

chapter eight

BEARING FRUIT

Opening Prayer

Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful
and kindle in them the fire of your love.

Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created.

And You shall renew the face of the earth.

O, God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit,
did instruct the hearts of the faithful,
grant that by the same Holy Spirit
we may be truly wise and ever enjoy His consolations.
Through Christ Our Lord. Amen.

Our Lady, Seat of Wisdom, pray for us.

I. SERVING THE CHURCH

On the other hand—as I wrote to priests in this year's Holy Thursday Letter—the ministerial priesthood, according to Christ's plan, "is an expression not of domination but of service" (No. 7). The Church urgently needs, in her daily self-renewal in the light of the Word of God, to emphasize this fact ever more clearly, both by developing the spirit of communion and by carefully fostering all those means of participation which are properly hers, and also by showing respect for and promoting the diverse personal and communal charisms which the Spirit of God bestows for the building up of the Christian community and the service of humanity.

— Saint John Paul II, "Letter to Women," 11.9–11.10

Key Points

John Paul II committed himself to opening new doors of participation for women in the Church.

In the days and months leading up to the 1995 Beijing Conference on women, the pope did more than write encouraging letters and speeches. He also took direct steps to advance the place of women within the Church and culture.

A few days before the Beijing meeting, he asked all three hundred thousand Catholic educational, healthcare, and relief organizations to commit to a strategy that focused on education for girls and young women, especially among the poor. Within that overall strategy, he also asked organizations to renew their commitment to instilling in young boys and men "a sense of women's dignity and worth."⁷⁸

At the same time, the pope appealed both to women of the Church "to assume new forms of leadership in service" and to all the institutions of the Church "to welcome this contribution of women."⁷⁹ Likewise, as an example for other priests and bishops to follow, the pope made an unprecedented number of appointments of lay and religious women to pontifical councils and academies. By the end of John Paul II's papacy, women comprised 35 percent of the top-level staff on papal councils, with women serving for

⁷⁸ Mary Ann Glendon, "The Pope's New Feminism," *Crisis* 15, no. 3, March 1997: 28–31.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

the first time on the International Theological Commission and heading up the Pontifical Academy of Social Scientists.⁸⁰

For John Paul II's thoughtful, compassionate, and practical commitment to helping women, the UN's Secretary-General Gertrude Mongella offered him public thanks, saying, "If everyone thought as he does, perhaps we wouldn't need a women's conference."⁸¹

Many new doors of apostolic service are now open to Catholic women in the United States.

In recent decades, following John Paul II's example at the Vatican, women's presence within the governing, teaching, and evangelizing structures of the Church in the U.S. has grown tremendously. Today, wherever work needs doing for the body of Christ, we find women putting their feminine genius at the service of God's children.

For example, as of 2016, three of the largest Catholic social service organizations in the United States—Catholic Charities USA, Catholic Relief Services, and the Catholic Health Association—are run by women.⁸² Likewise, while only 18 percent of U.S. Congressman and five percent of Fortune 500 CFOs are women, Catholic women hold a third of the top posts open to lay people in U.S. chanceries (chancellor, CFO, and school superintendent). A full 31 percent of diocesan chancellors are now women.⁸³

Additionally, today we find women teaching theology and philosophy in Catholic universities, seminaries, and high schools; holding positions of authority on diocesan and parish councils; and working in chanceries running offices of evangelization, religious education, family life, leadership, young adult ministry, communications, and more.

⁸⁰ Patricia Montemurri, "Women Working in Vatican See More Change Coming," Knight Ridder News Service, May 15, 2005. Available online at: http://articles.courant.com/2005-05-15/features/0505150531_1_pontifical-council-pope-john-paul-ii-dioceses.

⁸¹ Glendon, "The Pope's New Feminism."

⁸² Michael O'Laughlin, "Women Lead in the Church, Even as Catholics Debate Their Role," *Crux*, January 15, 2015. Available at: <https://cruxnow.com/church/2015/01/15/women-lead-in-the-church-even-as-catholics-debate-their-role/>.

