

WUCWO Women carriers of "living water"
*in the light of *Evangelii gaudium* and *Amoris laetitia**

1. I heartily thank to the WUCWO in the person of its President, Professor Maria Giovanna Ruggeri, who has kindly invited me to take part in these days of study dedicated to the theme: Women of WUCWO carriers of "living water" to the world thirsting for peace. I thank you for the hospitality and the cordial welcome you offer me these days: I interpret these feelings of sharing among sisters in faith not only towards me, but to me as a woman who works in the service of the Holy See, the Holy Father and the universal Church, so I thank you for the love of the Church that you manifest with your dedication and for the high content of these days of study.

I am honoured to have brought you the message addressed to you by Cardinal Kevin Farrell, Prefect of our Dicastery for the laity, family and life. I am also the carrier of the greeting and the omen of fruitful days of study on behalf of the Secretary of the Dicastery F. Alexandre Awi Mello and the Undersecretary, Gabriella Gambino, to whom the competence of the Dicastery inherent in human life has been entrusted in a special way.

I greet all of you WUCWO women present here, whom I have recently learned to meet, by consulting the archives and questioning our officers of the Dicastery, by reading your magazine, Women's Voice, by finding the presidency in Rome, by reading all that you publish on your website: I have had an idea of you as women who, more than looking at the polarizing demands, conscious of the baptism received, love the Gospel and the Church and try, as Church, to carry forward the good message of the Gospel to other women all over the world, of any social and cultural condition. This apostolic urgency of yours is a testimony of beauty and goodness for our world, which needs hope, goodness, happiness and peace.

What I have been able to know about you has been enough for me to become attached to the objective of this trip to Senegal - not very easy for a woman like me married and mother of two daughters - full of meaning because it allows me to share, as a sister in faith, the requests and concerns that the recent magisterium of Pope Francis, in the footsteps of his predecessors, entrusts to us as women in the Church and in the world.

2. Let us come to the theme of these days of study and to the specific title entrusted to me: Women of WUCWO carrying "living water" to the world thirsting for peace, in the light of *Evangelii gaudium* and *Amoris laetitia*.

If we look at our societies, if we think of what many Episcopal Conferences inform us during the *ad limina* visits to our Dicastery, we ask ourselves a question: but the world is really thirsty? the men and women of today that we meet every day, are really thirsty?

Sometimes it seems that a total indifference reigns, as well as sufficiency, a true lack of thirst also in ourselves. Or because we always feel satiated by the many things we do, satiated by being very busy, by being permanently busy, as Pope Francis called it last October 9, commenting on the Gospel of Martha and Mary¹, or also because, without courage and without breath, we believe that little can change, victims of indolence and mortal laziness².

So around us, and sometimes within ourselves, there is a lack of thirst. In this regard, the analysis proposed by Pope Francis in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, n. 83, is very effective: «And so the biggest threat of all gradually takes shape... A tomb psychology thus develops and slowly transforms Christians into mummies in a museum. Disillusioned with reality, with the Church and with themselves, they experience a constant temptation to cling to a faint melancholy, lacking in hope, which seizes the heart like “the most precious of the devil’s potions”. (GEORGES BERNANOS, *Journal d'un curé de campagne*, Paris, 1974, p. 135). Called to radiate light and communicate life, in the end

¹ Cf. <https://www.vaticannews.va/it/papa-francesco/messa-santa-marta/2018-10/papa-francesco-santa-marta-omelia-09-10-2018.html>

² Cf. *EG* 83

they are caught up in things that generate only darkness and inner weariness, and slowly consume all zeal for the apostolate».

To whom and for what purpose bring living water then, if there is no need for this water, if there is no thirst for living water?

3. We are called, as women of this time, and you, as women of WUCWO, to awaken the thirst, the thirst for good, for love, for hope, for beauty, for peace, for trust, for faith. To awaken a thirst that is dozy, trained, held back - more or less voluntarily. It is a very important task today and if we do not dedicate ourselves to it, our words and our actions could be wasted, useless.

How to awaken this thirst?

We are helped by the intense episode of the encounter between the Samaritan woman and Jesus at the well of Sychar (cf. Jn 4:1-42), in which Jesus arrives "tired from the journey". Not then a superman, but rather a man who arrives at midday tired from the journey. Moreover, not having a container to collect water, he asks for water. So, he appears to be in need. To whom? A woman from Samaria. We know well, as the evangelist John comments laconically, that the Jews had no relationship with the Samaritans (cf. Jn. 4:9). In this intense, respectful, sincere dialogue, the request is reversed: from the fact that it is Jesus to ask the woman for water, in the end it is the Samaritan woman to beg Jesus: "Lord, give me that water so that I may not thirst anymore".

