

The Feminine Genius

A Mother's Day Special

Guest Author: Karen Doyle



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This Month...



Th 1	St Joseph the Worker
Su	Easter 3 Road to Emmaus
Sa 1	St Damien of Molokai
Su 11	Easter 4 I am the gate
Tu 13	Our Lady of Fatima
Su 18	Easter 5 Our Father's House
We 21	Mexican Martyrs
Sa 24	Our Lady Help of Christians
Su 25	Easter 6 Keep my Commandments
Tu 29	The Ascension
Sa 31	The Visitation

An Invitation....

I am a mother to three young children under the age of six. Prior to having children I thought I had it all worked out, I had read all the books right? I presented parent information nights on the challenges and pressures of adolescence, puberty education evenings for parents and their children and seminars to high school students on making good choices in life. Then with the addition of each child into our family both my husband and myself realised we don't know that much at all about this whole parenting gig at all!

Despite their tender age my precious children have a way of holding the mirror of self revelation before me, presenting me with my weaknesses, inadequacies and shortcomings.



Our guest author this month is Karen Doyle, wife, mother, author and program developer with a passion for the feminine heart.

To a certain degree marriage also did this but parenting took it to a new level. While their behaviour, is at times, frustrating and challenging I have come to realise that my emotional response to them reveals far more about what is happening inside of me.

It is in these moments that I am presented with an invitation, an invitation to become more of who God created me to be.

My openness to respond to these daily invitations depends greatly on my relationship with the Lord and the time I make for him in prayer. When I have made time and space to encounter the love of Christ I am better able to respond in love to my husband and my children.



“ Learning to be still is the first step towards entering into his presence, engaging with his peace and learning to hear his voice.

Bl. Mother Teresa ”

The Eternal Questions

Let's face it, life is busy, there are so many demands on us as parents that we are hard pressed to find time to reflect on the deeper questions of life; who am I? where am I going? what should I be doing with my life? and how can I experience real happiness?

These eternal questions are, if we allow them to be, an invitation. An invitation to discover more fully what it means to be created in God's image and likeness as a man or a woman and what that means for us in the daily routine of family life.

With Mother's day on the horizon we are again presented with an invitation, an invitation to reflect on the value, dignity and vocation of womanhood with particular focus on the gift of motherhood.



Womanhood: A Calling

Right from the moment of your conception in the secret place of your mother's womb, God knew you and he wanted you to exist and to exist deliberately and specifically as a woman.

The fact that you were born female was no accident.

Your womanhood and the gift of your femininity is something that God delights in and he wants expressed in and through the way that you live your life.

Someone who offered women an understanding of their femininity as truly vocational was Saint John Paul II.

Elected as Pope shortly after the peak of the sexual revolution and feminist liberation movement, John Paul II was deeply aware of the challenges facing women in the modern world. While recognising these challenges he also saw the need to communicate the age old truths of the Church in new and engaging ways. One of the ways he chose to engage women more fully was to extend to them an invitation. It is an invitation to reflect with him on what it means to be created as a woman in light of God's original plan.





More than 20 years ago John Paul II extended this invitation in his apostolic letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*, on the vocation and dignity of women. John Paul II begins *Mulieris Dignitatem* with the closing statement from the Council Fathers at the end of the second vatican council. He quotes;

“The hour is coming, in fact has come, when the vocation of woman is being achieved in its fullness, the hour in which woman acquires in the world an influence, an effect and a power never hitherto achieved. That is why, at this moment when the human race is under-going so deep a transformation, women impregnated with the spirit of the Gospel can do so much to aid mankind in not falling.”

John Paul II *Mulieris Dignitatem*

This forms the essence of what John Paul II wished to communicate. A desire that women would play a central and irreplaceable role in the world. He called on all women to embrace their giftedness, or genius, and offer that as a gift to the world.

Woman: An Answer

Sadly, many women do not believe that their womanhood is in fact a gift.

Rather than seeing their femininity as an answer many women live their lives with the underlying belief that they, their womanhood, is in fact a problem. That they are either too much or they are not enough, that they attract too much attention or not enough.

In so much of John Paul II's work he offered men and women a paradigm shift, rather than being a problem he encouraged all women to embrace the fact that they are in fact an answer, to so many of the problems that face the world. But in order to be that answer women need to know what it is they have to offer. Instead of trying to be like men he encouraged women to embrace the unique spiritual qualities of womanhood, qualities which he called the feminine genius.



Some of the qualities that mark the feminine genius include; receptivity, sensitivity, generosity and maternity. While certainly not limited to these it is these qualities which really mark a woman's unique nature.

