

WEEKLY REFLECTIONS

5TH SUNDAY OF LENT



Isaiah 43:16-21 | Phil 3:8-14 | John 8:1-11

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. For example, in his wonderful letter about the way we belong to each other, *Fratelli Tutti*, he says ‘the organisation 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 is very much reflecting 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 meet 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 honour their strength, resilience and leadership. A good example is Shaniella, a young woman from a remote village in the Solomon Islands. She is the feature of this week’s story and embodies the theme of this year’s Project Compassion: For all future generations. Take a few minutes to share her story and consider the odds she is overcoming to create a safer and healthier environment for herself and her community. She is the kind of person who should surely grab our attention.

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, in the words of the prophet Isaiah, to put water in the wilderness as we consider what we might do ‘for all future generations.’