


# Third Sunday OF LENT

## PASTORAL CHALLENGE:

To promote the participation of women in ministries, government instances, discernment, and ecclesial decisions.



*"Foster the organization of ministry in such a way as to help to discover and develop the "genius of woman"<sup>253</sup> in each woman and realms of church and society and promote the broadest prominence of women. (DAp 458, a)*



# Encounter with the Word to illuminate life\*



## From the Holy Gospel according to Saint Luke 13, 1-19

*At that moment some came before Jesus to inform him that Pilate had murdered Galileans and had mixed their blood with their sacrifices. Jesus answered them, “Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.”*

*Jesus then told this parable: “A man had a fig tree growing in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it but did not find any. So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, ‘For three years now I’ve been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven’t found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?’*

\* For the biblical texts we use a translation offered by the Bible of the Church in America of CELAM.

## **“We let ourselves be illuminated”**

**Lord, ‘leave it alone for one more year, and I’ll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.’ (Lk 13,8-9)**

Some of our wise elders say that life is full of opportunities, but that we do not take advantage of them. We know that there are many people invaded by anguish, facing the impasse of war, drugs, divorce, unemployment, illness, or rejection. Some are crushed by guilt, which does not let them sleep or which wakes them up, amid self-deception and emptiness of meaning.

Lent is "a time of opportunities", as well as of crises if we learn from them using the four strategies of the vineyard: "pruning, digging, fertilizing and waiting". It is about "always praying and not giving up" (Lk 18,1), "not getting tired of removing evil from our lives" and "not getting tired of doing good in active charity towards others" (Cf. Lenten Message 2022). We want guilt to become "opportunity", Lent sows "Easter life" and the Word continues to be "alive and effective", to bear fruit of life, reconciliation, peace, joy, and communion.

To prune is not to kill but to strengthen "vitality". Digging is not sinking but facilitating "growth". To plow is not to get dirty but to help "fertilize" what is withered. Waiting is not negligent passivity but "trust" in the capacities of others. But we cannot miss this opportunity, now is the time, the hour of conversion has arrived.

One sign of this conversion in our communities will be "to promote the active participation of women in ministries, government, discernment and ecclesial decision-making bodies" (AEALC, challenge 3), because " at this time in Latin America and the Caribbean, there must be greater awareness of the difficult situation affecting the dignity of many women." (DAp 48), with innumerable forms of violence, inequality and exploitation, despite cultural changes (DAp 49) and Christian anthropology and theology that "invites us to live a community of equals in difference" (DAp 451).

Yes, it is very urgent to "prune" so much clericalism, "macho" culture; to "deepen" in the richness of those who are the first transmitters of the faith (DAp 455); to "pay" their leading role in all pastoral instances (DAp 458), and "expect" the effective presence of women in ministries, planning and pastoral decision (Ibid).

Let us make this "synodic Lent" find, by way of conversion, the new attitudes of those of us who dream of the life, peace, and joy of the Easter vintners.

Will we remain in the unsuccessful mediocracy or will we be linked to the perplexity of the "women of the dawn"?







# Reflection to impact life from the Pastoral Challenges

Among the clamor that was heard in the Ecclesial Assembly and expressed as challenges to which we are forced to respond, is the place of women in their dynamic and creative identity as God's people.

We have stipulated this by committing ourselves to "promoting the active participation of women in ministries, government instances, discernment, and ecclesial decision."

## Between pain and hope

Faced with this challenge, social and ecclesial pains accompany us on our journey (DDC 127-130), and we are invited to undertake them as a body since they are wounds that must be healed if we want to advance in synodality.

This Lent can be conducive to evaluating ourselves and reaching a path of conversion that makes us more sisters and brothers in equal dignity, that affects interpersonal relationships and commits us to build the discipleship of equals, a sign of communion in an increasingly lacerated world due to the abuse of power.

## What hurts us?

- In the social sphere "exclusion, discrimination and inequities" (SN, p. 92) hurt; a result of "structural oppression with a hidden machismo in society" (SN, p. 92), which is expressed in "widespread violence against women: domestic, sexual, economic, patrimonial, abuse and violence, femicide, prostitution, human trafficking, etc., in all social classes" (SN, p. 92).
- In the ecclesial sphere, it hurts us that "some authorities, not a few cases, are conservative, sexist and clericalist" (SN, p. 92), making it difficult for "women to access leadership or management roles in a Church dominated by men, when they are the great majority of the people of God, of the missionaries, religious, etc." (SN, p. 92).