- **Receptivity:** This lies at the heart of the feminine genius. Rather than being a passive state the receptivity of womanhood is an active receiving of the gifts of life and love.
- **Sensitivity:** The sensitivity that is so integral to the feminine personality is an ability to see and understand the deeper needs and longings of the human heart, and to respond in love.
- **Generosity:** The qualities of receptivity and sensitivity in turn give rise to a spirit of generosity which places value on the human person in a unique way.
- **Maternity:** One of the great joys of and mysteries of the feminine genius is the capacity for motherhood, both physical and spiritual.





“A woman, as well as a man, must understand her ‘fulfilment as a person, her dignity and vocation, according to the richness of the femininity which she received on the day of creation and which she inherits as an expression of the “Image and likeness of God” that is specifically hers.

John Paul II *Mulieris Dignitatem*, n 10.

These qualities, John Paul II explained emerge from a woman's physical capacity to nurture, sustain and bring forth new life. While this capacity may not be actualised in every woman it is the ability to do so which structures a woman's personality in a unique way. A way which makes her person centred.

She sees the human person with the eyes of the heart and senses their true value as human beings. Without the presence of women the world is deeply impoverished.





The Perfect Example

The Blessed Mother is referred to by John Paul II as the exemplar, the perfect example of womanhood. In her we see the qualities of womanhood lived out in an exceptional way. Rather than being an unrealistic ideal John Paul II encouraged all women to pray for the grace and wisdom to live the fullness of their femininity in every day situations.

In each of these situations, be they changing the nappies, doing the groceries, responding to multiple requests for something to eat, each one of us is asked to respond with the generous YES of Mary's fiat. She was able to respond so generously because she had made a place for God in her heart. Perhaps as mothers this is one of the most important lessons Mary can teach us. When we open our hearts to receive the love of Christ, then that love transforms us and gives us the ability to love without limits.

“Mary sheds light on womanhood. Women by looking to Mary find in her the secret of living their femininity with dignity and of achieving their own true advancement.”

John Paul II Redemptoris Mater, n 46.





As mothers, women have a unique opportunity to really impact the lives of the little and the not so little people who look to them to help navigate the path of life.

On this Mother's day let us join together and celebrate the gift of womanhood, to really embrace the unique qualities of femininity and offer those to our families.

the genius project

About the Author:

Karen, and husband Jonathan, have been creating resources for Catholic students and their educators for X number of years. She is the mother of three children and the author of several resources exploring feminine spirituality and empowerment.



Sexual Complementarity

Byron & Francine Pirola



Recently, we came across this quote from Simone Weil, a 20th Century French philosopher, Christian mystic, and political activist.

“God and humanity are like two lovers who have missed their rendezvous. Each is there before the time, but each at a different place, and they wait, and wait, and wait. He stands motionless, nailed to the spot for the whole of time. She is distraught and impatient. But alas for her if she gets tired and goes away. The crucifixion of Christ is the image of the fixity of God. God is attention without distraction. One must imitate the patience and humility of God.”

Simone Weil, “The Things of the World” in G. A. Panichas (ed.) The Simone Weil Reader, David McKay Company Inc., 1977, 424f.

**What a beautiful image! –
God waits for us, the eternal
lover, steadfast and patient,
while we, restless and
distracted, look for him but
do not see him, though he
remains ever constant in his
waiting.**

We are immediately struck by the comfortable way in which God assumes the masculine persona and humanity the feminine. This is the prevailing imagery whenever mystics reflect on God as a lover and it asks the question: what distinguishes femininity from masculinity?



Initiation & Receptivity

Some commentators have named it this way: The essence of masculinity is active initiation and the essence of femininity is active receptivity. Authentic masculinity initiates good, it initiates the dance of love and reaches out beyond itself, sacrificing himself in service and love. Genuine femininity actively and generously responds to the masculine initiative, surrendering herself in service and love, allowing herself to receive the good of the other, nurturing it, bringing it to birth in all its fullness. The two together create the dance of love and of intimacy – the lover and the beloved.



In some ways it's impossible to reflect on the feminine except in the context of the masculine and vice versa. Like yin and yang, the two mould and frame each other, illuminating that which is unique in the other by their mutual complementarity.

This complementarity helps both lover and beloved to bond as they become interdependent, each relying on and appreciating the unique presence and contribution of the other.



Questions for Reflection

1. In what ways are men and women different, physically, psychologically, spiritually?
2. Thinking about your relationships, how do you relate differently to men and women generally? What does this illuminate about your masculinity/femininity?

Mother's Day!

CathFamily has a variety of Marian and Mother's Day inspiration, crafts and recipes. Have a look and let us know what you found inspiring and helpful.

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Motherhood: Living God's Gift

Mother of Life

Craft and DIY:

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Mother's Day Photo Bouquet

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