⁸³ Michael O'Laughlin, "Most US Dioceses Have Women In Key Posts, Some Have None," *Crux*, May 14, 2015, <https://cruxnow.com/church/2015/05/14/women-us-catholic-dioceses-leadership-data/>.

In U.S. parishes, women staff more than half of all parish positions, serving as youth ministers, business managers, and directors of faith formation, among other positions.⁸⁴ Last but not least, we also form the backbone of countless lay apostolates that defend life, family, and the Faith (such as Endow).

This doesn't mean that there isn't more progress to be made or that there are no vestiges of sexism left within parish and chancery offices. As Mary Ann Glendon once wisely noted, "Cultural attitudes, custom, and sin are more stubborn than that."⁸⁵ But thanks to the papacy of John Paul II, real progress is underway.

Each of us has a charism that the Church needs.

In his "Letter to Women," when John Paul II speaks of "personal and communal charisms," he refers to specific gifts entrusted to each believer by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit gives us these gifts for the good of the Church. He wants us to use them to build up the body of believers and help the Church carry out her mission (see CCC, 799–800).

Sacred Scripture names over twenty of these charisms. They range from the ordinary (hospitality) to the extraordinary (miraculous healing). All believers have at least one charism, and usually many.

Traditionally, the Church organizes the charisms into the following categories: the Isaian Gifts (wisdom, counsel, understanding, fortitude, knowledge, piety, fear of the Lord); the Motivational Gifts (prophecy, service, hospitality, teaching, encouragement, almsgiving, administration, mercy); and the Manifestation Gifts (words of knowledge, words of wisdom, discernment of spirits, tongues, interpretation of tongues, faith, healing, and working of miracles).

In the *Catechism*, the Church notes the importance of individual believers discerning which of these charisms God has entrusted to them. "Discernment of charisms is always necessary," it explains. "No charism is exempt from being referred and submitted to the Church's shepherds . . . so that all the diverse and complementary charisms work together 'for the common good'" (CCC, 801).

⁸⁴ Mark Grey, Mary Gautier, Melissa Cidade, "The Changing Face of U.S. Catholic Parishes," Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, 2011. Available at: <http://cara.georgetown.edu/CARAServices/Parishes%20Phase%20One.pdf>.

⁸⁵ Glendon, "The Pope's New Feminism."

This discernment can be done with the help of a priest, spiritual director, or a Catholic apostolate, such as the Saint Catherine of Sienna Institute (<http://www.siena.org>), which help lay, clergy, and religious identify their gifts and talents.

Women must be at the center of the new civilization by being eloquent witnesses to love and by educating children to love; teaching them care for others, the beauty of self-giving, the values of self-sacrifice, and the reverence for and welcoming of new life.

-Mother Adela Galindo, S.C.T.J.M.



Bringing It Home

God wants each of us to use the charisms that He's entrusted to us. For some of us, that might mean working or volunteering for our parish or a Catholic nonprofit. But for all of us, it means using our gifts in the world—in the primary places where we live our lives. In our workplaces, neighborhoods, children's schools, and homes, we can put the charisms entrusted to us by God at the service of His people.

As for how we can do that, we can evangelize, encourage, comfort, and befriend people who would never otherwise encounter the Gospel—people who don't go to Church or read Catholic books and blogs. We can open our doors to people in need of a meal, conversation, or a place to stay, showing them the love of Christ through our example of hospitality. We can pray Rosaries and Divine Mercy Chaplets, sit before the Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, and rise early to attend daily Mass, interceding for a world desperately in need of grace. We can also use the material gifts God has entrusted to us to support the work of our local Church and Catholic apostolates.

We can do all those things and a hundred more. Regardless of how we're gifted, though, each of us has the ability to build up the Body of Christ. God has uniquely equipped each one of us to be His co-workers in the sacred task of redeeming the world. Our job is to discern how He's equipped us, and then get to work.

Discussion Questions

1. What gifts do you see women bringing to the service of the Church? Why is the feminine genius so necessary in this work?
2. Which charisms, listed above, do you think God has entrusted to you?
3. How do you use your charisms in the world? What difference have you seen this make in the lives of others?

