

Luminous

BE A LIGHT TO THE NATIONS



Michelle
KAREN D'SILVA



® LUMINOUS - BE A LIGHT TO THE NATIONS

Copyright © 2021 by Michelle Karen D'Silva

Permission is granted to print and reproduce this document for the purpose of reflection and study only. Please do not alter this document in any way. All rights reserved.

Published by Michelle Karen D'Silva.

Unless otherwise directed in writing by the writer, scripture quotations are from the NRSV Bible translation.



FROM MY HEART

Dear Sisters,

Have you ever spent time basking at a glorious sunrise?

One morning I found myself sitting on the dock looking for the sun to rise up over the sea in front of me.

As if suggesting with gentle gestures, a faint orange yellow blaze filled the canvas of the horizon, its brilliant undertones making way for the spectacular display of the glorious morn that followed. In a few seconds a little bit of pink splashed forth, then orange again; moment by moment the colored canopy was consumed with streaming light. Then in the blink of an eye, against the background of a fiery flamed horizon, the sun lifted itself, perfectly poised; a perfect golden circle.

It was dawn - a brand new day burst forth - light had swallowed the darkness. How fascinating that a single ember or flame was enough to kill the darkness. Darkness can never suffocate the light. Even the smallest flicker of light can drown out darkness.





How much more then, the Light of Christ within?

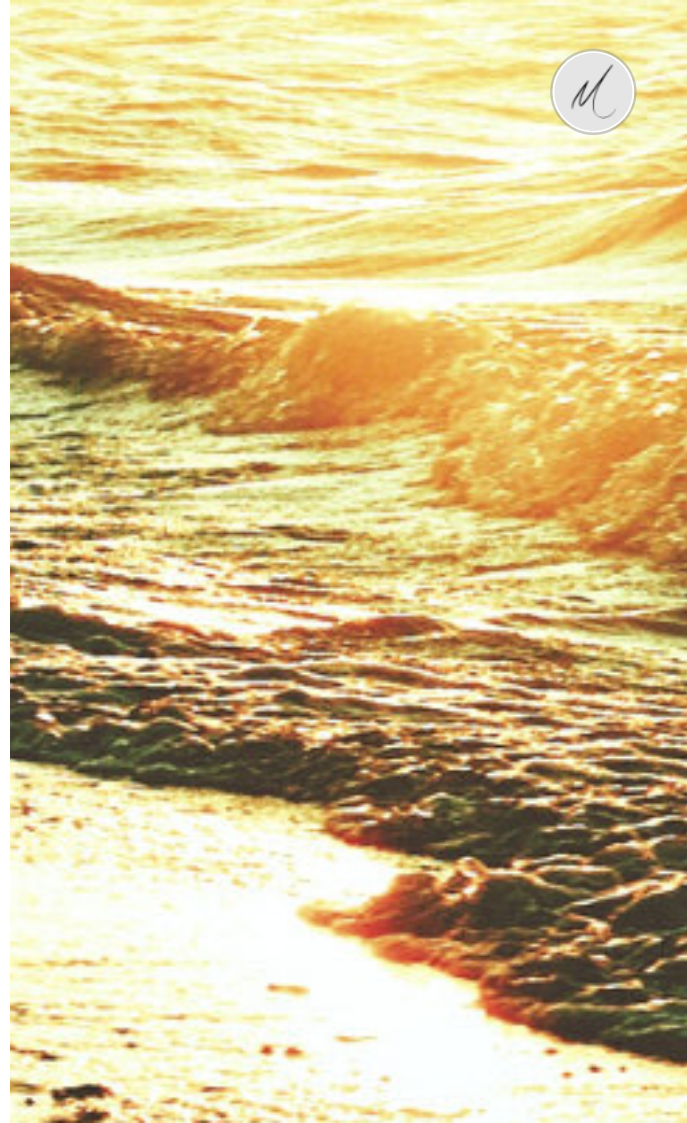
When Vatican II named its document ***Lumen Gentium*** - "***Light of the Nations***," it was revealing its role and responsibility in the world. The church first exists for evangelization before anything else (CCC850); it exists to embody, magnify and make known the light of Christ to every dark corner of human existence.

The very first Latin word of the document is "Lumen," that is, the Council desires "to bring the light of Christ to all men." This "light of Christ" is... you and me.

Do you see yourself as the light dear one?

I must be honest and say that there are moments in my life where I cannot see myself as the light, especially when life's lid of trials lays heavy on my eyes. It is in those moments that I have to make the 'choice' to be the light. I must choose to trust His light and I must recognize that the darkness of my self-condemnation comes from believing in myself rather than the One in whom there are no shadows, only transforming light. His is the Light that illuminates, renews and transforms. His is the light brings paradigmatic shifts, reordering and reorienting our lives to 'see' what we cannot see in our partially lit fallen world.

In these reflections, drawn from the story of the woman at the well, my heart's desire is for every woman to awaken to her womanhood, and find herself as the 'light' in order that she can go forth as 'the light to the nations'. We are made for so much more than dim lights and spot lights that the world offers which only provide partial crippled sight. We are made for the Light, to be vessels of the Light. When women believe that they carry the light of Christ within, they can go forth to serve as lighthouses and beacons of light to a world bereft of hope.





