

## Women are 'builders of humanity,' Pope Francis says in conference address



Pope Francis meets with Argentine pilgrims on Feb. 9, 2024, ahead of the historic canonization of the country's first female saint on Sunday, Feb. 11, 2024. | Credit: Vatican Media



By **Zoe Romanowsky**

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On the day before International Women's Day, Pope Francis addressed participants of the international conference "Women in the Church: Builders of Humanity" on Thursday at the Vatican.

The conference highlighted the witness of 10 women noted for their holiness: Sts. Josephine Bakhita, Elizabeth Ann Seton, Mary MacKillop, Laura Montoya, Kateri Tekakwitha, Teresa of Calcutta, Rafqa Pietra Choboq Ar-Rayès, Venerable Magdeleine de Jesus, and Blessed Maria Beltrame Quattrocch.

"All these women, at different times and in different cultures, each in her own distinct way, gave proof through initiatives of charity, education, and prayer of how the 'feminine genius' can uniquely reflect God's holiness in the midst of our world," **the pope said in his address.**

Francis acknowledged that throughout periods of history, women have been "largely excluded from social and ecclesial life" but that even in these times "the Holy Spirit raised up saints whose attractiveness produced new spiritual vigor and important reforms in the Church."

Referencing his apostolic exhortation on the call to holiness from 2018, **Gaudete et Exsultate**, the Holy Father paid tribute to "ordinary"

women who have faithfully lived their vocations and changed the world in quiet yet powerful ways.

"I think of all those unknown or forgotten women who, each in her own way, sustained and transformed families and communities by the power of their witness," he said. "The Church needs to keep this in mind, because the Church is herself a woman: a daughter, a bride, and a mother. And who better than women can reveal her face?"

Francis spoke to the theme of the conference, which referred to women as "builders of humanity," highlighting the nature of women as builders in cooperation with the Creator "in the service of life, the common good, and peace." In his remarks, he focused on two aspects of this mission — the first about "style," the way in which women bear love and compassion in the world.

"Ours is a time seared by hatred in which our human family, which needs to feel the power of love, is instead frequently scarred by violence, war, and ideologies that stifle the noblest feelings of the human heart," Francis said. "Precisely in this context, the contribution of women is more necessary than ever. For women know how to bring people together with tenderness."

He recalled St. Therese of Lisieux saying that she wanted to be "love in the Church."

"She was right," he said, "women, in fact, with their unique capacity for compassion, their intuitiveness, and their connatural inclination to 'care' are able, in an outstanding way, to be for society both "intelligence and a heart that loves and unites," to bring love where love is lacking and humanity where human beings are searching to find their true identity."

Francis also spoke about education — about how "testimonies of female sanctity" like the ones the conference was presenting "can encourage [women] to aim higher, to broaden the horizons of their dreams and their ways of thinking, and to aim to pursue high ideals." He called for educational settings to not only be places of study, research, and learning, but also places of "formation where minds and hearts are opened to the promptings of the Holy Spirit."

The pope told the participants that it is important to make the saints better known, "especially women saints, in all the depth and reality of their humanity. In this way, education will be increasingly capable of touching each person in his or her wholeness and uniqueness."

At the end of his address, Pope Francis acknowledged the sufferings and injustices women face in many places in the world, calling on prayer and action, specifically when it comes to education.

"In certain contexts it is a cause of fear, yet the way to the betterment of societies is through the education of girls and young women, which benefits overall human development," Francis said. "Let us pray for this and commit ourselves to this!"

*The full text of the pope's remarks can be found [here](#).*

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