II. SAINTLY MODELS

In this vast domain of service, the Church's two-thousand-year history, for all its historical conditioning, has truly experienced the "genius of woman"; from the heart of the Church there have emerged women of the highest calibre who have left an impressive and beneficial mark in history. I think of the great line of woman martyrs, saints and famous mystics. In a particular way I think of Saint Catherine of Siena and of Saint Teresa of Avila, whom Pope Paul VI of happy memory granted the title of Doctors of the Church. And how can we overlook the many women, inspired by faith, who were responsible for initiatives of extraordinary social importance, especially in serving the poorest of the poor? The life of the Church in the Third Millennium will certainly not be lacking in new and surprising manifestations of "the feminine genius."

— Saint John Paul II, "Letter to Women," 11.11–11.15

Key Points

Saint Catherine of Siena put her feminine genius at the service of the Church and the world.

Born in 1347, Catherine was the twenty-fifth child of a Northern Italian wool dyer and his wife. Although she had no formal education and lived for only thirty-three years, she is one of the most influential women the world has ever known.

While still a young girl, Catherine began having mystical encounters with Christ. Those encounters led her to make a vow never to marry; although she never entered religious life, she saw herself as betrothed to Christ. After making that vow, Catherine spent several years living as a hermit in her parents' home. In time, though, the Lord called her to leave her "cell" and go out into the world.

First, she ventured out into her own home, where she dedicated herself to serving her family, often working while others slept. Then, she expanded her service to her local community; she distributed food to the hungry, nursed the sick, and cared for the poorest of the poor. She also began attracting followers, who listened to her teaching about God, sin, and salvation, and strove to follow her example.

Eventually, Christ called Catherine to do what few women before her had done: intervene in Church politics. With His help, her letters and influence ended the Avignon papacy (the period from

1309 to 1377, when seven popes in succession resided in Avignon, France, rather than Rome). Her influence also helped settle secular conflicts between the rulers of different Italian City-States.

Today, Catherine's wisdom has been preserved in her letters and her *Dialogues*, a classic of Christian mysticism, which recounts Catherine's conversations with God about the human soul and the spiritual life. Named a Doctor of the Church by Pope Paul VI, Catherine is often remembered for her words, "Be who you are and you will set the world ablaze."

Saint Teresa of Avila put her feminine genius at the service of her religious community and all souls seeking holiness.

Saint Teresa of Avila was born into wealth and privilege in early sixteenth-century Spain. An attractive and spirited girl, Teresa's love for romance novels soon had her pious father fearing for her soul. So, after her sixteenth birthday, he sent her off to a Carmelite convent to complete her education.

Teresa eventually made the decision to become a Carmelite nun. For many years, though, she struggled with living out her vocation. When she tried to grow spiritually, she was distracted and depressed by her fellow nuns' shallow behavior. And when she was ill (as she often was), her own prayer life fell apart.

Finally, at age forty-one, Teresa's spiritual life turned a corner. With the help of a good spiritual director, she began to enter more deeply into prayer and contemplation. Then, she began receiving intense mystical visions.

As the years passed, Teresa became one of the foremost experts on the soul's journey to God. Her book *The Interior Castle* is still considered the single most important book in Catholic history on the different stages of Christian maturity. Besides writing, Teresa also launched a reform of the Carmelite order, founding new convents (and helping Saint John of the Cross reform the Carmelite men), all in the face of intense persecution.

Declared a Doctor of the Church on the same day as Saint Catherine of Siena, Teresa is remembered for her wisdom, her tenacity, and her wit. "May God protect me from gloomy saints," she once said.

Catholic history presents us with a vast array of feminine role models.

All women have a share in the feminine genius. God calls us all to love and nurture life. But how we live out that call and how the feminine genius takes shape in each of our lives is as unique as each of us. No shortage of saints attests to that.

Among the clouds of heavenly witnesses who intercede for us, we find saints who modeled purity and childlike trust: Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, Saint Maria Goretti, and Saint Gemma Galgani. We also find saints who led worldly and troubled lives before their conversions: Saint Mary of Egypt (a prostitute), Saint Margaret of Cortona (a rich man's mistress and single mother), and Saint Angela of Foligno (an adulteress).

