

INTRODUCTION

*Refresh me with the light of your presence,
and show me your face as my friend.*

—THOMAS À KEMPIS

In his apostolic letter to women, the late Pope John Paul II wrote,

The moral and spiritual strength of woman is joined to her awareness that *God entrusts the human being to her in a special way*. . . . Thus the “perfect woman” (cf. Proverbs 31:10) becomes an irreplaceable support and source of spiritual strength for other people, who perceive the great energies of her spirit. These “perfect women” are owed much by their families, and sometimes by whole nations.¹

The exciting truth is that each and every one of us can be a perfectly authentic woman with the potential to bring Christ to others in a unique and defining way.

But we can’t do it on our own power. Before we can be a source of spiritual strength for others, we need to take some time for ourselves and allow the Lord to refresh and renew us.

Our lives are busy, our hearts are full, and our minds are often preoccupied with the details and daily responsibilities that surround us; but in the midst of all our activity is the call to embrace a renewed strength in our collective vocation. For no matter what our station in life, our feminine genius is needed.

Refresh Me, Lord! is my gift to you. What began as a dream to write this book almost twelve years ago has grown into a personal mission to encourage, affirm, and inspire women from all walks of life. We are all on this journey together, as we strive to meet the demands of modern living while growing in this most sublime and mysterious vocation of authentic womanhood.

Use this book as a companion on that journey to plug in to the outpouring of God's grace and receive an infusion of his joy. You can read these hundred reflections from cover to cover or simply open the book and read whatever page is right in front of you. The spiritual suggestions at the end of each reflection, labeled "Just for Today," are meant to be a starting point for your personal reflection. You could use them to begin your daily journal entry or share them with others in your conversations. If you are a member of a women's group, the suggestion could be used as an opening topic. If something in the book strikes you

as helpful or inspiring, chances are that it will also be of interest to someone else; so pass on what you discover, because we all need spiritual refreshment to keep us going.

It is truly an amazing grace that God is intimately interested in every aspect of our lives. Your heart, your soul, and your spirit are his precious creations, so when you find yourself wanting or weary, remember that the Lord is just a prayer away. He is your friend, always ready, willing, and able to refresh you with the light of his loving presence.

Anne Costa

A Complete Yes

*“Here am I, the servant of the Lord;
let it be with me according to your word.”*

—LUKE 1:38

At the beginning of each new year, we often experience stirrings within us that lead us to reflect on where we have been and where we are going. For some, the new year brings feelings of anticipation and excitement; for others, a sense of foreboding or trepidation. Whether facing the beginning of a new year or a new day, each one of us has the opportunity to begin anew and embrace unforeseen experiences. Whatever our plans may be, the mystery of the future remains just that—a mystery.

It is fitting, then, that as Catholics, we set aside days and months throughout the year to reflect upon and celebrate Mary. More than any other person in history, she embraced the mystery of the unknown when she said yes to God at the annunciation. Mary could not have completely understood what was happening to her or how her life would change as a result of the angel’s visit. But by her fiat, Mary confirmed her commitment to God and allowed herself to be used

by God to redeem humankind. As a result, her entire life became a reflection of the depth of God's love. She expressed awe and wonder at the role she was to play in God's plan of salvation when she proclaimed in the Magnificat, "For he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed" (Luke 1:48).

Like Mary, each of us has an important part to play in God's perfect plan. We are pilgrim people with a mission to serve in love. May we embrace the unique call God has on our lives with the same receptivity and openness that Mary displayed. We don't have to wait until the beginning of a new year to offer our own complete yes to God. Like Mary, let us walk with God in trust as the mystery of our life unfolds before us.

Dear Lord, lead me along your path of goodness and love. Help me to surrender my plans and projects, just as Mary did, and to say yes to all that you ask of me. —

Just for Today: I will say yes to God.

Bring Him Too

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations.”

—MATTHEW 28:19

A sign on the door of a local church reads, “You are about to participate in the greatest act of worship the world has ever known—the holy sacrifice of the Mass. Be reverent, prayerful, and open to God’s grace.” Before Mass, the church is usually quiet inside as most people kneel and pray silently. It’s a time for collecting ourselves and preparing our hearts for the awesome experience to come. The sign on the door sets the stage and sends a message: something special is about to begin.