Remember, there is no one else like you in the entire world. No one has the gifts you do, no one can shine like you or love like you - you are unique and special and your light is important and necessary. The fire in your soul starts with a single flame and when it's shared with others, it sets the world ablaze. This is the power of collective light, but it begins with one flame - yours!

Friend, you are 'lumen', you are the light of the world. The world is in need of your witness. No sin, failure or past hurts can paralyze your destiny. The same God who splashes the horizons with glorious hues, is at work, creating a masterpiece: **YOU!** He infuses you with light, far glorious than the sun and He equips you with what you need so you can shine like stars in the sky.

We are 'lumen', we are the light, this light that points the way to the Son, this same light that the Son sends us with, to be the *'light to the nations'*

Shining with you,



Michelle
KAREN D'SILVA





WOMEN IN EVANGELIZATION



Jesus placed incalculable worth and dignity in women, as evident in the Gospels. He affirmed their vocation and equipped them for ministry. Many women, like Joanna, Mary of Magdala and others, followed Jesus in His public ministry and provided monetarily for the needs of the group.

Jesus bypassed cultural taboos to reach out to distressed and destitute women. The most evident among them all is His interaction with the Samaritan woman at the well. Following this encounter, the woman believed in Him and returned to her village as a witness. At a time when women were not considered reliable witnesses, Christ chose a woman – of ill repute, no less – to herald the good news.

Resurrection, the greatest of all events in history, was first made known to a woman. Mary Magdalene and her friends were entrusted with the first news of the risen Christ, making for the most compelling case for Christianity's defense.

Women were present in the Upper room during Pentecost and played a pivotal role in establishing the early church. The coming of the Spirit only reinforced their role in evangelization. Both men and women were empowered by the Spirit to fulfill the Great Commission; both were entrusted to build the body of Christ, both commissioned to carry the *“light to the nations.”*



“

*Let yourself be taken over by
the light of Christ, and spread
that light wherever you are.*

ST. JOHN PAUL II



TABLE OF CONTENTS

LUMINOUS PREFACE	1
BLAZING JOURNEYS	4
UNEXPECTED LIGHT	9
GLEAMING GIFT	17
BEDAZZLED BY TRUTH	24
RADIATING BEAMS	32
THE LUMINOUS ONE	41
MARY, OUR MODEL OF SELF GIFT	44



LUMINOUS PREFACE

Sacred Scripture is saturated with images of water and light. From shimmering bright clouds to burning bushes, from the crossing of seas to the opening of blind eyes, “thirst” rewarded and the “illumination” of darkness vividly dramatize the divine encounter.

In John 4, the sun-scorched terrain and water-hoarding bristly plants make for fitting landscape; such forbidding terrain invites us to reflect deeply on the spiritual thirst experienced by the Samaritan woman and the moment of her illumination as she encounters Jesus at the well.



Hers is a life of secrets too painful to reveal in daylight's stern glare. Her shame is tragic even as it is scandalous—stemming from deep pain. In her efforts to escape stark reminders of everything that has thrust her into an immoral lifestyle, she chooses the hottest, brightest part of the day to abscond. The sun can illumine the day, but its rays cannot penetrate the shadow of death—that place where man's eyes brook no light. In her isolation, the sun itself is all aridity.

Unknown to her, she needs something far greater than cool springs and light of midday — something she discovers most unexpectedly at the well. Though it seems like the exchange is plainly about water, the words are about life; the words are about light. In her brief encounter with Jesus, who asks her for a drink, her secrets are exposed. Here, then, is the Son in His lambency, lighting not to shame but to set free. She is freed from the tyranny of wading through sun-struck terrains, hauling clay jugs, and hiding behind shadows. Her thirst is quenched, her mind renewed, and her sin washed clean.

As the Light of the World streams down the deepest parts of her well, she is able to “see” Him. She sees because He has first seen her. Unlike the men in her past, this man offers her something of incomparable worth. He sees her at her worst, accepts her, and then gently allows her to see herself through His lens. She thereby sees herself for the first time: worthy, significant, radiant, and dignified.

What begins as a simple request for a much-needed slaking of physical thirst results in her drinking a full measure of grace and truth from the source of Living Water and True Light—Jesus Himself! With one sip of faith, her sin is quenched and the darkest corners of her soul impregnated with His resplendence.

In Eastern Orthodox and Eastern Catholic traditions, she is venerated as a saint with the name Photine, which means the “**Luminous One**.” The Fire of the Spirit set ablaze not just her life, but also the entire village through her courageous witness. Her name is fitting—she is in the Light, not afraid to be fully seen, because she is fully known and fully loved. She goes forth to tell of a love that transforms, a love that satiates every thirst, and a love that exhorts every sinner to respond with “Sir, give me this water.”

Dear sister, have you had your epiphanic moment? Do you need to see yourself with new eyes, as did the woman at the well? Are you longing for a better way?

In this study, my hope is that, as you encounter these images of water and light, they become for you an intimate, personal reality of sacramental Grace—that you receive and respond to this truth and perceive anew the life of faith that Christ invites you to live as “children of the light,” that you might thereby become “the light to the nations.”





blazing JOURNEYS

But He had to go through Samaria.

(JOHN 4:4)



Jesus “had to go” through Samaria.