The Church's female saints also include scholars (Saint Edith Stein and Saint Hildegard of Bingen), medical doctors (Saint Gianna Beretta Molla), mothers (Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton and Saint Zelie Martin), queens (Saint Elizabeth of Hungary and Saint Margaret of Scotland), mystics (Saint Julian of Norwich), long-suffering wives (Saint Monica), military leaders (Saint Joan of Arc), penitents (Saint Rose of Lima), and humble servants of the poor (Saint Teresa of Calcutta).

Some of these women were sweet; more than a few were salty. Some were simple; others were brilliant. Many were mild-tempered; many others were full of fire and feistiness. No two were alike. Each imaged God in their own particular way. As C.S. Lewis once observed, "How monotonously alike all the great tyrants and conquerors have been: how gloriously different are the saints."⁸⁶ In that—their radical, total, God-given uniqueness—they serve as models for each of us.

⁸⁶ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Collier, 1963) 190.

Bringing It Home

Female saints are not painted plaster statues. They did not spend their lives gazing off into the distance, hands clasped around flowers, with sweet, ecstatic expressions on their faces. The vast majority were not, as so many representations of them suggest, dainty and delicate creatures, too weak for this world.

Often, bad or simplistic artwork of saints can give us the wrong impression of who these magnificent women were. They can lead us to think that they were more angelic than human. They also can lead us to think that they were all the same, and that if we want to be saints, we have to conform to one particular type of femininity.

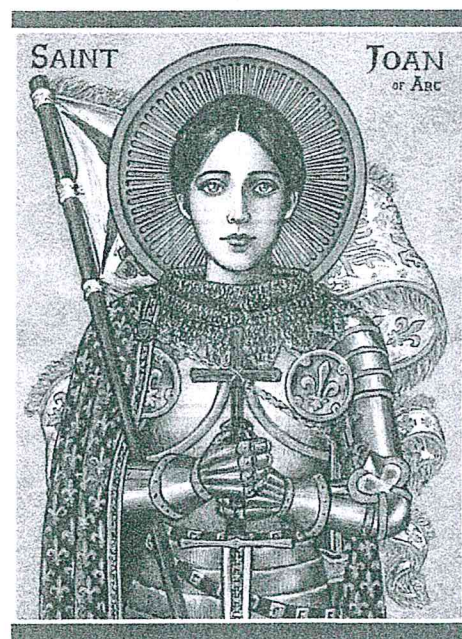
The more time we spend reading about women such as Saint Catherine or Saint Teresa, however, the more we discover the truth behind the plaster statues. We encounter women who were strong, determined, funny, passionate, intelligent, and radically unique. We also encounter women who didn't waltz gracefully into sainthood, but who struggled to overcome their own fears, weaknesses, and sinful habits. In other words, we encounter women like us.

God calls each of us to sainthood. He calls each of us to struggle through our own weaknesses and vices so that we can become truly ourselves—not a replica of someone else. The saints—the real ones—show us how that's done.

Discussion Questions

1. What female saint inspires you? What is it about her that appeals to you?
2. Do you ever struggle to identify with the saints—either the saints in general or particular ones? Why do you think that is?
3. Many saints have become patron saints—there are patron saints of cooking, beer brewing, finding lost things, and countless more. If you were to become a canonized saint, of what would you want to be a patron? What do you think this says about your path to holiness?

In His strength I will dare, and dare, and dare, until I die.
-Saint Joan of Arc



III. A VOCATION TO LOVE

You can see then, dear sisters, that the Church has many reasons for hoping that the forthcoming United Nations Conference in Beijing will bring out the full truth about women. Necessary emphasis should be placed on the “genius of women,” not only by considering great and famous women of the past or present, but also those ordinary women who reveal the gift of their womanhood by placing themselves at the service of others in their everyday lives. For in giving themselves to others each day women fulfill their deepest vocation. Perhaps more than men, women acknowledge the person, because they see persons with their hearts. They see them independently of various ideological or political systems. They see others in their greatness and limitations; they try to go out to them and help them. In this way the basic plan of the Creator takes flesh in the history of humanity and there is constantly revealed, in the variety of vocations, that beauty—not merely physical, but above all spiritual—which God bestowed from the very beginning on all, and in a particular way on women.

