

Introduction

In my prayer that crisp autumn morning, as the sun glistened on the brightly colored leaves that had fallen on my deck, it was as if Jesus was lovingly looking into my soul and gently pleading with me.

“I need you,” he said.

I didn’t let the Lord finish what he had to say. “What does that mean, Lord?”

The silence was deafening. It was as if the Lord was preparing my heart to hear something of grave importance.

“I’m listening,” I told God.

Closing my eyes, I pictured Jesus before me.

“My body is battered, bruised, and broken, and I need you—as women—working in the beautiful gifts you’ve been given in your womanhood, to heal me,” Jesus said.

Immediately my thoughts turned to St. Francis. Just as the Lord said to St. Francis, “Rebuild my Church,” in the recesses of my heart on this October day, I heard the Lord saying to me and to women everywhere, “Heal my Body.”

There is no doubt that in the world today, the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ, is being repeatedly assaulted. We need only turn on the television, open a newspaper, or surf the Internet, and instantly we see how our Lord continues to be persecuted. It can be disheartening at times, but as followers of Christ we do not lose heart. Our hope is in the Lord.

For the last twelve years I have ministered to many faith-filled women, traveling the country and connecting with others just like me—people on fire to share the Gospel and make Jesus Christ known and loved. I have encountered women from every walk of life: mothers, nurses, lawyers, teachers, bank tellers, psychologists, writers, bus drivers, artists, and pastoral leaders. Their lives were marked with irrepressible

sensitivity, compassion, and generosity. Their hearts were focused on bringing others to Christ to be healed. Now, it was as if Christ was calling them together to be part of a greater healing.

As the faces of my women friends and colleagues surfaced in my memory, the Lord's words echoed in my ears: "I need women to work in the beautiful gifts they have been given as women and to heal my Body."

So many of these dear women were purpose filled, driven by an insatiable desire to serve their Lord. Their maternal instincts and innate sensitivity to others could be used, powerfully, in the kingdom of God.

It was a moment of profound illumination. This was a divine summons, a call that could not be ignored. The Body of Christ needed more than just a Band-Aid. It needed to be healed.

But who could lead this charge?

God has bestowed upon all women graces that allow us to understand and to enter fully into our mission as his disciples. He has gifted us with receptivity, sensitivity, generosity, and intuitive maternal gifts, all of which allow us to know our heavenly Father on a deeper, more intimate level. St. John Paul II in his letter to women, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, said, "Christ speaks to women about the things of God, and they understand them; there is a true resonance of mind and heart, a response of faith."

Okay, Lord, you've captured my mind and heart. Where do I begin?

That autumn day in 2012 is now just a distant memory. But I took the Lord's words to heart. After talking with some of the wisest women I know, we decided to pool our gifts and write a collection of Lenten reflections by women and for women. That's how the book you are now holding came to be. It is our hope that as you enter more fully into Holy Week as a woman, you will enter more fully into the paschal

mystery and be continually transformed into the woman God created you to be.

How to Use This Book

Walk in Her Sandals: Experiencing Christ's Passion through the Eyes of Women allows you to enter more fully into Jesus' passion, death, and resurrection in a new and profound way—as a woman living the beauty of your giftedness. The structure of each chapter is purposeful. We begin with “A Moment to Ponder” as we set the stage for the theme of that chapter and prepare you to embark on the journey that awaits you that day.

Next, “Enter the Scripture” provides the riches of the readings of sacred scripture that correspond with that day, both in the biblical narrative and in the liturgical year. Reading the scripture citations provided beforehand makes for a powerful experience.

Following the scripture reading, “Walk in Her Sandals,” a fictional narrative, draws you into the story and allows you to experience what it may have been like for women who lived and walked with Jesus. Like so many modern-day Catholic women, these ancient women were seekers and sharers of healing.

Next, in “Unwrap the Gift,” a specific gift related to womanhood is explained so that you begin to understand anew the beauty of your dignity and vocation as a woman—you embrace your *feminine genius*.