As Catholics, we are blessed to be able to participate in the celebration of the Eucharist. Receiving Christ’s actual body and blood is a privilege that surpasses any experience on earth. It’s so wonderful, in fact, that we shouldn’t keep it to ourselves. When we return to our homes and our families, our jobs and our activities, we can share the miracle we have just experienced—we can bring Christ with us into the world.

The time we spend at Mass ought to change us for the better. If others were watching, would they notice a difference in our demeanor, attitude, and actions as

we walk out of church? We may not be like Moses, who left the tabernacle of God shining so brightly that he needed to cover himself; we should, however, carry within us a burning desire to share Christ with others.

God has issued an open invitation to each of us to enter into his grace at Mass. As we accept it, we can ask ourselves, How will my encounter with Jesus make me different? How is God's transforming love truly present within me? What does God want to say to the world through me? We already know that the world desperately needs what and whom we experience when we go to Mass. It's up to us to bring Christ to the world, and when we do, the effect will be nothing short of miraculous!

Lord, fill me with your presence each time I attend Mass, so that I might bring you with me to others. —

Just for Today: I will invite Jesus to change me in some way through my participation in the Mass.

Let Go of the Chaos

*She looks well to the ways of her household,
and does not eat the bread of idleness.*

—PROVERBS 31:27

The enemy of our souls uses many strategies to distract us from accomplishing all that God has planned for us. His tricks of the trade are intended to keep us bound to ill-fated attempts and good intentions. Satan always seeks to strengthen his strongholds, even as Christ pours out his grace to help us overcome them.

One effective tactic is to keep us “drowning in our surroundings.” If we are unable to get things done because we are constantly searching for what we need to get started, or if we are mismanaging our time by “flying by the seat of our pants” through life, then we won’t reach our maximum potential for God. We can’t give our best to the kingdom if we can’t clean up the mess in our own homes or make it out the door on time. When we turn to the Lord to help restore the balance and order we need to serve him, we could find ourselves facing some uncomfortable truths buried underneath the chaos in our lives.

Hoarding and disorganization can serve as barriers to intimacy with others and can interfere with our ability to serve the Lord. If we have difficulty letting go of “things,” we may find that we are clinging to more than just material goods. Feeling as though we are losing control or becoming overly stressed or even depressed at the thought of cleaning out the closet or putting our affairs in order could mean that our belongings have become tools of bondage. The enemy can then use our possessions and even our emotions to keep us locked in a self-defeating pattern of procrastination and avoidance of the abundant life Christ wants to give us.

Restoring sanity to our life space can become an exercise in spiritual maturity. Reflect on your own patterns, and ask the Lord to guide you in incremental steps toward a more peaceful and contented way of life. Believe that you can have this life, claim it, and—together with Christ—let go of the chaos and clutter, one “thing” and one day at a time.

Lord, thank you for helping me to gain greater self-control and order in my life. Set me free from the bondage of chaos. —

Just for Today: I will choose an area of clutter in my life and begin to bring order to it.

Seeds of Service

*He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food
will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and
increase the harvest of your righteousness.*

—2 CORINTHIANS 9:10

Second Corinthians 9:10 is exciting! This verse tells us that any seed of service we sow will be multiplied by God to bring about an even greater good than we could have accomplished on our own. Whether we plant a small seed of listening, presence, or respect or give a monetary or material gift, God will multiply it. When we sow the seeds of our gifts and talents in order to serve others, God will complete the harvest by his generous hand.

As we give prayerfully with the faith that our gift will release God's abundance into the situation, then we take the focus off ourselves and place it where it belongs—on God. He is faithful to his promises, and he is the provider of all good things. He will not just honor our actions, but he will exceed our expectations when we sow seeds of service in his name.

This verse also reminds us that God is concerned with even the smallest details of our lives. In the

world's economy of scale, the seed is very tiny. And yet, something that begins from a seed—bread—is a basic necessity, the very foundation for our nourishment, both physically and spiritually. Bread, though ordinary in its composition, is the form in which God has chosen to give himself to us through the Eucharist. And he has promised to multiply his goodness through us as we receive him.

God uses us, his laborers in the field, to plant seeds and bring in the harvest of lost or wanting souls. This work of saving souls is not for the fainthearted, yet we don't have to go any farther than the fertile ground of our own families to accomplish it. Jesus lamented in Matthew 9:37, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few." We are blessed to be among the few.

Lord, thank you for your generous actions and your abundant grace. Show me ways I can serve others so that you can multiply the seeds I plant in your name. —

Just for Today: I will ponder the ways in which God's abundance has touched my life and praise him for the harvest.