The journey from Judea to Galilee was tedious and long. Owing to longstanding hatred between the two races, Jews often took the circuitous path to avoid the shorter route via Samaria.

The Samaritans were a racially mixed Gentile clan that emerged from the Assyrian captivity of the ten northern tribes in 727 BC. Having been rejected by the Jews, they established their own religious services and practices, including an alternate center for worship on Mount Gerizim (John 4:20) that paralleled the temple of Jerusalem.

No respectable Jew dare engage with the Samaritans. But Jesus did. As the sun rose to its crest, Jesus made His way through strenuous terrain pulsing with ancient enmity. For Him, this was a journey of divine necessity. Jesus went through Samaria on purpose, for purpose.

Jesus “had to go” through Samaria.

The “had to” implies intent. How consoling that the Samaritan woman had been foreknown and predestined by the Father in eternity past (Romans 8:29). That such a low, mean, and immoral figure is given to the Lord by the Father is among the most freeing truths we encounter in Scripture: for one soul, the Son diverts His path.

Jesus “had to go” through Samaria.

Because far more important than socio-cultural rights and economic status is the heart of the “thirsty” human, lost in darkness. Into this broken, twilight vessel, Jesus poured the splendor of His Grace that washes, restores, and revivifies. Jesus willfully took on harsh confrontations and blazing journeys, for the heart of His mission: which is the human person before Him.

When Jesus saw the Samaritan woman, He didn't keep His distance. He never does. Even though He knew her whole story, with all its mistakes and poor choices — He journeyed just for her, because He loved her.



How might this journey resonate with us, who labor each day under the social, racial, and political divides of our culture? Whether it is racist trolls or name-calling or mere stereotyping, the tension we face is inexcusably palpable. How often do we pause to consider how our social confrontations or politically correct views affect the “truths” we profess? Don’t these internet cliques only push us toward more silos and squads?

In our digitally interconnected world, how might the truth that Jesus overcame social and cultural barriers change the way we see people? Perhaps you have your own story of ethnic prejudices. Perhaps you have been shunned because of your race or culture. In Asian countries, thousands of women live under the tyranny of class and caste. How different would our world and our Church look if we became agents of restoration rather than agents of cultural prejudice?

As women, our sacred roles as beloved daughters are rooted in His identity. No culture, social norms, or ethnic ties can uproot that identity. This is truth: we are made in the image and likeness of God. Our worth, our beauty, our feminine uniqueness is a result of the sacred imprint of the Creator on our souls. It is this truth that frees us, sanctifies us and makes us worthy. It is for this that Jesus will traverse long journeys, even as He took on a journey we could never take on our own, by way of the Cross.

As high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His love for you. As far as the east is from the west, so far will He travel the heights and valleys, just for you. There is not a place He can’t reach you. Even if you escaped to the darkness of the ocean floor, even there His light would find you.

(Psalm 139, paraphrased)

Jesus “had to go” through Samaria.

Jesus will go through “Samaria,” for you.



SOW:

Read John 4; additionally, read James 2

CULTIVATE:

Reflect on some journeys in your life that have demonstrated risk. Are they worth the sacrifice?

Have you ever experienced rejection because of your culture, ethnicity, or economic status? How does Jesus' bypassing of cultural prejudices—his embarkation on this blazing journey—speak of His love for you?

Do you see your ethnic or cultural background as a barrier to opportunity? How might you change your mind now after reflecting on this passage?

GROW:

Think about one person in your life that needs to hear that Jesus overcomes all cultural barriers. What will you say to encourage him/her?

Does God's love ever call you to go to places that human divisions tell you to avoid? How can you break down barriers between you and other people in your day-to-day life?



unexpected **LIGHT**

“Give me a drink.”

(JOHN 4:7)



She lifted the large pot, balanced it on her head, steadying it with one hand and began walking the familiar rows of the vineyard on the foothills beneath Mount Gerizim. She had taken the shorter path to the well, rather than the main road that ran through the village. How contrasting is this journey from that of the Savior's? While she is hiding, Jesus is open and willing to face any conflict for the sake of love.

It was noon. The sun blazed overhead in the clear blue sky. Perhaps the brightness of the sun caused her not to look up. She stayed downcast. As she approached the well, she took the water jar down and as she stood, she looked up, surprised, rather shocked, to see Him sitting at the well, looking at her.

“Give me a drink”

Jesus said weary and thirsty from travel. She was even more astonished now, for Jews had no dealings with Samaritans. Jesus repeated His request, His intent clearly breaking this historically packed social propriety. *But why? Who was He? Why was He here?* And why did she, a Samaritan reject, matter to Him? He was an intrusion upon her routine. He had invaded her space.

Wouldn't He now know the secrets she had been keeping all along—her furtive trips to the well in the heat of the day, alone? The customary times for women to gather at the well were early morning or evening and always in the company of other women. Instead of avoiding the scorching sun, she settled for the hottest part of the day. The weight of the water-filled jar in the heat must have been almost unbearable, but the weight of the collective rebuke over her failed marriages, was more than she could bear.

And yet this “unexpected” intrusion would become the beginning of the freedom she had sought, but in all the wrong places. She was thirsty but didn't know what she was thirsting for. Hidden under that request was a need that surpassed physical water, a need now exposed as the intensity of His gaze penetrated her reality.

