



In his homily at Mass in the Santa Marta residence, Pope Francis reflects on the exploitation of women today who are treated like objects, recalling that without women men cannot be the image and likeness of God.

Taking his inspiration from the gospel reading from Matthew where Christ said that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery, Pope Francis' homily was a reflection on the many different ways in which women are exploited in today's society. He lamented how so many females are used and cast aside and spoke of the young women who are forced to sell their own dignity in order to earn a living.

Jesus changed history

The Pope reminded his listeners that women are what men on their own lack to be the image and likeness of God. He explained how Jesus' words about women were radical and ground-breaking and "changed history." This was because up until then, a woman was considered "a second class citizen," she was "enslaved" and "did not even enjoy complete freedom," he said.

Jesus' doctrine about women changes history. Before Jesus the view about women was one thing but after Jesus they are another. Jesus dignifies women and puts them on the same level as men because he takes that first word of the Creator, both are "the image and likeness of God", both of them; not first the man and then a little lower down the woman, no, both are. And a man without a woman beside him - whether as a mother, as a sister, as a bride, as a working companion, as a friend - that man by himself is not the image of God.

Woman today are objects of desire even in our own societies

Reflecting in particular on the gospel words about men desiring women, Pope Francis lamented how we see women treated as objects of desire in the media and those same images of women are often used to sell a product and we see her “humiliated” or “wearing no clothes.” The Pope went on to point out how this exploitation of women is not happening in far off places but right here all around us, where we live and in the workplace. Women are the victims of that “use and throw away mentality” and don't even seem to be treated as “a person,” he said.

This is a sin against God the Creator, rejecting women because without her we men cannot be the image and likeness of God. There is an anger and resentment against women, a nasty anger. Even without saying it... But how many times do young women have to sell themselves as disposable objects in order to get a job? How many times? "Yes, Father, I heard in that country...". Here in Rome. There's no need to go far away.

Look around us to see that exploitation

Turning to the issue of the sexual exploitation of women, Pope Francis asked his listeners what they would see if they took a walk at night around certain areas of the city where so many women including migrant women are being exploited like in a market. He went on to point out that when men approach these women on the streets they are not saying “Hello” to them but asking how much they cost and they salve their consciences by referring to them as prostitutes.

All this happens here in Rome, it happens in every city, anonymous women, women - we can describe as "faceless" because shame covers their faces, women who do not know how to laugh and many of them do not know the joy of breastfeeding their baby and the experience of being a mother. But, even in our everyday life, without going to those places, there is this ugly way of thinking, of rejecting women or seeing her as a "second class" person. We need to reflect more deeply about this. And by doing this or saying this, by entering into this way of thinking, we despise the image of God, who made man and woman together with his image and likeness. This Gospel reading helps us to think about the marketing of women, a trade, yes, trafficking, that exploitation which is visible but also that trade which we can't see but is taking place out of sight. A woman is trampled underfoot precisely because she is a woman.

The Pope concluded his homily by stressing how during his ministry Jesus encountered so many women who were despised, marginalized and cast aside and with great tenderness he restored their dignity. Jesus had a mother and “many female friends who followed him to help him in his ministry” and to “provide support,” he said.