



FOR THE ROLE OF WOMEN

APRIL

**“Let us pray that the dignity and worth of women be recognized in every culture, and for an end to the discrimination they face in various parts of the world”**



## PRAYER INTENTION REFLECTION

ADDRESS TO MEMBERS OF THE FOUNDATION “CENTESIMUS ANNUS PRO PONTIFICE” AND THE STRATEGIC ALLIANCE OF CATHOLIC RESEARCH UNIVERSITIES <sup>6</sup>

Francis

11 March 2023

[...] I would like to emphasize three aspects of care as a contribution that women make towards greater inclusivity, greater respect for others and confronting new challenges in a new way.

First, greater inclusivity. The volume discusses the problem of the discrimination often encountered by women, together with other vulnerable groups in society. I have frequently insisted that diversity must never end up in inequality, but in grateful mutual acceptance. True wisdom is multifaceted; it is learned and lived out by journeying together; only thus does it become a “driver” of peace. Your research thus represents a summons, thanks to women and on behalf of women, not to discriminate but to integrate everyone, especially those most vulnerable, at the economic, cultural, racial and gender levels. No one is to be excluded: this is a sacred principle. Indeed, the plan of God the Creator is a plan that is essentially and always “inclusive”, centred precisely on “those living on the existential peripheries”. [2] A plan that can be compared to a mother, who sees her children as different fingers of her hand: inclusive, always inclusive.

The second contribution: greater respect for others. Each person must be respected in his or her dignity and fundamental rights: education, employment, freedom of expression, and so forth. This is particularly the case for women, who are more easily subject to violence and abuse. I once heard an expert in history explain how women came to wear jewelry – women wear jewelry, but now men do too! In a polygamous culture, if a husband decided he didn't like one of his wives, he would tell her to leave, and she had to depart immediately with whatever she was wearing, without being able to come back and collect her things. That, according to this account, is how women began to wear gold, the origin of jewelry. Perhaps it is only a legend, but it may have

<sup>6</sup> See full message:

<https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2023/march/documents/20230311-incontro.html>

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something to say to us. From times of old, women have been the first thing to be cast off, discarded. And that is terribly wrong. Every person, together with his or her rights, is to be respected.

We cannot be silent before this scourge of our time. Women are being used. Even here, in a city! They pay you less, because you are a woman. Woe to you if you are pregnant, because if you are clearly pregnant, you won't get the job, and if it shows in the workplace, you'll be sent away. This is one of the ways that women today, in large cities, are discarded, because they bear children. It is important to recognize this fact; it is a scourge. Let us make heard the voices of women who are victims of abuse and exploitation, marginalization and undue pressures, like those I mentioned with regard to the workplace. Let us become the voice of their pain, and denounce forcefully the injustices to which they are subjected, often in situations that deprive them of any possibility of defence and redemption. Let us also make space for their activities, which are naturally and potentially sensitive and oriented towards the safeguarding of life in every state, age and condition.

We now come to the third point: confronting new challenges in a new way. Creativity. It is undeniable that women contribute to the common good in their own unique way. We see this already in sacred Scripture, where women frequently play a critical role at decisive moments in salvation history. We think of Sarah, Rebecca, Judith, Susanna and Ruth, culminating with Mary and the women who followed Jesus even to the cross, where – let us not forget – the only man who remained was John, the others all departed. Only the courageous remained, and they were women. Then too, in the history of the Church, we can think of women like Catherine of Siena, Josephine Bakhita, Edith Stein, Teresa of Calcutta, but also of the “women next door”, those who heroically put up with difficult marriages, children with problems... such is the heroism of women. Apart from the clichés of a certain genre of hagiography, these are all women of impressive determination, courage, fidelity, remarkable for their ability to persevere, even amid suffering, and to communicate joy, integrity, humility and firm resolve.

In Buenos Aires, I used to take the bus to the northwest part of the city where there were many parishes. The bus would pass by a prison where there was always a long line of people going to visit the prisoners: ninety percent of them were women, mothers, mothers who never abandon their children! Mothers. And this is the strength of a woman: a silent strength, an enduring strength. Our history abounds in women of this kind, whether famous or anonymous (albeit not to God!): women who have inspired and sustained the journey of families, societies and the Church, some of them putting up with difficult and dissolute husbands, yet always caring for their children. We also see this here in the Vatican, where women who work hard, also in roles of great responsibility, are now numerous, thanks be to God. For example, once a woman became the Secretary General, things are working better here, much better. And other places, where there are women, secretaries... The Council for the Economy, for example, used to be made up of six cardinals and six laypersons, all men. Two years ago, there was a change of personnel, and now there is one lay man and five lay women, and it has begun to function, because they have a different kind of ability, ways of acting and also patience. Once a powerful union leader, someone who had worked himself up from the ranks, told the story of how, when he was young, he had no father, only his mother, who was very poor and employed as a domestic. They lived in a tiny apartment with his mother's bedroom and a small dining room where he would sleep. Often he would get drunk at night – at the time, he was 22 or 23 years old – and when his mother would go out in the morning to work, she would stop and look at him. He was awake but pretended to be asleep; she would look at him and then leave for work. “My mother's perseverance, her looking at me, putting up with me, not scolding me.... that eventually turned me around and that is how I got to where I am today”. Only a woman can do this; his father would have kicked him out of the house. We have to appreciate the way women do things: it is something grand. [...]



**The Pope Video - FEBRUARY 2022:**

<https://thepopevideo.org/february-for-religious-sisters-and-consecrated-women/>

**The Pope Video - FEBBRAIO 2021:**

<https://thepopevideo.org/february-for-women-who-are-victims-of-violence/>

**The Pope Video - OCTOBER 2020:**

<https://thepopevideo.org/october-women-in-leadership-roles-in-the-church/>

**The Pope Video - May 2016:**

<https://thepopevideo.org/october-women-in-leadership-roles-in-the-church/>

- **8 March 2024 - International Women's Day**