“Give me a drink”

We all come into the world thirsty. From that first cry in the delivery room, babies long for something to drink. The moment the nourishing umbilical cord is severed, we begin our journey of thirst, longing to satisfy our spiritual thirst, the reason we exist.

Until our encounter with Jesus, we fumble, trying to quench the God-given thirst with anything and anyone who offers temporary relief. Like the Samaritan woman, we drink from shallow streams, only to be left empty and thirsty for more.

Have you ever experienced that level of thirst?

The kind where we may have rearranged our lives to accommodate our private thirsts? What fuels this thirst for significance, validation, opportunity, or relationships? Maybe we are parched for affection, desiring anyone to heal our loneliness? As women we can be so emotionally fragmented, latching on to every bit of comfort we receive from the world.

How many of us stay in toxic relationships just so that we don't have to face the wound of rejection? It's hard to admit that what used to satisfy is no longer fulfilling. But we must acknowledge that our best efforts to imbibe water from shallow streams only leave us wanting. We need a different water source: Jesus.

In an ordinary moment, dazzled by unexpected light, the woman would encounter a stranger who would point to the greatest quest of her soul. In a language both foreign and appealing, He would speak to the depths of her “own well” with acceptance, not judgment; love, not hate.

“Give me a drink”

Think about it. The Eternal One, the Unquenchable One is thirsty, asking her for a drink. He is thirsting for her. How comforting it is to know that our Savior not only identifies with our weariness and thirst, but revitalizes and replenishes us as well! He must first thirst for her, not from a place of lack, but from an ardent desire to give her love – *for how could she, a poor, despised, and blinded sinner, “give” Him a drink?* She cannot. She cannot give what she does not possess. She must first ask of Him. She must first receive before she can give away.

She couldn't deny the brilliance of His countenance, stirring the waters within, inviting her in. She realized that the only way for the freely flowing, resplendently refreshing water from the Holy Spirit – water that quenches every thirst – was to drink it.

“

The only way to dispel darkness is to enter into the Light.



Our lives are full of unexpected interruptions. A sudden sickness, a traffic jam, a lofty bill, a complaining customer, unfaithfulness, divorce, and death are only a partial list of life's sudden intrusions. We are tempted often to challenge them or walk away. But how might we grow if we begin to look afresh at these interruptions as illustrations of God's love? Then in every unexpected visit of the Lord, we would discover His purpose and plan illumining our future?

Jesus interrupts our routines only to love us further. His only desire is to quench our thirst and refresh us with newness.

In asking for a drink, Jesus brought the Samaritan woman as He brings us to the periphery of our own hearts, and to the end of our human efforts to seek the only water that satisfies. He will encounter us in the most unexpected places and make space at the 'hottest' hour of our day, if that will get our attention. He relentlessly seeks because He relentlessly loves.

Caught up in the grind of life, perhaps you've wondered if Jesus cares enough to enter your mess and your 'unearthly' hours? Truth is, He does. Jesus waits to encounter you in the most unexpected places and in the most unexpected ways. Your most ordinary places are potent with the promise of luminous invitations. Take delight that He sees you, all of you, even in the mess.

His sudden brilliance may catch you off guard. Maybe you have settled in your grief and disappointment, for the ever-tempting shadows. Maybe you have been distraught as you compare yourself with others, wondering how God can come for someone with your background or history. Or maybe you are afraid to come to the light for fear of what you might encounter.

Yet we know that though His flame is startling, it is freeing. Though it seems like it invades, it invites. Take heart, the blazing Light of Heaven only heals. It seeks to make radiant your life with the truth found in the presence of One whose only desire is freedom. It is only in His light, even if unexpected, that we discover His thirst, and our longing for His "living water" — not merely for the here and now, but for all eternity.



As we sip, moment by moment, we are freed: freed to consider the great lengths Jesus undertakes to reach us; freed to see how low Jesus is willing to stoop to drink from our polluted vessels and receive our hospitality; and freed to encounter Him, unafraid, in the ordinary.

What is your ordinary at this moment? Jesus is waiting for you there. You are seen not because it is peak midday but because the Son has fully seen you.

Let us fill up and drink deeply!

SOW:

Read John 4:14; additionally, John 6:35, John 7:38.

CULTIVATE:

How do you respond to Jesus' request for a drink? Write down how you feel as you discover that the thirst of your own soul finds its source in Him?

Are there areas you are afraid of bringing to the Light? Why? What aspects of your life remain hidden in darkness?

Jesus encounters you in the ordinary. Where in your routine as wife, mother, daughter, sister, and friend do you need to encounter Christ?

What questions linger in your soul that you haven't voiced in years? Bring them to Jesus as you delight in His thirst for you.

GROW:

By focusing on one area at a time, what steps will you take to allow Christ to come into your spiritual condition? Pray with a trusted friend to understand the history of your patterns and areas where further intervention maybe needed.



gleaming GIFT

"...If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink' you would have asked him, and He would have given you living water."

(JOHN 4:10)



There is something about the gaze of this Stranger. She has been in the company of gazes before, yet there is something convincing in the way He sees her. His gaze does not condemn, but compassionately penetrates her broken, disintegrated, hitherto unreachable well. He “sees” as if with illumined knowledge, the deepest parts of her story, upholding them with dignity and kindness.

