



International Women's Day - 8th of March 2024

March 8 is an opportunity to reflect and pray about the status of women in society. It is a time to remember the historical struggle, a time to celebrate all the achievements of women in the last century, but also to remember that there is still a long way to go: gender inequalities, disparity of wages, access to the world of work and violence remain open questions.



Let us pray to the Lord to inspire new laws and policies in favor of the dignity and respect for women in every country on the planet. We are also aware that a law that defends women does not mean they are automatically defended by society as well.

Pope Francis, during his homily on January 1, 2020, recalls that:

The rebirth of humanity began with woman. Women are sources of life; and yet, they are continually offended, beaten, raped, induced to prostitute themselves and to suppress the life they carry within. All violence inflicted on women is a desecration of God, born of a woman. Salvation came to humanity, from the body of a woman.

John Paul II, in his pontificate, devoted a lot of attention to women and value of femininity, in the letter *To Women* he writes: *Femininity*” lived according to the sublime model of Mary is of no small importance. There is, in fact, in the “femininity” of the believing woman, and especially of the “consecrated” woman, a kind of immanent “prophecy”, a strongly evocative symbolism, one could say a suggestive “iconicity”, which is fully realized in Mary and expresses well the very being of the Church, as a consecrated community with the absolute dimension of a “virgin” heart, to be “wife” of Christ and “mother” of believers.

In the same letter, John Paul II thanks the women: *Thank you, woman-mother, who becomes the womb of the human being in the joy and suffering of a unique experience, who makes you the smile of God for the creature that is given birth, who guides you in your first steps, support of your growth, a reference point throughout your life. [...]*

Thanks to you, consecrated woman, who, following the example of the greatest of all women, the Mother of Christ, Incarnate Word, opens yourself with docility and fidelity to the love of God, helping the Church and all humanity to live towards God a “nuptial” response, which wonderfully expresses the communion that He wants to establish with His creature. Thank you, woman, for the simple fact that you are a woman!

From the beginning of the New Testament, women were given an unprecedented place of equality and importance equal with men. We can see how Jesus, with his behavior and way of acting, was a great “revolutionary” for a culture as closed as the one in which he lived.

Luke 8:1-3

¹ *And it came to pass after this, that he went about from city to city, and from village to village, preaching and spreading the gospel of the kingdom of God; and the twelve went with him,*

² *And some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons came out;*

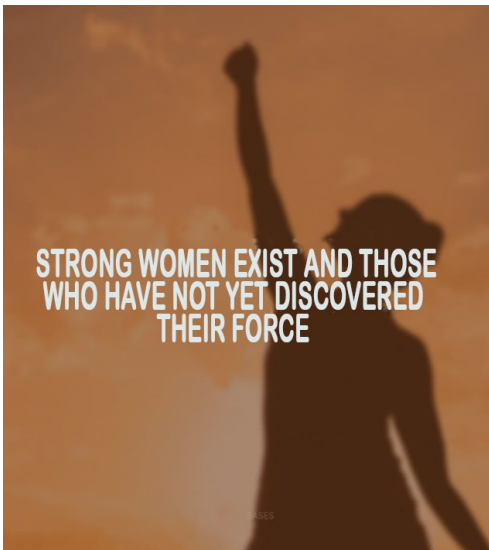
³ *And Joanna, wife of Chuza, Herod's procurator, and Susanna, and many others who served him with their possessions.*



Jesus went through the cities and villages announcing the good news of the Kingdom of God and with him were also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities. Therefore, women who have experienced the therapeutic and free love of Jesus. This presence of women in Jesus' itinerant group was an absolute novelty in the culture of the time. Jesus challenged the dominant culture. Not only because he allowed himself be touched and kissed by a sinful woman, but even more so we could say that there was a shock to the dominant culture because these women were part of a stable group. They were men and women in full synergy, totally dedicated to the master and his mission.

For reflection:

- *How can we allow ourselves to be provoked by this icon from Luke 8, 1-3?*
- *If the women we meet in the Gospels could speak among us, what would they say about Jesus to our Church today?*
- *How can we further improve the synergy and richness of male and female complementarity in our Claretian Family?*



Following Christ as a missionary disciple...

It means being strong women: Strong in faith, in hope, in love for the Lord, in the expansion of Christ's kingdom; strong women in preserving consecrated life and vocation; strong in the defense of purity, in humility, in kindness, in the spirit of sacrifice, in obedience, in knowing how to fulfill all the tasks of religious life with joy. Strong women, in all aspects, so that when faced with pastoral or missionary responsibility, at school, in the apostolate, in the coordination of any work, everyone can see determined women, who know what they want and who accomplish what they know.

Msgr. Geraldo Fernandes Bijos, CMF
Founder of the Missionary Sisters of Saint Anthony Mary Claret

Woman, take your pitcher and go... (Sister Helena Rech)



Woman, take your pitcher and go...
Announce that you are a woman,
woman like so many in this world,
but don't forget to say that

You are a woman in love,
a woman of fertility generating
new things,
a woman who loves because she is free,
a woman capable of breaking the bottle
and pouring the balm over her
brothers and sisters
and flood the room with perfume.

You are an anointed-consecrated woman,
incarnated in history,
without fear to love, to fight,
and without hatred fight for justice.

You are the intercessor so that
water becomes wine
and bread is shared,
so that the little one is looked after,
the woman be welcomed,
the man is helped
and the maternal face of God is
revealed.

Yes, take your pitcher and go,
pour flowers in your feminine way
and decorate this broken world,
open your womb and generate the new
because everything is so old and hurt.
Tear up the space that is yours alone,
embrace, welcome, generate, share,
pray,
love, cry, vibrate, but don't forget:

**EVERYTHING IS A GIFT.
YOU ARE GIFTED!**



Thank you, Lord, For having created women in the world and for having enriched her with precious gifts: affection, sensitivity, beauty, tenderness, dedication and love. You gave man the grace to find in woman: a friend, sister, companion, wife and mother. In her, the mystery of life takes place, being able to generate, to give birth to sons and daughters. Without her presence in the world, love would be doomed to extinction. And the world would be poor and meaningless.

Forgive us, Lord, for not always knowing how to recognize the true value of women, for often considering them objects, the weaker sex and a force for domestic labor.

May women also recognize their value, their dignity and their mission in the world. That she does not accept being instrumentalized or trivialized in her body and in her feelings.

That in the body and soul of each woman, we can continue to find the signs of a MOTHER that you planted in her. *Amen.*



On this International Women's Day we cannot fail to remember the figure of Our Lady, to whom Saint Anthony Mary Claret was particularly devoted. Mary is an example of a Woman and a Mother for all women. How many women bear the name of Mary in their name! May they, following the example of Our Lady, have strength in the face of life's adversities and can keep everything in their hearts and meditate on everything that happens.

Hail Mary...

Blessing

The blessing of the God of Sarah, Abraham and Hagar;
the blessing of the Son, born of Mary;
the blessing of the Holy Spirit of love,
who cares with affection, like a mother who cares for us,
be upon each and every one of us. Amen.