

Greetings to you! This week is an exceptional week as we have several important days coming up. Today is National girl child's day and tomorrow is the conversion of St. Paul and the following day is our Republic Day. Today is also marked as *Septuagesima* Sunday meaning "70th" that is seventy days before Easter. This also marks a time of preparation for the forty days of fasting during lent.

The Old Testament text taken from the book of Genesis clearly shows how God had created everything and made human beings in his image. In Gen 1:26-28 three fundamental truths about human beings arise, namely that God made (and makes) them in his own image, that he made (and makes) them male and female, giving them the joyful task of reproducing and that he gave (and gives) them dominion over the earth and its creatures. So right from the very beginning the design was both male and female. Both of them shared in the divine image and both were given the authority to rule over the earth. There is no distinction here among the sexes that either of them was more like God or that either sex is more responsible for the earth than the other. Their resemblance to God and their stewardship towards the earth was from the beginning equally shared since both sexes were equally created by God and like God.

In Genesis 1:27 there is a threefold affirmation that God created human beings in his own image, "In the image of God he created them" and finally spells it out more specifically "male and female he created them." Genesis 1 clearly affirms the equality of the sexes. Whatever is essentially human in both male and female reflects the divine image which is equally borne by male and female. Male and female are equally called to rule over the earth and to cooperate with the creator in the development of the resources for the common good.

In Genesis 2 God's design for male and female is for companionship and to act in a complimentary manner. Genesis 2:18 the Lord says that "it is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." The idea was that God would make someone who will be complementary to Adam and be a suitable helper. The Lord caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping he took one of the man's rib and closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made the woman with a rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The word 'helper' is normally used of God and so God is bringing somebody like him, yet different and would complement him. Mathew Henry commenting on this 300 years ago says that, "Eve was not made out of his head to top him, nor out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out his side to be equal to him, under his arm to be protected and near his heart to be loved." Peter Lombard, in about AD 1157, just before becoming Bishop of Paris commented in his *Book of Sentences* that "Eve was not taken from his feet to be his slave, nor from his head to be his Lord, but from his side to be his partner.

We note from both Genesis 1&2 that male and female were created equal in God's eyes and male and female were meant to complement each other. In Genesis 3:16 apart from the pains of child bearing, the curse is "your desire will be for your husband and he will rule over you." Part of this fallen nature lead to a domination of women by men. In our own country the sex ratio is fairly skewed. The 2011 census of India revealed that there were 914 girls per 1000 boys in the 0 to 6 age group across India. The worst hit states in India are Haryana (830) Punjab (846) Jammu and Kashmir (859). Delhi has (866) girls for 1000 males and has decreased from (942) in the 2001 census. Reports suggest that over 19 million girl children are aborted in India. If this is the situation in our country and in our city it is also true of the Church. Many families abort female children because they see them as a liability. These deliberate killings of children who are yet to be born will be called to account by God. As a Church how do we engage in affirming the life of female children? Not a single minute goes when a girl is not raped, or experiences domestic violence or becomes a prey in the hands of the perpetrators of the violence. Delhi has got dubious distinction of being the rape capital of India.

In this kind of context how can we change be brought about? Lot of people argue for stricter laws and severe punishments. However all these will not help us because the human heart is deceitful and above all cure. The only way any real change can take place is when there is a change of heart. The conversion of St. Paul is an excellent example of this. A man who went about destroying people was touched by God and was transformed so radically that he went around saving people from eternal destruction. Jesus also taught us that both male and female are equal in God's sight and that life is important in the sight of God and he is the only one who has the authority to give and take life. If God has created man and woman to be joint heirs of the kingdom then the Church being the body of Christ must be the first to reflect this, May God help us to affirm life, to let the girl children live and treat women as joint heirs of the kingdom.