While I commend to the Lord in prayer the success of the important meeting in Beijing, I invite Ecclesial Communities to make this year an occasion of heartfelt thanksgiving to the Creator and Redeemer of the world for the gift of this great treasure which is womanhood. In all its expressions, womanhood is part of the essential heritage of mankind and of the Church herself.

May Mary, Queen of Love, watch over women and their mission in service of humanity, of peace, of the spread of God's Kingdom!

With my Blessing.

From the Vatican, 29 June 1995, the Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul.

— Saint John Paul II, “Letter to Women,” 12.1–12.10

Key Points

We don't need to be famous to be extraordinary.

We live in a culture that values public accomplishments and visible markers of success. Our resumes, titles, and grade point averages, where we went to school and where we live now, how we look and how we dress—those are the criteria the culture uses to judge us. Given all that, it's not surprising that several surveys in recent years list fame and fortune as the number one desire of today's youth.⁸⁷

John Paul II, however, reminds us here, that what makes us extraordinary isn't our resume or the numbers on our bank statement. People don't have to know our name for our name to be great.

⁸⁷ For an in-depth analysis of this trend, see Jake Halpern's *Fame Junkies* (Mariner Press, 2008).

What makes us great is answering God's call. It's living our feminine vocation wherever God puts us, and serving those around us with a mother's heart. That service might be public—as a congresswoman or CEO. But it also might be private—as a mother, working in the home or a daughter, caring for elderly parents.

As Saint Teresa of Calcutta used to say, God asks each of us “to do ordinary things with extraordinary love.”⁸⁸ If we do that, we become extraordinary too.

Our greatest task is always love.

God calls each of us to serve in different ways. But ultimately, He calls us to love. He wants us to love Him. He wants us to love our friends and family. He wants us to love the poor, the forgotten, the innocent, and the helpless. He wants us to love whomever He puts in front of us.

In *Familiaris Consortio*, John Paul II reflected on that call, writing:

God created man in His own image and likeness: calling him to existence through love, He called him at the same time for love. God is love and in Himself He lives a mystery of personal loving communion. Creating the human race in His own image and continually keeping it in being, God inscribed in the humanity of man and woman the vocation, and thus the capacity and responsibility, of love and communion. Love is therefore the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being.⁸⁹

As we give that love, John Paul II reminds us here, we're to give it irrespective of politics, class, race, or ideology. In a culture increasingly fractured by how a person votes, what a person believes, or the color of a person's skin, this feminine task of love grows more urgent by the day. No matter how differently a person may vote or live or think from us, they are still loved by God, and as such, they still need to be loved by us.

⁸⁸ John Burger, “Do Extraordinary Things with Extraordinary Love,” *National Catholic Register*, August 26, 2010. Available at: <http://www.ncregister.com/daily-news/do-ordinary-things-with-extraordinary-love>.

To give ourselves away in love, to serve others, to acknowledge the eternal importance of every person we meet—these are the ultimate expressions of the feminine genius.

Our greatest beauty is our love.

Women, in a special way, are icons of God's eternal beauty. We are "the custodians of beauty and life" who make God's beauty manifest in the world.⁹⁰ As John Paul II points out here, though, the way we reflect that beauty best is not through how we look, but through who we are.

There's nothing wrong with physical beauty. God made women beautiful (in many different ways), giving us a body that "expresses the person."⁹¹ But physical beauty should do just that—express the beauty within us—not mask an underlying spiritual ugliness.

Too often, when all we value is physical beauty—when we devote all our time, energy, and attention to being beautiful in the ways the world most values—we neglect to be beautiful in the ways God most values. We fail to love, we fail to serve, we fail to welcome and care for others. Sooner or later, that failure shows through. "Nature gives you the face you have at 20," the fashion icon Coco Chanel once famously observed. "Life shapes the face you have at 30. But at 50 you get the face you deserve."

