

## Francis: Women have 'special role' in church

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Pope Francis

Vatican City

Women have a unique ability to share the Catholic faith because of their penchant to experience love and share it with others, Pope Francis told a crowd of some 50,000 during the second general audience of his pontificate Wednesday.

Speaking to those gathered in St. Peter's Square for the event, Francis mentioned the role of women in the church several times, even stating that their presence in the Gospel account of Jesus' resurrection shows that "God does not choose according to human criteria."

Francis was continuing a series of catechetical talks on the Christian faith begun by his predecessor, Pope Benedict XVI.

Commenting on the words, "rose again on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures," the pope noted that the New Testament gives women a "primary, fundamental role" as witnesses of Jesus' resurrection. He cited the passage in Mark's Gospel in which women find an empty tomb and an angel who tells them that Jesus is alive.

"Here we can see an argument in favor of the historical truth of the resurrection," the pope said. "If it had been an invention, in the context of that time it would not have been linked to the testimony of women," since the Jewish law of period did not consider women or children as "reliable, credible witnesses."

"This tells us that God does not choose according to human criteria," the pope said. "The first witnesses of the birth of Jesus are the shepherds, simple and humble people, and the first witnesses of the resurrection are women."

Jesus' male apostles and disciples "find it harder to believe in the risen Christ," the pope said. "Peter runs to the tomb, but stops before the empty tomb. Thomas has to touch the wounds of the body of Jesus with his own hands."

By contrast, the "women are driven by love and they know to accept this proclamation (of the resurrection) with faith," the pope said. "They believe and immediately transmit it; they do not keep it for themselves."

"Women have had and still have a special role in opening doors to the Lord, in following him and communicating his face, because the eyes of faith always need the simple and profound look of love," the pope said.

"This is the mission of women, of mothers and women, to give witness to their children and grandchildren that Christ is risen," he said. "Faith is professed with the mouth and heart, with the word and love."

"Let us also have the courage to go out to bring this joy and light to all the places of our lives," the pope said,

eliciting cheers from the crowd, as at several other moments in his talk. "The resurrection of Christ is our greatest certainty, it is our most precious treasure. How can we not share this treasure, this beautiful certainty with others?"

"Unfortunately, there have often been attempts to obscure faith in the resurrection of Jesus, and doubts have crept in even among believers themselves," Pope Francis said, lamenting what he called a "rosewater"-like faith, diluted by superficiality, indifference, other priorities or a "purely horizontal vision of life."

Hope in the resurrection, he said, enables Christians to "live everyday realities with more confidence, to face them with courage and commitment."

Before addressing the crowd for the audience, the pope travelled through the square in an open-top Jeep. He stopped the car several times to take offered children into his arms.

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