She has not been looked at, this way before. Perhaps the illusory, temporal luminosity of the sun serves as an easy means of avoiding His gaze. She looks away, her eyes traversing the smooth sloping outline of Mount Ebal. These are familiar mountains. They carry monumental altars her forefathers built, plastered on broken stones. This was her heritage, her blessing. Now bereft in her shame, she dare not hope in that blessing.

“There is no blessing for the sexual immoral, for the promiscuous woman. There is no blessing for the one marked ‘unworthy, unlovable, unaccepted.’”

Defensively she asks, *“How is it that you, a Jew, asks a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?”* Jesus answers, *“If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you, you would have asked for a drink, and I would have given you living water.”*

Jesus suddenly shifts His role from earthly receiver to Divine Giver. It is not water from living springs that He offers, but the Fount of God welling up with eternal life.

Jesus makes a distinction for her. *“Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty ...”*

Excitedly she asks, *“Sir, give me this water...”* (John 4:15)



“...If you knew the gift of God”

What makes a gift a "gift?" First of all, every gift needs a giver. Anyone who has seen a child unwrap a gift knows the excitement contained in the exchange. There is a “person” behind every gift that expresses deep knowledge, love, and intent. Love therefore remains the most fundamental reality of gift-giving. A gift cannot be earned, demanded, or manipulated. It is freely given. It is freely received. It is rooted in freedom; otherwise it ceases to be a ‘gift’.

Because a gift is unmerited, it also elicits surprise and gratitude. With that gratitude comes a return-gift. A gift well-received does not end in the receiver, but rather blooms and bears fruit in the relationship. There is an exchange, not just of material things, but of love, kindness, and communion with one another.

Jesus called the Samaritan woman not only to give, but also to receive — to ask *Him* for the gift. He called the woman to the receptive dimension of the gift—to be a *receiver*. Only in receiving the divine Gift of God would she see herself as “gift.”

As women, we have been endowed with the beautiful gift of receptivity, but how many of us can truly say it is easy to receive? Isn't it easier to simply give? Think about motherhood. What is a mother? She's a refuge. She nurtures, protects and guides. She's a place where people can go and safely be loved. She gives of her time, her talents, her possessions, and her body. Motherhood is the most generous form of gift-giving.

But receiving? That requires risk. A receiving spirit is a vulnerable spirit, but not a weak one, for it is the spirit of Jesus Himself – the Word Made Flesh. To receive means to acknowledge that we can't have it all together, all the time. To receive means to say, "I too need help." To receive means to say we are stronger together. To receive also means we loosen our grip on all prospective *gifts* we have demanded of this world.

Like this woman, we too fail to recognize the "gift of God." Like her, we fail to see our womanhood as a "gift." Like her, we fall for the easy route of perfectionism, trying to draw water from our own strength. Like her, we control our circumstances and use hidden paths if we need to. Like her, we wrestle daily wells of busyness and family challenges, marital conflicts and career choices, thinking that if only we did just this or had just that, then we could earn this "gift."

But salvation does not come to us in return for our efforts. The Gift of God is ours through the stupendous prodigy of love, which is poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5). God loves us regardless of our shame. God loves us regardless of our efforts. God's blessing runs in our DNA because we are His.



God gives Himself to us with ardor and vehemence, with the deep truth of His infinite love. In return, He asks us to contemplate the generosity of His offering, the beauty of its wrapping, the mystery of its content — this gift which ever draws, ever surprises, ever satisfies, and ever expands to supersede every other gift we have known.

He does not desire to merely live with us, but in us. He does not wish to come to us only to satisfy our needs, provide for us, or rescue us when we fail; He desires to give Himself to us completely and wholly.

How do we respond?

Jesus asked the woman to be a return gift unto Him. Jesus asks us to be a self-gift unto Him. It is only in “receiving” His Gift of Life that we become a gleaming gift ourselves!

It is this free offering of ourselves that we carry to a world waiting for its blessing.

It is fitting therefore that we respond, ***“Sir, give me this water.”***



SOW:

Read John 4:10; additionally, John 4:14; Isaiah 44:3.

CULTIVATE:

How might the Gaze of Christ transform you? Write down what goes on in your mind in the possibility of being fully seen.

How easy or difficult is it to receive from Jesus? Why or why not? What will you do with the “Gift of God?”

Do you see yourself as a Gift? What are some areas that prevent you from seeing yourself as a blessing?

GROW:

List down areas where God has blessed you. Thank Him for those blessings and lift up any area where doubt prevents you from coming to Him in faith.



bedazzled **BY TRUTH**

“Go, call your husband, and come back.”

(JOHN 4:16)



There was an unusual certainty in His tone. Her hands froze on the ropes as a little shiver ran down her spine. *Did He imply He had something that could put an end to this unending quest?* Regaining her composure, she asked, “*Sir give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.*”

I will, Jesus assured her, I know you are thirsty for more.

“*Go, call your husband and come back.*”

She dropped her gaze to the ground, fidgeted and gasped. How does this man know? What else does He know?

Surprised by the intrusion, bedazzled by this sudden light, she quickly changed the subject and began to talk about places and practices of worship. She was desperate for freedom yet feared what this light demanded.

