



Vision and Viewpoint
a weekly e-newsletter from

Joan Chittister

A letter to Pope Francis

Dear Pope Francis,

Your visit to the United States is important to us all. We have watched you make the papacy a model of pastoral listening. You have become for us a powerful reminder of the Jesus who walked among the crowds listening to them, loving them—healing them.

Your commitment to poverty and mercy, to the lives of the poor and the spiritual suffering of many—however secure they may feel materially—gives us new hope in the integrity and holiness of the Church itself. A church that is more about sin than the suffering of those who bear the burdens of the world is a puny church, indeed. In the face of the Jesus who consorted with the most wounded, the most outcast of society, all the time judging only the judges, your insistence is the lesson of a lifetime for the self-righteous and the professionally religious.

It is with this awareness that we raise two issues here:

The first is the dire poverty to which you draw our attention ceaselessly. You refuse to allow us to forget the inhumanity of the barrios everywhere, the homeless on bank steps in our own society, the overworked, the underpaid, the enslaved, the migrant, the vulnerable and those invisible to the mighty of this era.

You make the world see what we have forgotten. You call us to do more, to do something, to provide the jobs, the food, the homes, the education, the voice, the visibility that bring dignity, decency and full development.

But there is a second issue lurking under the first that you yourself may need to give new and serious attention to as well. The truth is that women are the poorest of the poor. Men have paid jobs; few women in the world do. Men have clear civil, legal and religious rights in marriage; few women in the world do. Men take education for granted; few women in the world can expect the same. Men are allowed positions of power and authority outside the home; few women in the world can hope for the same. Men have the right to ownership and property; most of the women of the world are denied these things by law, by custom, by religious tradition. Women are owned, beaten, raped and enslaved regularly simply because they are female. And worst of all, perhaps, they are ignored—rejected—as full human beings, as genuine disciples, by their churches, including our own.

It is impossible, Holy Father, to be serious about doing anything for the poor and at the same time do little or nothing for women.

I implore you to do for the women of the world and the church what Jesus did for Mary who bore him, for the women of Jerusalem who made his ministry possible, for Mary of Bethany and Martha to whom he taught theology, for the Samaritan Woman who was the first to recognize Jesus as the Messiah, for Mary of Magdala who is called the Apostle to the Apostles, and for the deaconesses and leaders of the house churches of the early church.

Until then, Holy Father, nothing can really change for their hungry children and their inhuman living conditions.

We're glad you are here to speak to these things. We trust you to change them, starting with the Church itself.

—Sister Joan Chittister, OSB