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The latest from Pope Francis on women

by Maureen Fiedler

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I really like Pope Francis in so many ways. He seems personable, friendly, truly human, a man who experiences life with joy. I love his simpler lifestyle, his emphasis on the poor of the world and his preaching of social justice and peace as cornerstones of the Gospel message.

But when it comes to women, I want to cry. He just doesn't seem to get it. He tries to be nice, to be complimentary and understanding. But in almost every phrase, he seems to think of women as a different species of human.

His latest document, *Evangelii Gaudium*, is no exception. He talks about women's "sensitivity, intuition and other distinctive skill sets which they, more than men, tend to possess." He mentions "the special concern which women show to others, which finds a particular, even if not exclusive, expression in motherhood." In another sentence, he talks about the "feminine genius." Women may be socialized into many of these roles and qualities, but we don't have a corner on them. I have known lots of men who are sensitive, intuitive and show a special concern for others. Francis himself demonstrates many of those qualities.

But there are many qualities women and men also share that he does not mention: intelligence, organizing abilities, leadership skills, political savvy, physical prowess. These attributes are women's as much as they are men's.

But Francis' words read as if he thinks women are somehow a different species. They are the creatures with "soft" qualities, not the qualities stereotypically attributed to males.

The real problem is that these sentiments, together with some strange theology, seem to be the basis for his rejection of any discussion of women's ordination. On this score, he says, "The reservation of the

priesthood to males, as a sign of Christ the Spouse who gives himself in the Eucharist, is not a question open to discussion."

This seems to be a new way of saying that because Jesus was male, the priest must be male. That argument has been answered so many times, it seems redundant to say it. But "imaging Jesus" is not a question of gender. To make the maleness of Jesus a controlling element in imaging him is to confuse Jesus' maleness, which is incidental, with his humanity, which is fundamental to his redemptive role. And the spousal imagery is just that: imagery. Moreover, to say that only males may image Jesus sacralizes masculinity.

Pope Francis does have a noteworthy point on one thing: The priesthood is for service, not for power. Too often, these are entangled and confused.

But that does not erase his antiquated view of women, nor does it reform his theology of the priesthood. Until that happens, many of his other worthy goals -- especially attracting young people to the church -- will remain beyond his reach.

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