“*Go, call your husband and come back.*”

Jesus’ words stirred within her an authentic thirst, thus preparing her heart to recognize her sin. His knowledge did not shame her, nor did He think to punish her. There was infinite tenderness in His reproach. Rather than belittle her or diminish her worth like so many others had in the past, He offered to serve her, fulfill her need, and give her life. His words brought conviction, but also compassion and comfort.

The ropes were loosened, and Grace gushed forth.

This is a moment of illumination. She recognized that Jesus’ desire for her went beyond fulfilling physical needs. This is a moment of conversion. She recognized that sin must be dealt with first. Love broke through and appealed to her deepest need. She now stood before Him in the honesty of life, catching a glimpse of a newfound relationship based on spirit and truth, not on gender and race.

She now stood before her new reality. “Go”!



Are you longing for a better way? What parts of your heart need truth today?

Love does not exist in the absence of truth. Without truth, love would be incapable of establishing a firm bond or liberating our isolated ego. If love needs truth, truth needs love. Without love, truth becomes cold, impersonal, and oppressive. The truth we seek, the truth that gives meaning to our journey, enlightens us whenever we are touched by love.

As part of this love, Jesus exposes the bankruptcy of our souls. Sin diminishes our worth and does not allow us to see ourselves as “gifts.” Hence the nature of love is to expose, so that light can dispel all that separates us from this love. We are sinners, yet Jesus calls us because He loves us. He crosses the abyss for us, like He did for the Samaritan woman.



“

The nature of love is to expose so that light can dispel all that separates us from this love.



“Go, call your husband and come back”

Jesus wanted to see if the woman owned her own truth, her own choices. He wanted to see if she was the kind of soil He could sow into. Was she hungry enough for truth, letting go of her pride? In the great strength of His undying, never-going-to-leave-you love, she had no excuse to run, but every reason to hold onto His hope. And she did, she didn't defend. She simply replied, “I have no husband” (John 4:17).

Can we ever find freedom in the absence of truth?

Jesus' gift of living water must be accompanied by our will to be converted, a movement to authenticate the gift of self which our lifestyles have so profaned. The truth that Jesus calls us out into, must result in our own *fiat*. Only then can we truly be free to “go” where Jesus sends us.

“Go” is a verb. Repentance is an action. Tomorrow's high sun would see the Samaritan woman at the well again with her jug. She still had her old responsibilities; she would still have to draw water for her everyday sustenance, but now all her chores and daily activities were redeemed and transformed by and in Christ. All the course of her days were now to be filled with daily images of God's Grace.

No more fear. No more hiding. Only Truth!

“Go...and come back.”

Christ never commands us to go without offering us hope in return. When we go for Him, we always return to Him. And then “*come back*” — that was a word for her heart, for our hearts. She (we) “go” as the old person, but always “come back” made new. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a *new* creation, everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! (2Corinthians 5:17)

How often do we prefer the despair of darkness or the comfort of our wounds to the hard work asked of us in the light? Yet in those moments when we find ourselves preferring darkness, it is Truth that pursues and awakens. It is Truth that beckons. It is Truth that liberates.

Would today be a day of divine revelation for you? Whatever you are facing, whatever you are hiding, God’s Grace is sufficient for you. He invites you to face the sting of truth in exchange for the dull ache of denial. When women love, they give their whole heart. This also means we run a great risk of having our hearts shattered. The tragic brokenness arising from rejection and abuse is a scar we prefer to live with, rather than doing the courageous work of coming to the light for our healing.

Truth is hard work. Freedom is hard work. And healing is hard. But Christ never calls us into anything without the promise of His Presence in our path. His Word remains a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path (Psalm 119:105). Truth may be bracing, even intolerable, but it is revelatory. No matter what, how, why, we too can “Go.” No matter how strong the darkness, Light is stronger still.





When is the last time you have been honest with God? When is the last time you let your memories and feelings unleash before Him?

He invites you today to find stillness in His truth. Don't we long to be listened to, to be understood? Christ desires to be your all, today, now. You can be honest with Him about your fears of abandonment. You can be honest about life's circumstances and failures. Living in denial is crippling but coming to the Light is healing and transforming. The cost of denial is heavy, but it will never outweigh the Power of His Love.

Do not dim this Divine appointment today—take your whole heart to Him: your marriage, that trauma, that situation, those people, that childhood, that dream, those years, that child, those leaders, that friend. And then invite His truth in.

*Healing and freedom are real. Love is not a prize to be won, but a sacred gift to be received and cherished. **His truth calls us from within**, but also propels us forward into discipleship, reminding us of our destiny.*

SOW:

Read John 4:16; additionally, Hebrews 4:13, John 1:47-48

CULTIVATE:

Are there parts of your life that you haven't confessed? Why?

Where do you sense Jesus calling you out in love and truth? How will you respond?

Where is Jesus nudging you to "go"? Which person, family, or friend needs your light today?

GROW:

Talk to a priest in the confessional and seek an appointment if there are parts of your life that have been hidden in pain.

Talk to a friend who needs your "truth" and "love" today.



radiating BEAMS

“Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done..”

(JOHN 4:29)





For a few moments she struggled as she tried to turn the conversation away, yet could not. She was summoned irresistibly toward something mysterious and beautiful. She had gone to draw water from the well, but had found another kind of water, welling up to eternal life.