That saying, however, works both ways. If we make spiritual beauty the priority—if we love, if we serve, if we sacrifice, if we pray—that has a way of working its way to the surface as well, making us far more beautiful in the eyes of those who know us than plastic surgery ever could. Consider Saint Teresa of Calcutta. People who met that tiny, wrinkled, aged woman routinely walked away saying she was the most beautiful woman they'd ever met. They saw how she loved, and that made her beautiful in their eyes. She said "yes" to all the graces God gave her; she said "yes" to living the feminine genius. And for that, God gifted her with eternal beauty, the beauty of holiness, a beauty that never fades.

⁸⁹ John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio* (November 22, 1981, 11).

⁹⁰ Alejandra Correa, *The Beauty of Woman*, The Pontifical Council for the Laity, June 15, 2014. Available at: <http://www.laici.va/content/dam/laici/documenti/donna/culturasocieta/english/Beauty%20of%20Woman%2006-15-2014%20PCL.pdf>.

⁹¹ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 14:4.

Bringing It Home

Over the course of this study, we've talked about a great many important and often complex topics—from gender ideology to the sacramental economy. But in the end, living the feminine genius is very simple. It doesn't require degrees in theology or feminist studies. It simply requires love. That's what John Paul II reminds us about in this letter's closing paragraphs.

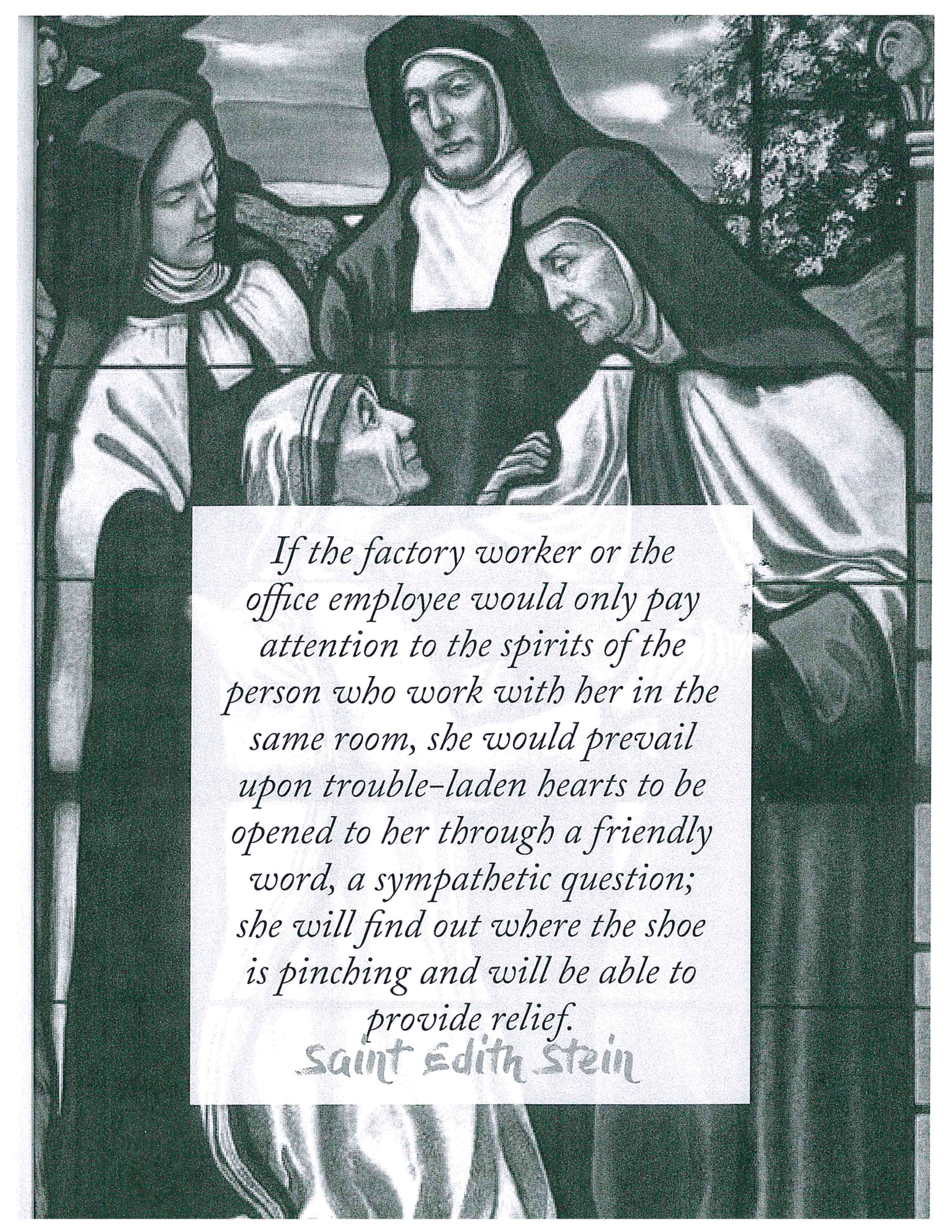
Our job, as women, is to see the people God puts in our path and love them as they most need to be loved. It's to think less about ourselves, so we can think more about others. It's to recognize how incredibly precious every single person on this planet is, and help them recognize that as well.