Having entered the scriptures, walked in the sandals of a woman during the time of Jesus, and unwrapped your gift, you will be guided to “Reflect on the Meaning” by one of your sisters in Christ who is striving for holiness just like you. These practical stories offer insight, encouragement, and inspiration for you on this journey.

You'll continue your reflection with “Lectio.” Here you will be led in *lectio divina* (a prayerful reading of sacred

scripture), provided to draw you deeper into an intimate relationship with Jesus.

Since we know that as Catholics we live, learn, and worship in community, and since we know that as women we are “radically relational,” we have added “Questions for Group Discussion” to each chapter. One of the best ways to use this book is in the small-group setting with other women. In fact, we at WINE: Women In the New Evangelization created this book for that exact purpose. If you are interested in learning more about the national women’s ministry WINE: Women In the New Evangelization, visit www.CatholicVineyard.com and be sure to check out the information provided on the last page of this book.

The final section of each chapter, “Walking in the New Evangelization,” will help you to use your gifts to bring others to Christ. This section offers two ways to contribute to the New Evangelization: first, by growing in your contemplative spiritual life; and second, by giving you practical suggestions to enhance your active spiritual life.

To assist you as you walk through the various aspects of each chapter and encounter the unique and beautiful styles of the individual writers, I have provided a few comments or suggestions. These interjections are italicized and serve to weave the many pieces together seamlessly.

As you read the selected scriptures, enter into the narrative, and ponder these reflections, you might find yourself asking, *How am I being called to be a disciple like the women in the Bible? In what ways can I heal the bruised and battered Body of Christ?*

This Lent, I’ll be praying for you, my sister in Christ. May this book trigger a grand conversion in your heart. May these stories draw you into the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus in a new and profound way, and may your heart be softened (evermore) and your ears be opened.

Perhaps you will hear the Lord speak to you as he spoke to me. Maybe you’ll hear him say,

My dear one . . . heal my Body.

Does this seem like too big a challenge, too great a task? If we try to do it on our own power, we would undoubtedly fail. To inspire you to take up this journey with confidence, my friend Pat Gohn starts us off by reflecting on a passage from the eleventh chapter of John's gospel, in which we meet two of Jesus' closest women friends: Mary and Martha, who had just lost their beloved brother, Lazarus.

Believe and See the Glory of God

by Pat Gohn

In the weeks leading up to his passion, death, and resurrection, there's a powerful moment in the lives of Jesus and his dear friends at Bethany, where the Lord and his followers would often visit as they went to and from Jerusalem. Jesus' in teaching this moment of truth stands as an important watchword for this book and our examination of Holy Week and Eastertide.

The gospel recounts Jesus' raising of Lazarus, Martha and Mary's dear brother and a good friend of Jesus (see Jn 11:1–54). Lazarus died before Jesus arrives, and his friend has been in the tomb for four days. Curiously, Jesus had heard his friend was ill yet failed to hasten to his friend's bedside. Now, by all appearances, it was too late to do anything but try to comfort the mourning sisters.

And in fact, when Jesus arrives Martha and Mary are encouraged by his presence. Martha openly trusts in Jesus when he predicts that her brother will rise again, as he declares to her, "I am the resurrection."

Martha's faith is emboldened. She calls Jesus the Messiah, "the Christ, the Son of God!" Yet even faith-filled Martha protests Jesus' next move, when Jesus asks that the stone before the tomb be removed. "Lord, already there is a stench" (Jn 11:39).

Yet hear these challenging and inviting words from Jesus: “Did I not tell you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?” (Jn 11:40).

After that, Jesus prays, and the dead man, Lazarus, is raised. A miracle!

It was to be Jesus’ last public miracle, for it set in motion the Pharisees’ nefarious plan to put Jesus to death.

Let us thoughtfully consider these words of Jesus as we begin this book. Let us be on the lookout for the glory of God in these weeks of praying with the paschal mystery of Jesus’ passion, death, and resurrection.

If *you* would believe, *you* would see the glory of God. I once read a beautiful expression of this: “Something of the glory of God shines on the face of every person.”¹

Just stop and think of that—the glory of God is on *your face*, good woman!