She widened her eyes and released her grip on the rope as the water jar fell, crashing at her feet and spilling all her worldly thirsts to the ground. The more her water penetrated the earth, the more she was freed. The more she drank, the closer she stepped forward to the Fount of Living Water.

She looked up. The fields were white and ready for harvest. She left her jar and went forth!

The transaction was immediate. She came in as reject but went forth as chosen; she came in wounded but went forth whole; she came with her broken cistern but went forth with a well overflowing with hope; she came in as sinner but went forth a devoted Saint. Transformed by light, she gained new sight, new vision, and new revelation. She became a witness.

"But those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life" Jesus had said (John 4:14). She had listened with hopeful attentiveness, as they exchanged conversations about faith and hope and life. The longer she talked, the more she was enlightened. She demonstrated a posture of discipleship listening to Jesus, harkening to the call of evangelism as she learned from Him. Light began to shine, and hope began to rise. Yet this Hope was living, vital, and contagious.

It spread like wildfire as she stepped into her village – the same village that judged her – to declare a new kind of freedom found in One who not only offered her a drink of life, but also made her a reservoir of hope and healing.

Now, no longer afraid of the light, she burst forth into song, *"Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done..."* (John 4:29). Many Samaritans came to believe in Jesus. They said to the woman *"It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world"* (John 4:42).

The sound of gushing water filled the place. As they sipped the newly found cool spring, their hearts were opened, their minds renewed and their thirst, like hers, quenched forever.

They had found what she had found: the Fount of Living Water.

“

***Receive the light fully,
that it may infuse us from
within and radiate out.***



A single encounter with Jesus is more powerful than a thousand self-seeking efforts on our part to fulfill the quest of our soul. Even the most wicked of sinners are only one revelation away from salvation. All one needs to do is receive the light fully, that it may infuse us from within and radiate out.

As soon as the woman realized who Jesus was, she *“left her water jar behind”* and went to proclaim the Lord. The jar symbolized the rhythm of her inordinate desires, her futile attempts to turn to the world to assuage her spiritual hunger. How wonderful that, having met the source of living water, she was able to set aside her addictions and become, herself, a vehicle of healing for others.

She did not run from the light; she stepped into it. That is when everything changed. That’s when everything changes. Running and hiding does not bring change; turning to Christ does. It is He who dispels darkness. It is He who makes us beacons of light. It is His light that we carry to our community, our marriage, our friendships, our workplaces, our Churches, and our neighbors. It is His splendid refulgence that invites us in, and it is His light (in us) that invites others. This is how discipleship is birthed. It begins the moment we are willing to leave our “jar” behind. It begins the moment we say: *I want to be the light.*

Like the Samaritan woman, each of our lives is marked by choices. These choices form part of our daily routine. In our cleaning and cooking, our settling wardrobes and paying bills, our raising kids and raising others, we can be the light. We can choose the light. Freedom is a reality for anyone who turns to the Son. It is in His offering of new, abundant, and overflowing life that we find the impetus to “leave behind our water jar,” the symbol of everything that may seem important, but that loses all value before the “love of a Savior.”



Sister, we all have one or more jars. *“What is your interior water jar, the one that weighs you down, that distances you from God, that pushes you to quench your thirst outside of God?”*

Having drunk deeply from the Living Waters, like the Samaritan woman, we too are invited to become lighthouses, whose radiating beams transform us into missionary disciples. Having been quenched, we go forth to quench the thirst of others. Having been illuminated, we go forth to spread light. Having been granted a “gift,” we go forth to put our gifts into action for the sake of others. This is the movement of all disciples—growing in faith through our relationship with Jesus, then moving outward to use our gifts for the sake of the world.

This is also why as women; we need to support and nurture each other. We need to help our sisters who are weak and raise those who have been downcast by the world. We need to equip, edify, and encourage. This is what being the light means: *we serve as lighthouses* and we embrace the light in others. This is the power of sisterhood, this is community, and this is the Church. Even a tiny flame lifts the heavy lid of night. How much more can we become luminous, all together, if we bond as one in the communion of the Church? This is how legacies are born; this is how light is passed on generation after generation.

It begins with an encounter with Jesus, one person at a time, one ray at a time.





Where in your life do you need to spread the light of Christ? Is it in your marriage? Is it to your family members? Is it your son /daughter? Is it a colleague who has deeply hurt you? Is it to a friend who has lost her way seeking empty wells?

Each of us is called to radiate light. In the great dislocation of this pandemic, how do we remain evangelists and persons of compassion and hope?

We don't need great outdoor evangelical efforts to spread light. We can take one moment at a time to reach those isolated, wounded, and grieving. We can lend a helping hand to single mothers struggling during the pandemic to make ends meet. We can comfort sisters discouraged after having to cancel special events like Baptism or a wedding or graduation. We can grieve with those who grieve losses and rejoice with those who need our celebration.

As believers, as evangelists, as Christians, there will always be opportunities to lift up spirits. There will always be someone in need of our own unique luminescence.

To answer God's call to be people of light, we must put Him at the center of our lives. When God is our priority, His light will always shine. Our job is not one of conversion; that is for the Holy Spirit. Our job is to be obedient, however and wherever the Spirit prompts us; to evangelize in new ways as He leads; to remain always lit from within.