This is a simple thing, but it's not necessarily easy. The world, the devil, and our own weaknesses always work against us. Each of us has our own demons to fight, and our own wounds to nurse. But John Paul II never doubted our ability to carry out the mission for which God made us. He trusted that God's grace—which is always there for us in the sacraments, the liturgy, and quiet moments of prayer—was sufficient.

It is sufficient. But no one can force us to receive that grace. Each of us has to choose it every day. We have to choose between God and self, virtue and vice, love and indifference. The question for each of us, as we conclude this study, is, "What will we choose?"

Discussion Questions

1. What are the most important things you do everyday that nobody sees? How are these things changing you and the world?
2. Whom do you have a hard time loving? Why is that? What is one loving thing you can do for that person or those people regardless of your emotions?
3. Who is the most beautiful woman you know? What makes her beautiful?



*If the factory worker or the
office employee would only pay
attention to the spirits of the
person who work with her in the
same room, she would prevail
upon trouble-laden hearts to be
opened to her through a friendly
word, a sympathetic question;
she will find out where the shoe
is pinching and will be able to
provide relief.*

Saint Edith Stein

Closing Prayer

THE MEMORARE

Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary,
that never was it known
that anyone who fled to thy protection,
implored thy help, or sought thine intercession
was left unaided.

Inspired by this confidence, I fly unto thee,
O Virgin of virgins, my mother; to thee do I come,
before thee I stand, sinful and sorrowful.
O Mother of the Word Incarnate, despise not my
petitions, but in thy mercy hear and answer me.

Amen.

Saint John Paul II, pray for us.

About Endow

Mission

Endow (Educating on the Nature and Dignity of Women) seeks to educate women toward a more profound understanding of their God-given dignity through study in small group communities of faith and friendship. Rooted in the teachings of Pope St. John Paul II, Endow affirms the genius of women—the feminine genius—and empowers them to fulfill our culture's desperate need for an authentic feminine presence in every aspect of life and society.

Endow attracts women of all ages, races, nationalities, and vocations and brings them together to read and discuss papal and magisterial documents as well as the lives and writings of the saints. Endow group members encounter the Catholic intellectual tradition together, sometimes for the very first time, and learn how to recognize, cultivate, and live the fullness of their feminine genius in their families, workplaces, and communities.

History

Endow was founded in 2003 when three women—Betsy Considine, Marilyn Coors, and Terry Polakovic—encountered the writings of Pope St. John Paul II on the new feminism. They quickly realized the impact of these life-changing truths and wanted all woman to learn them. With the aid of Archbishop Charles Chaput, Archbishop Jose Gomez, and renowned Catholic scholar Sr. Prudence Allen, R.S.M., they began writing study guides for small groups. These study guides have enabled our participants—wives, mothers, and single and consecrated women—to encounter the beauty and depth of the Church's teachings on womanhood. From its humble beginnings as a lunchtime conversation in Denver, Colorado, Endow has grown into an international apostolate in over 130 dioceses, reaching over 40,000 women all over the world.