But hope rises and puts us on our feet, makes us aware of the prophetic exercise of passion and compassion with these realities that hurt, that require us to practice justice and materialize the desire for renewal and ecclesial conversion.

## What gives us hope?

- In the social sphere, we hope for "the empowerment of women, occupying positions of greater participation and leadership as workers, in governments and social movements, as well as supporting the family, giving strength and stability to their home" (SN, p. 92).
- In the ecclesial sphere, our hope lies in "the great strength, participation and interest of women to move the Church forward" (SN, p. 92), and, on the other, "the advances in their inclusion real and equal as neighbors and protagonists" (SN, p. 92). In many ecclesial spaces, there is "respect and equality of options about priests and bishops" (SN, p. 92), with "participation of women in ecclesial instances, such as giving communion, reading the Gospel, leading retreats, talks, catechesis, pastoral work, and many other ministries" (SN, p. 92).



### **A Lenten Call:**

May hope let us advance in a synodal key, accompanied by the words of Pope Francis who invites the ecclesial body to question itself and not avoid this very relevant issue: "The claims of the legitimate rights of women, based on the firm conviction that men and women are equal in dignity, pose profound and challenging questions to the Church which cannot be lightly evaded." (EG 104).

Do you avoid the situation of women in your community?



## The challenge we all face to influence life

To face this challenge implies that during this Lent, we review our conversion process at the personal, community, pastoral and synodal levels with sincerity, recognizing that conversion must be practical, accompanied by concrete works, and not a mere speech.

Having in mind and heart the need to promote the participation of women in ministries, government instances, discernment, and ecclesial decision:

- What attitudes of Jesus do you think we should have in our encounter with women? The Gospel is full of examples.
- Can you remember any words of Pope Francis that can guide us in pastoral work to promote the participation of women?
- What new challenges does this challenge pose to the pastoral care of your community?
- What could you personally commit to in favor of women's participation in your community?

Let's go one step further in our conversion process and promote the participation of women:

- **From our conversion:** Let us imitate Jesus who, in his encounter with women, reestablishes their dignity as daughters of God.
- **From our community conversion:** Let us seek to accompany those women's associations that struggle to overcome difficult situations of vulnerability or exclusion. (Cf. DAp 458, c)
- **From our pastoral conversion:** Let us guarantee the effective presence of women in the ministries that in the Church are entrusted to the laity, as well as in instances of pastoral planning and decision, valuing their contribution. (Cf. DAp 458, b)
- **From our synodal conversion:** Let us commit ourselves to strengthen ecclesial communion so that women can undertake their leadership with greater force within the Church, and that the Church recognizes and promotes it by reinforcing their participation in the pastoral councils of parishes and dioceses, or even in government instances" (SA DF 101).

"At this time in Latin America and the Caribbean, it is urgent to hear the cry, so often silenced, of women who are subjected to many forms of exclusion and violence in all its forms and at all stages of their lives" (SN, p. 95)



## To Celebrate life

Lord of life, consoler of hearts,  
hear the cry of our brothers and sisters  
who have been injured by abusive situations.  
Grant us courage and wisdom,  
humility and grace, to act with justice.  
Blow your wisdom into our prayers and endeavors  
and teach us the way of justice and integrity,  
illuminated by the truth and by your mercy.  
Amen.

### ACRONYMS

AEALC: Ecclesial Assembly of Latin America and the Caribbean, 2021

DAp: Document of Aparecida, 2007.

DC: Document for the road. Ecclesial Assembly of Latin America and the Caribbean, 2021

EG: Evangelii Gaudium, Pope Francis

SA DF: Amazon Synod, Final Document.

SN: Narrative Synthesis. Listening to the 1st Ecclesial Assembly of Latin America and the Caribbean, 2021





*“Her figure emerges from the Gospel as a free and strong woman, consciously directed toward true following of Christ. She has fully experienced the entire pilgrimage of faith as the mother of Christ and then of the disciples, and yet has not been saved from incomprehension and continually having to seek the Father’s project. Thus she came to stand at the foot of the cross in deep communion, to then fully enter into the mystery of the covenant. her figure emerges as a free and strong woman, consciously oriented to the true following of Christ. She has lived the entire pilgrimage of faith as the mother of Christ and then of the disciples, without being spared misunderstanding and the constant search for the Father’s project. Thus, he managed to stand at the foot of the cross in profound communion, to fully enter into the mystery of the Covenant.” (DAp 266)*

Our Lady of Luján, patron saint of Argentina