

PRAYER FOCUS FOR THE MONTH OF AUGUST

In Solidarity with Vulnerable Women

REFLECTION ONE

We are reminded that in the call to Mercy the primary focus passed on to us by Catherine McAuley is to portray Christ and his Gospel of Love. Recognising the effectiveness of prayer and the 'prayer force' within the Institute and beyond, we are invited to unite in a specific and focussed way – for the month of August we offer a focus on *solidarity with vulnerable women*.



Of the many ways we can offer prayer for women, one way is for readers to take some quiet time and imagine a slow-moving video presentation where, for each of the following realities (vignettes), you allow images to appear on your inner screen.

It is suggested that each prayer time you take one or more of the vignettes and breathe a long, slow blessing on the vulnerable and seemingly powerless women across the globe with whom we choose to stand in solidarity:

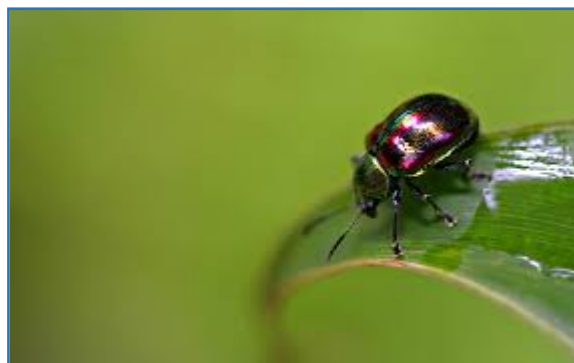
- ✚ Women account for 70 percent of the population living in absolute poverty. More than a billion women live in poor, rural areas. Most of them are illiterate, malnourished, exhausted, and/or ill, and are forced to work long hours for little reward.
- ✚ In nearly all underdeveloped countries, boys are favoured over girls from birth, since parents consider sons as a guarantee for their economic security in old age. In many poor countries women have few rights and are given away in marriage at an early age.
- ✚ More than 16.4 million women in the world have HIV/AIDS. In some regions, girls are HIV/AIDS positive at a rate 5 times that of boys.
- ✚ Women make up 80 percent of all refugees and displaced people. Instruments of genocide such as sexual violence and rape are often directed at women and girls.
- ✚ The majority of people smuggled illegally across country borders are women. Many of them are kidnapped or sold by their families into the sex industry.
- ✚ Millions of women each year fall victim to abuse and exploitation through human trafficking. A multibillion dollar enterprise from which those involved at all levels – traffickers, pimps and

buyers – profit. The most immediate challenge with human trafficking cases is that there are no geographic barriers to such activities.

- ✚ Girls are less likely to reach adulthood because of gender discrimination. Tens of millions of girls have been aborted, killed, undernourished, or neglected because of their gender.
- ✚ According to the World Health Organisation approximately 140 million females worldwide are suffering the effects of female genital mutilation. The practice is widespread in countries such as Africa and several countries in the Middle East and Asia. Understandably, victims of such practices often suffer serious health repercussions.

REFLECTION TWO

In his book, *The Power of the Powerless*, Christopher de Vinck tells the story of one Saturday morning when he and his then young son were planting raspberry bushes along the side of their garage. A neighbour joined them for a few moments during which time de Vinck's son, David, pointed to the ground and asked his father what was the fancy, colourful creature on the ground. His father told him that it was a beetle.



De Vinck reports that his neighbour lifted his foot and stepped on the beetle giving his shoe an extra twist in the dirt, and, laughingly, exclaimed, “That ought to do it!” David looked up at his father, waiting for an explanation, a reason for such an unnecessary action.

That night, before de Vinck turned off his son's light in his bedroom, David whispered to his father that he liked the beetle. All de Vinck could do was to whisper back to David that he liked it too.

The story concludes by de Vinck telling the readers that they have the power to choose. And we do! We have the power to choose how we will respond to every living thing that crosses our path, to all the fancy colourful creatures upon our fragile planet – from beetles to human beings, from one human being to another human being: man, woman or child.

Sometimes, though, our feet are quicker than our hearts.

23 August is International Day for the Remembrance of the Slave Trade (Trafficking, a form of modern day slavery) and its abolition. We invite readers to be aware on this day and hold the vulnerable in the presence of God...

May we each consciously watch where and how we step!

Acknowledgements:

Prayer prepared by Maree Haggerty rsm, Celestine Pooley rsm & Patricia McDermott rsm

Sources:

“Close the Gap: Why Equality for Girls and Women Matter” World Bank; Equality Now; Dadalos; Amnesty America

Christopher de Vinck. *The Power of the Powerless*;

Australian Catholic Social Justice Council, *Social Justice Diary 2014*.

For a video clip on this topic go to: <http://institute.mercy.org.au/ourfocus/2010/wap.cfm>