The encounter with Jesus, not with a self-referential super-man evangelizer, but with a man who presents himself in his truth as a man who is thirsty, who does not have the necessary instrument to reach the water of the well, who establishes a relationship asking for help, induces and awakens the thirst in the woman, the desire to be satiated of beneficial water not only as a physical need, but also by the deep thirst for love, intelligence, inner peace, happiness.

The encounter lived in truth, in reciprocal truth, that is, a woman of Samaria and Jesus the son of the living God, awakens the thirst for living and vital water, and the thirst for

water predisposes to receive a message that is beneficial not only for the moment but long term, deep down.

And we notice a further reflection that comes to us from this piece of John's Gospel: this encounter lived in truth produces a healthy concern, it is urgent to go and tell others, it produces the happiness of running, of drawing attention and spreading that experience.

As women who live immersed in their own time, in our personal, family, social, working realities, the most disparate in the various continents, we are called to awaken a thirst sometimes absent and to do so not in a self-referential way, announcing the fascination of ourselves - that as we know vanishes -, but to awaken the thirst in an encounter with our neighbour to whom we announce that the living water flows from the encounter with Jesus, the Lord of our life, the son of the living God³.

4. That is why you women of WUCWO, singularly and as a Union of aggregations of women recognized by the Holy See, are invited to awaken thirst, to announce that there is a "living water" which springs from an encounter and which constitutes a secret of life, of goodness and of peace in spite of the hardest challenges of each one's life: that is the commitment which has been entrusted to you as Church.

The apostolic exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* explains to us that this happens by virtue of Baptism, a force through which «every member of the People of God has become a missionary disciple (cf. Mt 28:19). Each of the baptized, whatever their function in the Church and the degree of enlightenment of their faith, is an evangelizing agent, and it would be inappropriate to think of a scheme of evangelization carried out by qualified actors where the rest of the faithful are only receptive to their actions. The new evangelization must involve a new protagonism of each one of the baptized [...]. If you have truly experienced the love of God that saves you, you don't need much preparation time to go out and announce it, you can't expect to be given many courses or long instructions. Every Christian is a missionary as long as he or she has met the love of God in Jesus Christ. We no longer say that we are "disciples" and "missionaries", we are always

³ EG 264.

"missionary disciples". If we are not convinced, let us look at the first disciples, who immediately after knowing the gaze of Jesus, went out to proclaim him joyfully: "We have found the Messiah". (Jn 1:41). The Samaritan woman, as soon as she left her dialogue with Jesus, became a missionary, and many Samaritans believed in Jesus "because of the word of the woman" (Jn 4:39) [...]. What are we waiting for? ».

What are we waiting for? All of you, women of WUCWO, all of us are called to awaken true thirst and to announce who can satiate it, who is the "living water", not a place, not a temple, but the encounter with the person of Jesus Christ who gives us his spirit.

In fact, following the urgency that led the Samaritan woman to speak of that encounter to her acquaintances, "many Samaritans in this city had believed in him because of the word of the woman".

It is interesting that Jesus, after hearing that many believed in him, stopped with them for two days: this shows us that the encounter narrated by the woman is available to all those who are thirsty. And John's suggestion is magnificent: the Samaritans say to the woman: "We no longer believe because of what you have said; we ourselves have heard him and we know that he is truly the Saviour of the world".

Therefore, she did not bind them to herself, but the recipients became believers because they had an encounter and experienced in themselves that Jesus gives them salvation.

To us women, as clearly expressed in EG, it has been entrusted to awaken the demand for "living water", with our particular feminine gifts, in the ecclesial and social realities in which we live: is described in the apostolic exhortation not as a marginal or supplementary women contribution, but as an "indispensable contribution" for the Church and for society⁴. Pope Francis specifies in this regard: «it is still necessary to extend the spaces for a more incisive feminine presence in the Church. Because "the feminine genius is necessary in all expressions of social life; therefore, the presence of women must be guaranteed also in the working environment" (Pontificio Consiglio della Giustizia e della

⁴ EG 103

Pace, Compendio della Dottrina Sociale della Chiesa, 295) and in the various places where important decisions are made, both in the Church and in social structures».

