadership, both in the Church and in the world at large.

In his wonderful letter about the way we belong to each other, *Fratelli Tutti*, he says ‘the organization of societies worldwide is still far from reflecting clearly that women possess the same dignity and identical rights as men. We say one thing with words, but our decisions and reality tell another story.’ He is concerned about ‘those women who endure situations of exclusion, mistreatment and violence’.

Pope Francis very much reflects the attitude of Jesus whose closeness to women distinguished him as a leader and teacher in his time. You might think of significant encounters in the New Testament: the woman at the well, Martha and Mary, the widow of Nain. You might also think of the woman we met in today’s Gospel, described by the scribes and Pharisees as ‘caught in the very act of committing adultery.’ Listen to the sneer in those words.

These men, who are supposed to be educated and respected, have been peeping through the window. Their behavior is salacious, domineering and demeaning. In their self-righteousness, they threaten violence. There is no sign of the woman’s partner who is surely just as much part of the story. Jesus neatly turns the tables.

He starts by sitting on the ground, occupying a position lower than that of the woman. He is the only one not taking an eyeful of her.

Caritas Australia, whom we support through Project Compassion, has long acted in constructive ways to uphold the dignity of women and honor their strength, resilience and leadership. We have seen this during Lent, particularly in the stories of Irene from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Toefuata’iga from a school in Samoa. Please look at Caritas Australia’s resources online; you will find many such stories. In so much of the world, development is led by women.

This Lent, we have also been mindful of the Year of Jubilee, a significant call to *Unite Against Poverty* as pilgrims of hope. Today’s second reading reminds us that none of us is perfect. But like St Paul, we are still running, still trying to achieve ‘the perfection that comes through faith in Christ.’ This does not mean judging others as the scribes and Pharisees did. It means challenging ourselves to bring the world closer together as Jesus prayed ‘may they all be one.’



PRAYER OF INTERCESSION

We pray that all women may be respected and encouraged to take their rightful place in society. We pray also that all people will have access to clean water and safe housing. May we *Unite Against Poverty* as we act for justice in concrete ways, such as through Project Compassion.



Irene harvests her field in Kongolo, DRC.

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