How is this possible? It is possible because the God of creation made you in his image! “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (Gn 1:27). This means that a woman who fully lives her dignity as a woman gives glory to God! In other words, something of the *genius* of God is in you! God’s image is reflected in the genius of humanity’s creation. Women and men reflect God, in some important ways, in who they are as human persons. That’s fantastic!

Within the dignity of the human person we discover another theme that we’re going to explore more in this book: the genius, or the gift, of womanhood. (Yes, of course, there is a complementary masculine gift, but that’s not this book. This book is for women.)

When it comes to celebrating the beautiful dignity and vocation of womanhood, women have a friend in St. John Paul II who described it as the *feminine genius*. (How do you like that? You’re a *genius*!) John Paul II’s pontificate offered teaching documents and homilies that extolled women and dignified their feminine gifts. In this book, we’re going to

explore four gifts that are naturally and spiritually inherent in women: receptivity, generosity, sensitivity, and maternity. We're also going to examine the two gifts of faith that increase the graces we need in our lives: the gift of prayer and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

We'll delve more deeply into these gifts as we go along. While we can reflect upon our feminine gifts at any time, the scriptures are particularly rich in their exploration of our sisters in faith in the gospels—in particular, in the final week of the life of Christ. For this reason, we are focusing on the events during Holy Week and Pentecost, when we see the glory of God expressed in a most extraordinary way. Something of the amazing relationship that Jesus Christ has with us is on display during this part of the liturgical calendar. Something of the glory of God is found in contemplating Jesus as he walks toward Calvary and beyond.

No matter what time of the year you find yourself pondering this revelation, it is something momentous; it is not to be missed. As we reflect on this season of grace through the lens of our womanly gifts, may we come to understand, truly, that something of the glory of God shines in us!

So let us walk with Jesus so that our faith and our giftedness may grow. And may we believe and see the glory of God!

1.

The Gift of Receptivity

(Palm Sunday)

A Moment to Ponder

by Kelly Wahlquist

In the fifth century BC, the prophet Zechariah records the words of the oracle who foresaw the Messiah who would restore God's kingdom:

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!
Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem!
Lo, your king comes to you;
triumphant and victorious is he,
humble and riding on an ass,
on a colt the foal of an ass.
I will cut off the chariot from E'phraim
and the war horse from Jerusalem;
and the battle bow shall be cut off,
and he shall command peace to the nations;
his dominion shall be from sea to sea,
and from the River to the ends of the earth. (Zec 9:9-10)

After Jesus fulfills this prophecy in the final week of his life (see Mt 21), the promised Messiah goes on to reveal himself

first as the Suffering Servant, then as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, and finally as the King of Glory. In obedience to his Father and for love of us, our Savior wholeheartedly embraced his role in the fulfillment of God's salvific plan.

Thirty-three years after the great mystery of the Incarnation, he set the stage for an even greater mystery. In this final week of his passion, death, and resurrection, our Lord showed us what it means truly to abandon ourselves to love.

This total abandonment, within the feminine genius, reveals itself in the feminine gift of *receptivity*, the feminine charism that is at the heart of this chapter. As we examine the significant events in the final week of the life of Christ and beyond, we will see how each of these affected those closest to Jesus and how understanding these events can deepen our own relationship with God as we follow him with increasing faith, hope, and love.

If we are willing to open ourselves to what God has in store for us, we will see in a fresh way the transforming beauty of the Cross, whether with the anticipation of waving palms or the hindsight of resurrected glory. And as we see that beauty, may it give us courage to take up the little crosses of our lives and follow him.

Enter the Scripture

by Sarah Christmyer

In this chapter we will be delving into the passages of scripture most commonly associated with Jesus' final triumphant entry into Jerusalem (Mt 21:1–9; Mk 11:1–11; Lk 19:28–40; Jn 12:12–19).

