

# Parish Resource

Assisting parishes to celebrate  
International Women's Day  
Sunday 10 March, 2013

2013



## Suggested prayers of general intercession.

For the family of the Church; that we listen attentively and act upon the Word of God proclaimed  
*We pray to the Lord.*

For our self-concerns and fears; free us Gracious God, that we might have a generous heart to give hope and love to all Your children  
*We pray to the Lord.*

For the courage to respond to your call; Loving God, help us to hear Your voice within and around us  
*We pray to the Lord.*

For the oppressed and suffering; that we may be strong in upholding all those whose rights and dignity are limited by prejudice and ignorance  
*We pray to the Lord.*

For all women celebrating International Women's Day this week; that we may support and encourage those women who have been more than hearers of the Word and have acted upon the call to justice in our world  
*We pray to the Lord.*

For those whose lives are afflicted by loneliness, sickness and suffering; may God's healing touch be upon them  
*We pray to the Lord.*

For those who have died recently especially ..... and members of all our families whose anniversaries occur now; may they be blessed forever in the loving presence of God  
*We pray to the Lord.*



## Additional Prayers of Intercession specific to International Women's Day

For women, young and not so young; may their gifts of wisdom and energy be encouraged and supported in taking up leadership roles within the Church  
*We pray to the Lord.*

For women who are wounded and disconnected from the Church; may they be strengthened by the dignity, honour and respect Jesus gave to women  
*We pray to the Lord.*

For women in caring professions; may they be renewed and refreshed in their care and commitment to people in need  
*We pray to the Lord.*



## Prayer

*We hold deep within us the gift of your fullness,  
O God of Abundance,  
and our spirits grow ever stronger in the hope of your promise,  
because you have filled our hearts with the source of life itself.  
Each day of our lives, our awareness grows deeper,  
because you have done great things within our hearts.  
Holy is this moment in our lives,  
for you honour all those who will reverence the touch of your love.*

*You have transformed our weakness into strength;  
in spite of all our fears and doubts.  
You have melted all our rigid ideas and inflexible goals,  
and set out for us your vision of fragile simplicity.  
Our desire to bring healing and reconciliation among us springs from the generous love which you lavish upon us.  
Our illusions of self-sufficiency are mercifully revealed in the light of your grace.  
All year you have come to our help, with your loving kindness,  
true to the promise you made at the beginning of time.  
We remember your vow to lift up our lives  
so that your fullness may be known now, in our time.*

*Amen*

Inspired by the 'Magnificat of Waiting' by Ann Johnson in *Miryam of Nazareth - Woman of Strength and Wisdom* Ave Maria Press: Notre Dame Indiana, 1984 (pp.79-80)

**This parish resource has been produced by the Bishops Commission for Church Ministry and the Council for Australian Catholic Women.**

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**Digital copies of this resource can be downloaded at the National Office for the Participation of Women web-site [www.opw.catholic.org.au](http://www.opw.catholic.org.au)**

## Introduction

**A letter from Natalie Lindner L'Huillier,  
Chair, Council for Australian Catholic Women**

WELCOME TO THE 2013 INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY Parish Resource. It is our hope that the material contained in these pages will assist your community to participate in this annual celebration of women's gifts and achievements.

For over a hundred years International Women's Day has called our attention to the remarkable political, social and economic accomplishments of women, and encouraged us to work with all people of good will so that the dignity of women may be more fully realised.

The Australian theme for international Women's Day in 2013 is 'The Gender Agenda: Gaining Momentum'. It is a theme anchored in hope, both realised and for the future, for the wellbeing of the human family. While it's true that women and girls continue to encounter startling levels of injustice and violence on the basis of their gender, individuals, communities and nations are working together for change and we are succeeding!

When we think of advancing the wellbeing of women, our minds are often drawn to the experience of women in developing nations. Gender equality is a fundamental building block for the achievement of the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals such as eradicating hunger, reducing child mortality and improving maternal health. Without gender equality we deprive women and their communities of the capabilities and gifts of women who remain less able to reach their full potential, live a life of dignity, and be productive citizens. Solidarity with our sisters around the world, particularly in our region of the Asia Pacific, is an important reason to participate in International Women's Day.

