



SAINT LOUIS ABBEY



Homily for 22 September, 2006

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That Gospel was probably over before you tuned into it. Jesus journeys around the villages accompanied by the Twelve and a number of women who provide for them out of their own resources, and it's the latter group which gets the most attention. You know that Saint Luke emphasizes the role of women. He reports the annunciation to Mary, her visit to Elizabeth and the great song she sang on that occasion, the Magnificat. He tells of Mary pondering the events of Jesus' nativity, of a sword that would pierce her heart, of her finding her Son in the temple, of her presence with the Apostles at Pentecost.

Luke mentions other women not found in the other gospels: Anna the prophetess, Martha and Mary receiving him into their home, the widow of Nain whose son Jesus raised, a crippled woman whom he healed, a sinner who washed his feet with her tears and showed more love than anybody else, the woman who found the lost coin, the importunate widow and the judge (by the way, I hope you know that word for the SAT), and the women of Jerusalem Jesus meets while he's carrying the cross. And it is Luke who gave us Jesus' great compliment to his mother, when the crowds were blessing her for her physical motherhood: Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it.

Why speak to boys and young men about women? That's the Gospel of the day and that's my job. But there's a deeper reason. None of us would be here without women. Your mother brought you into the world in great pain—probably something you never think about, I know I don't. We would be nothing without the women who nurtured us. The dignity of woman is nowhere more clear than in her providing a body for God when he entered the world. It was woman who carried him in her body and suckled him. And it is a woman who is the only human being, apart from Jesus who was human and divine, who lives in her risen body in heaven— the rest of us have to wait until Christ's second coming.

The women in your life are the transmitters of life and love. Respect them: first your mothers, then your sisters if you have them, then your girl friends. Esteem them, says Saint Paul, as you esteem yourself. Respect their dignity as you respect your own dignity as a loved child of God. Respect their bodies, which are the expression of their spirit. Be careful that you talk about girls not as objects but as persons. Save your sexuality for the communion in love with the woman you will choose to bear your children. Don't fall for the exploitation of sex which the media and the culture foist on us. Girls can be made to feel they will only be loved if they give in to your physical desires, but that isn't love, it's using and being used. Maturity is being able to control your desires and act in accord with your truest self, what you deep down want. Integrity is being so in touch with your

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own goodness that you do not compromise it even under strong temptation or peer pressure.

Where does that dignity of men and women come from? It is rooted in the love of God for each of us which led him to share his risen life with us. St. Paul tells us that Christ rose not for himself but so that we could rise with him. That is your true dignity and you already have it. At communion the life of the risen Jesus will be renewed in you, giving you an incomparable worth as a son of God. Honor that dignity. It will lead you to respect others as you respect yourself, to honor them as Jesus did, never to harm them, to see them as partners in the risen life of Christ. Be strong in the Christ who loved and honored his mother and all women with profound respect and who gave his life for them, as he gave his life for you.