The week before Pope Francis came to the United States for the World Meeting of Families, all Philadelphia was buzzing. I've never seen anything like it. Everyone—Catholics, Protestants, Jews, and “nones”—was talking. “Are you going?” “Did you get tickets?” “You must be excited!” Skeptics thought

it was all hype, that people would flee the crowds. Others agonized over how to get into town. "I can't believe so many roads will be closed," was a common complaint. "Who is this guy?" a neighbor asked me. "They don't do this even for the president!"

More than once, I was reminded of the week before the first Easter, the day Jesus entered Jerusalem. "Who is this Jesus?" is the question everyone was asking. They'd heard of his miracles. Some were skeptical: had he truly raised Lazarus from the dead? Others were simply cautious. His disciples, the Jews, and the Romans had been watching him for weeks. Now he was headed from safety in the northern region of Galilee, down to Jerusalem where the Jewish leaders wanted his head.

Jerusalem was abuzz with preparations for Passover. Jews came from the four corners of the earth to attend the festival, and Jerusalem and the surrounding towns were bursting with pilgrims who were already in a festive mood when they heard that Jesus was coming. And so, "a great crowd who had come to the feast" gathered palm branches and "went out to meet [him]" (Jn 12:12–13). As people "spread their garments" on the road ahead (Lk 19:36), the "whole multitude of disciples" who were walking with him "began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen" (Lk 19:37).

The Pharisees tell Jesus to rebuke the crowds, but it's no use. "If these were silent, the very stones would cry out" (Lk 19:40). Yes, even the stoniest hearts melted that day; the scriptures tell us that "all the city was stirred" by this explosion of praise and joy as Jesus enters Jerusalem (Mt 21:10). "Stirred" is an understatement. The same Greek word is used in Revelation 6 when a great earthquake sends the stars tumbling to the ground like figs from a tree in a gale. This country boy is rocking the big city.

Before this, Jesus often told people not to talk about him or call him king. Now he plays right into their expectations. He sends two disciples into the village to get a young donkey

they would find tied up there.¹ You and I might think he's tired, but those around him know better. Without a word, the disciples do as he asks; they fling their cloaks on the donkey and help him onto it. As he rides into Jerusalem, Jesus is acting like a king at his coronation.

What did that look like? The Old Testament gives us an idea:

- **1 Kings 1:32–46** tells how King David, when he calls for Solomon to be anointed king after him, has him ride to his anointing on the king's own mule. Not coincidentally, the people rejoice until the city is "in an uproar" (v. 45); "the earth was split by their noise" (v. 40) Matthew alludes to this when he describes Jesus riding a mule into Jerusalem.
- **Zechariah 9:9** prophesies the return of the Messiah² like this: "Rejoice! . . . Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on an ass, on a colt the foal of an ass" (in some translations, "donkey"). We might expect a king to ride a white charger, a war horse. But the prophet portrays the king riding humbly on a donkey, bringing peace.
- The people around Jesus get the picture, as they did in the Old Testament. In **2 Kings 9:13**, people threw their garments on the ground for King Jehu to stand on while they proclaimed him king. The prophets told them what to expect, and now the crowds around Jesus are seeing it. No wonder they throw down their cloaks and cry, "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" They are quoting Psalm 118:26, an enthronement psalm. The long-awaited king is being received by his people as he enters the holy city.

As we wave palm branches at the start of Mass on Palm Sunday, we too are welcoming o always startled when we move from waving palms to a reading of the entire Passion narrative. In the Church calendar, Palm Sunday is also Passion

Sunday. We all read it together, as two people read the parts of narrator and Christ, and then we take the part of the crowd as they shout, “Crucify him!” It makes you realize that the same crowds who call him king soon call for his death. And in a cosmic irony, it’s the crucifixion that vaults Jesus to his throne, making him the king they had hoped for—but in a way they could never have imagined.

Triumph joins with death in another way as well. The palms we wave at the beginning of mass are later burned and then blessed for use the next Ash Wednesday. They remind us even as we rejoice in Jesus’ coming that he died for our sins.

Hosanna! Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Are we willing to receive a king who comes “in ashes”? Can we receive a king who looks not like a king at all but like a piece of broken bread, or a person who is poor, sick, or needy? Who is this Jesus, our King? How do we receive him?