The world we are inheriting, desperately needs a new sense of sisterhood and human solidarity, of beauty and the richness of God's love. It needs witnesses that show love by demonstrating love. It needs you – it needs me – to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

The stresses and messes you find yourself in today – these are the very places where Jesus would meet you, so that by His grace, you can fulfill your higher purpose: ***to be a light to the nations.***



SOW:

Read John 4:29; additionally, read Revelation 22:17.

CULTIVATE:

How does the word “witness” speak to you personally?

What is God whispering to you about your own calling? Where is He calling you to evangelize?

What are some of the challenges in leaving your “jar” behind? Why do you think you still struggle with them? Write them down and offer them to Jesus.

What are some “new” ways the Holy Spirit is calling you to evangelize?

GROW:

Write down the names of three individuals you would like to talk to about their need for Jesus Christ. Ask Jesus to prepare their hearts for an initial conversation and thank Him for those who have witnessed His love in yours.



notes

Lined writing area with 20 horizontal lines for notes.



“

*Having been illuminated,
we go forth to spread light.*





THE LUMINOUS ONE





The Samaritan woman may have begun her true life in anonymity, but her story did not end thus. In Eastern Orthodox tradition she is venerated as St. Photine (Greek), which means “The Luminous One.” She is called in various traditions “Equal to the Apostles” and “The first Evangelist.” She also carried the name “Svetlana” in some parts of the world: “the Enlightened one.”

Tradition highlights that after the Apostles Paul and Peter were martyred, St. Photine and her family left their homeland of Sychar, in Samaria, to travel to Carthage to proclaim the Gospel of Christ there. In 66 AD, under the persecutions of Emperor Nero, they all achieved the crown of martyrdom. She is known to have converted her five sisters and two sons, all of whom became tireless evangelists for Christ.

From humble and despised beginnings as a heretic and a woman, Christ bestowed upon St. Photine an eternal memory written in love and prepared her for “greater things” as He did the disciples. He clothed her with the same Power (Acts 1:8) and equipped her with gifts to advance His kingdom.

Through Photine’s life, we learn how the grace of God can achieve what seems humanly impossible. We learn that Grace can make “luminous” even the dullest and darkest of sinners.

Jesus said, *“Let your light so shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven”* (Matthew 5:16). This light must not be secreted beneath a bushel. Having discovered the Light, St. Photine left behind all concerns and ran to share the joy, the wonder of what she had discovered. She brought her fellow-citizens to Christ. She made them “luminous.”

The implications are clear. If we also open our hearts and lives to the bubbling, life-giving Spirit, the fountain of life, we shall see wondrous things as the life of Christ flows out through us to others. As surely as Photine means “enlightened,” it is our calling also to enlighten others with the Light of Christ.

May we follow in her blazing trail.



***“Illuminated by the Holy Spirit, All-Glorious One,
from Christ the Savior you drank the water of salvation.
With open hands you give it to those who thirst.
Great-Martyr Photine, Equal-to-the-Apostles,
pray to Christ for the salvation of our souls.”***





MARY, OUR MODEL OF SELF GIFT



If there is any person who serves as the very embodiment of “self-gift,” it is the Blessed Virgin Mother of God. Mary, in receiving the message of the angel with faith and joy, demonstrated its fruitfulness by becoming His “handmaid” and thereby sharing the uncontainable joy of the Gospel with her neighbors. Her identity as handmaid is her personal *fiat*, her total gift of self, her feminine response to the gift of God. By it she pledges, with and in Christ, a life of total service that is inseparable from the mission to love every person wholly.

Mary’s self-gift, like Jesus, carries no taint of greed or self-interest. As Mother, she reserves nothing for herself. As a young girl, she surrenders her dreams. As a daughter of God, she embraces the Cross. She does not cling even to her Son, her own center of being, but instead acquiesces totally and at every moment in His mission of self-gift for the life of the world. Everything she receives, she gives, including her Son. Her hands and her heart are opened out to the world, pierced, bleeding and overflowing with heavenly joy in exchange for the world’s deadly sorrows.

Mary can *give* because she has first received: her worth, her identity, her destiny, her vocation as *beloved daughter* of God. It is in receiving this Grace that she can give. And she does, throughout her life. Following in the footsteps of her Son, Mary completed her pilgrimage of faith, renewing this “*fiat*” over and over again, becoming this “self-gift” again and again.

Mary would accompany Jesus to the cross (John 19:25), extending her motherhood to each of His disciples (John 19:26-27). She would be present in the upper room after Jesus’ Resurrection and Ascension, joining the apostles in imploring the gift of the Spirit (Acts 1:14). Mary would accompany the Church in its early bearings and continue to serve as handmaid for the purposes of the Great Commission.

At the center of our faith is the confession of Jesus, the Son of God, born of a woman, who brings us, through the gift of the Holy Spirit, our own reality as “self-gift.” She gives herself totally to us. Inspired by this confidence, we can turn to Mary at any given time and place to implore her intercession.

In the mysteries of Light, we are invited like Mary to fully embrace the light of Christ. By contemplating these mysteries, we are invited to rediscover our Baptismal identity as beloved daughters of God, filled with luminous joy that we carry to the nations of this world.





Michelle
KAREN D'SILVA