Here in Australia the growing momentum of the 'gender agenda' can be seen in the unprecedented levels of cooperation across the Australian community with our national plan to address domestic violence.<sup>1</sup> This safety net of relationships and laws to protect and support

women is to be celebrated, and yet the need for these laws to exist must spur us onward in our quest for the just treatment of women.

It is a tragic reality that more than 1.2 million Australian women have experienced violence at the hands of a current or former partner. Ailing social attitudes towards women are also reflected in the statistic that one third of Australian women have experienced unwanted comments about their bodies, and one in five women will experience sexual harassment in their workplace.<sup>2</sup>

In this Year of Grace, International Women's Day is a great opportunity to publicly affirm the many ways that women exercise gifts of leadership, service, compassion and competence that bring life to our church and our world. As we do, we affirm women's human dignity, and celebrate that, with the help of our Gracious God, a future is possible where women and girls are full participants in setting the direction of their lives and that of their communities and societies.

We invite you to consider how you might enhance the liturgies and celebrations of your parish by making use of the reflections and prayer suggestions within this resource. May our prayerful affirmation of the dignity of all people bring encouragement and hope to our communities and the whole human family.

With every good wish,

**Natalie Lindner L'Huillier**  
Chair, Council for  
Australian Catholic Women



<sup>1</sup> <http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/our-responsibilities/women/programs-services/reducing-violence/the-national-plan-to-reduce-violence-against-women-and-their-children/national-plan-to-reduce-violence-against-women-and-their-children>  
<sup>2</sup> Australian Institute of Criminology, 'International Violence Against Women Survey: Australian Component' (2004) <http://www.aic.gov.au/documents/5/8/D/%7B58D8592E-CE77-4005-AB11-B7A8B4842399%7DRPP56.pdf>  
Australian Human Rights Commission, 'Sexual Harassment: Serious Business' (2008) [http://humanrights.gov.au/sexualharassment/serious\\_business/index.html](http://humanrights.gov.au/sexualharassment/serious_business/index.html)



# Liturgy Notes

## Gospel Reflection

### Readings (Fourth Sunday of Lent 10 March 2013)

- Reading 1:** Joshua 5:9A, 10-12
- Responsorial Psalm:** Psalm 34:2-3, 4-5, 6-7
- Reading 2:** 2 Corinthians 5:17-21
- Gospel:** Luke 15: 1-3, 11-32

THE STORY OF 'THE PRODIGAL SON' IS SOMETIMES ALSO CALLED the story of 'The Forgiving Father' or 'The Loving Father'. The inclusion of this Gospel story on a day when we celebrate International Women's Day encourages us to stop and ask some deeper questions about this text and the role of women in Scripture.

'The Prodigal Son' is not really an accurate title because there are three important characters in the story: a man and his two sons. The story covers the breakdown of family relationships and a journey that eventually leads to the challenges of the restoration of family relationships. In fact, the text does not tell us whether the older son came to accept his father's actions (and therefore his brother's actions also), but finishes with the father's viewpoint.

Today it is timely to ask, 'Where was the mother of the two sons?' Luke provides no clues for the answer of this question. Was the father widowed? Or was the mother still part of the family but simply written out of the story, in the way that many women's roles and contributions were not included in Scripture? It is not

uncommon for women to be unnamed in Scripture texts, such as 'The Widow of Nain' or 'The Samaritan Woman'. Luke is often praised for his inclusion of many different women in his Gospel, but some Scripture scholars are now critiquing this approach and saying that while he does include more women than other authors, the tasks they are doing or the roles they play are trivialised.

On International Women's Day, when we encounter a story where the only women mentioned is a reference to prostitutes (Luke 15:30), it is timely to stop and think about the many roles that women have in our world, and how many of those roles are a result of personal choice or socio-cultural circumstances that have led to women being in such roles. What would our world look like if women everywhere did have personal choice over how they used their gifts and talents? How would our societies be if women and girls were treated with dignity and respect by all, so they could contribute in profoundly unique ways to bring God's goodness, love and wisdom into our world?