Walk in Her Sandals: Anah’s Story

by Stephanie Landsem

Anah hurried toward Jerusalem’s upper market, wondering why the streets were so quiet the week before Passover. No pilgrims thronged the streets to gape at Herod’s enormous palace or stare at the Temple soaring higher than the city walls. Perhaps she’d be able to make her purchase quickly. She found the potter’s stall but no potter sitting beside his wares. She browsed through the clay jars; surely he’d be here soon.

Her thoughts went to the preparations she needed to make this week: wheat and wine, and the lamb must be chosen and brought to the Temple. Jerusalem would be crowded for the feast, especially if what she’d heard about Jesus was true. He’d be here for Passover, and the Sanhedrin would be watching him. Unease prickled over her skin. For her mother’s sake, she prayed they were just rumors.

Close by, the cry of a newborn babe made Anah's heart skip a beat.

"Shh." A woman about Anah's age—perhaps twenty years—stood among the vessels with an infant in her arms and a little girl beside her. The baby quieted, but the girl pulled at a jar, almost toppling it on her head. Anah caught it just in time.

"Forgive me," the mother took the little girl's hand and pulled her away from the pottery. "I shouldn't have come here with these two. You're fortunate to be able to go to the market by yourself."

Anah forced her lips into what she hoped was an understanding smile as the mother shooed the child down the street, but the familiar pain pierced her heart. She didn't feel fortunate. She felt empty.

For five years, she'd prayed for a child to fill her womb, to bless her as it seemed every wife in Jerusalem had been blessed. She'd lain awake at night, asking the Most High how she had sinned against him, but no answer came. She was empty and hollow, just like the jar in her hands. When would the Lord hear her prayers? When would her life have a purpose?

Carefully, she set the jar in its place. *How long, O Lord, will I wait for your answer?*

Anah did her best to be faithful. She took care of her husband—and everyone else in her household. She was a good wife, a good daughter-in-law, but not a mother.

In the street, a boy dashed past. She called out, motioning to the empty stall, "Where is everyone?"

"Jesus, the Nazorean," he answered, his voice breathless. "They've gone to see him."

Anah's heart dropped to her stomach. So the rumors were true. "Where is he?"

He shouted over his shoulder, "The Sheep's Gate."

Anah hesitated, her thoughts tumbling. Jesus. Back in Jerusalem. The man her mother and her brother, James,

followed. The man all of Jerusalem had talked about, who had—if the talk at the well could be believed—raised Lazarus of Bethany from the dead. The man who had angered the most powerful men in the city.

The last time Jesus had come to Jerusalem, there'd been threats of arrest, and Jesus had stayed with a secret disciple. Anah hadn't even seen her mother or James. This time, Ephraim said the Pharisees were determined to arrest Jesus—and his followers. If she could find her mother and James now—today—she could bring them home. She could keep them safe.

Anah rushed down a winding back street and around the wood market. Soon, she heard the sound of a crowd, like the rumble of thunder. She stepped out of the dim street into the harsh sunlight. The open square around the Sheep's Gate teemed with people. Her heart pounded, and her mouth dried with the dust stirred by the crowd. Please, let them not all be here to see Jesus. If only he'd slipped into the city quietly, unnoticed. It would have been so much safer, for everyone.

Beside her, a man lifted a small boy to his shoulders. The boy pointed, "He's coming!"

Anah dodged elbows and stepped on feet as she pushed her way to the front. She must find her mother now, or it would be too late.

Suddenly, she emerged at the gate and her mouth fell open in disbelief. Jesus. But not walking into Jerusalem as a poor traveler from the country. No, he rode in on a white colt. Following him and surrounding him were pilgrims—hundreds of them. They shouted and sang, waving palm branches in the air. Some took off their cloaks and threw them down in front of Jesus.

What was he thinking? The chief priests were looking for him, and he marched into the city as if he were the new David, returning to claim his kingdom!

The pilgrims shouted as they passed by, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"