Aware, therefore, that you do not announce by yourselves, but a message of liberation that comes from the “living water” guaranteed by Jesus, that there shall be no shyness in you, but rather the necessary strength to announce the Gospel with audacity, with frankness “loudly and in every time and place, even against the tide [...] Jesus wants evangelizers who announce the Good News not only with words but above all with a life that has been transfigured in the presence of God”⁵.

5. Continuing with the other apostolic exhortation which you have asked me to work on, that is *Amoris letitia*, I limit myself, as I have done for EG, to taking some suggestion, in truth minimal regarding to what should be said of that magisterial document, hoping that in these minutes some indications containing a very dense mission entrusted by the Lord, by the Church to you women of the WUCWU, will suffice for us.

Rereading *Amoris letitia* on the perspective of this encounter with you, I have noticed in a particular way the attention given to women in how, repeatedly, their dignity is not respected: migrant women⁶, women who raise their children alone⁷, women whose rights are still denied at various levels, as you well know and as can be seen in the effective words of the number 54 of LA: “even though significant advances have been made in the recognition of women’s rights and their participation in public life, in some countries much remains to be done to promote these rights. Unacceptable customs still need to be eliminated. I think particularly of the shameful ill-treatment to which women are sometimes subjected, domestic violence and various forms of enslavement which, rather than a show of masculine power, are craven acts of cowardice. The verbal, physical, and sexual violence that women endure in some marriages contradicts the very nature of the conjugal union. I think of the reprehensible genital mutilation of women practiced in some cultures, but also of their lack of equal access to dignified work and roles of decision-making. History is burdened by the excesses of patriarchal cultures that considered women

⁵ EG 259

⁶ AL 46

⁷ AL 49

inferior, yet in our own day, we cannot overlook the use of surrogate mothers and “the exploitation and commercialization of the female body in the current media culture” (Catechesi, 22 aprile 2015: L'Osservatore Romano, 23 aprile 2015, p. 7). There are those who believe that many of today's problems have arisen because of feminine emancipation. This argument, however, is not valid, “it is false, untrue, a form of male chauvinism” (Catechesi, 29 aprile 2015: L'Osservatore Romano, 30 aprile 2015, p. 8)”⁸.

In the face of such challenges, you women of WUCWO are sentinels called to recognize those injustices that mutilate the dignity of women and to discover concrete ways of improvement and valorisation. Its rescue must happen not only to repair justice by obtaining roles similar to those developed by men, but to give to humanity and to the world what is its own, that is, what has always been donated to it, the beauty and complementarity of man and woman. If we deny the contribution of women in all their dignity, we deprive ourselves of a richness inscribed on the human race, on the divine plan of love, and then we will have a monstrous, prevaricating and dehumanized society⁹.

Another crucial aspect that we must persevere is the protection of motherhood, not as a social conquest, but as it is indispensable for the well-being of our society: «The weakening of this maternal presence with its feminine qualities poses a grave risk to our world. [...]. In fact, “mothers are the strongest antidote to the spread of self-centred individualism... It is they who testify to the beauty of life”. (Catechesi, 28 gennaio 2015: L'Osservatore Romano, 29 gennaio 2015, p. 8). Certainly, “a society without mothers would be dehumanized, for mothers are always, even in the worst of times, witnesses to tenderness, dedication and moral strength. Mothers often communicate the deepest meaning of religious practice in the first prayers and acts of devotion that their children learn... Without mothers, not only would there be no new faithful, but the faith itself would lose a good part of its simple and profound warmth” (Catechesi, 28 gennaio 2015: L'Osservatore Romano, 29 gennaio 2015, p. 8) ».¹⁰

⁸ EG 54

⁹ Cfr. AL 56

¹⁰ Cfr. AL 173-174

It is not necessary to comment on those dense expressions that we recognize as true in our life experiences.

6. That the frailties of today's women are, therefore, your priorities, let us trust in the fact that, finding in truth and intelligence the women and men of today, you will be able to awaken in them - as Jesus did with the Samaritan woman - the thirst for the "living water" of which you yourselves, because of the power of baptism and as Church, are bearers. Be sentinels, apostles, like Mary of Magdala at the dawn of Easter, which preceded the apostles and, with generosity and love, led you to meet the risen Jesus Christ.

May Our Lady of Promptitude, as Pope Francis¹¹ has invoked her, accompany and inspire you as women.

Dakar, 17 October 201

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¹¹ EG 288