The story of the man and his two sons is often promoted as a story that portrays an image of a loving father, thereby giving us an image of God as a 'loving father' for each of us. On International Women's Day it is important to note that we come to know God through our own life experiences and unfortunately, not all children are blessed with an experience of a loving relationship with their fathers. This reality challenges us to draw on a multitude of images from scripture that provide metaphors to help

us come to know God in our own lives, through our own experiences. The story immediately prior to the story of the 'loving father' is the parable of a woman who searches for her lost coin. Likewise, Scripture scholars talk about this story being a metaphor for God, whose love is so great that she searches for what she has lost that is so important to her, and rejoices when she finds it. The text prior to this story is the parable of 'The Lost Sheep', which provides another metaphor of God's love for us.

Let us keep in mind that the Catechism of the Catholic Church (#370) states: "In no way is God in man's image. He is neither man nor woman. God is pure spirit in which there is no place for the difference between the sexes." In his Angelus address on September 10, 1978, Pope John Paul I said, "God is our father; even more he is our mother."

The story of the 'Loving Father' challenges us to look at our own images of God, and to ensure that we draw from a wide variety of Scripture texts to provide us with a multitude of different images of God, portraying God's unconditional love for us. Each image provides us with a glimpse of who God is for us. However, no image is complete, because God is more than we could ever imagine. The story of the 'Loving Father' also challenges us to critique the place of women within Scripture and our own lives. Where have we overlooked the contribution of women? Most importantly, what can each of us do to support the women in our lives to be all that they were created to be, thus revealing the feminine face of God to others?

## Consider the Parable

Luke 15:11-32

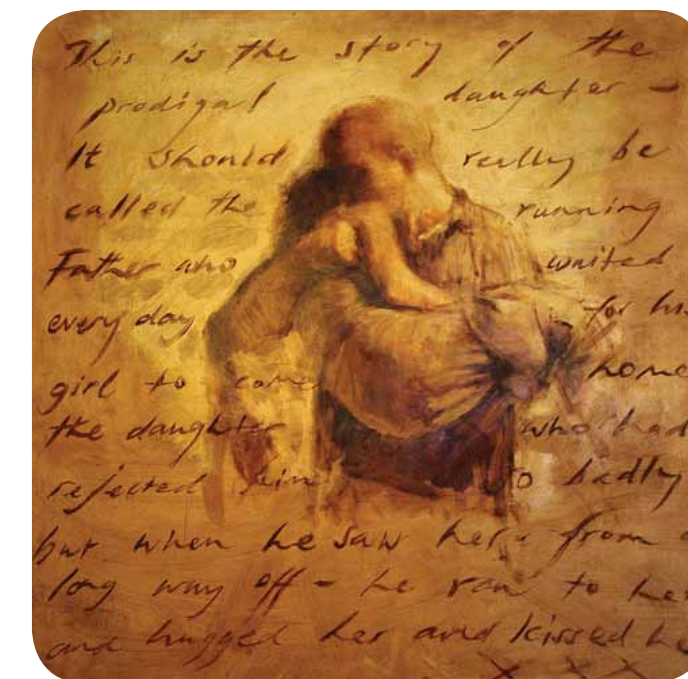
- What does this parable tell you about family life?
- What does it mean to have 'blown the inheritance'?
- If you were to rewrite this parable making shifts in gender and viewpoint, how would you change it?

## Be silent and still with the words

"You are with me always and all I have is yours."  
Luke 15:31

## Encounter Mystery

The Prodigal Daughter



## Pray together

### Beatitudes for Women

Blessed is the woman of faith and hope  
*She will be a sign of the presence of God among us.*

Blessed is the woman of relationships  
*She will be a bond of unity and a sign of the fullness of God.*

Blessed is the woman who welcomes  
*She will be kindness, the sign of the love of the Lord.*

Blessed is the woman of the Word  
*She will be a Word of God for others.*

Blessed is the woman of discernment  
*The wisdom of God will be her riches.*

Blessed is the woman of peace and reconciliation  
*The strength and joy of the Lord will be hers.*

Blessed is the woman who journeys towards the fullness of Christ  
*She will live in the freedom and light of the Lord.*

Blessed is the woman of prayer  
*She will live in communion with God and her brothers and sisters.*

Amen

