PRAYER FOR THE GIRL CHILD

[As we gather to reflect on the situation of the Girl Child in our word today, we are invited into a space of silence. It is good if the group prepares a ‘sacred space’ around which to gather. Some gentle music for a few minutes will help us become present to ourselves and to the moment. Perhaps, you could listen to ‘Come into This Sacred Space’]

Come into This Sacred Space
Chris Skinner

Come into this sacred space
Light a candle, take your place.
Come receive the gift of heart’s embrace.
Whatever weighs upon your heart
We can make a brand new start
Each of us is God’s own precious work of art.

With our voices singing
Giving thanks and praise
The Holy Spirit’s moving
In many different ways
Come within the presence of the gentle breeze
Come with hearts wide open
And fall upon your knees.

There is light with each new dawn
There is hope for those who mourn
Come lift up the ones whose lives are torn.

Come receive the living bread
Take and eat just as he said
Yearn to see all hungry people fed.

With our voices singing
Giving thanks and praise
The Holy Spirit’s moving
In many different ways
Come within the presence of the gentle breeze
Come with hearts wide open
And fall upon your knees.

With the music playing
And our heart’s desire
Eager voices praying
With passion and with fire
Come within the spirit of the One who gives
Come with hands wide open
And receive the One who lives.
What am I feeling as I read this?

What prayer arises in my heart at this time?

Do you feel that this is a form of slavery?

Can you imagine what some girls go through?

What prayer arises in your heart now?
Every child comes with the promise that God has not despaired of humanity.” So wrote Rabindranath Tagore. But the truth is that so many of our children live in fear, deprivation, distrust, pain and deep sadness. Remember what Jesus said about mistreating children and scandalising them.

UN Habitat studies show that women in urban areas are twice as likely as men to suffer some form of violence, especially in developing countries. Violence is a daily reality that disproportionately affects women and girls in the poorest districts of any city. Owing to their poverty, survivors among those populations have less access to support services, or they simply do not have the necessary information.

In most of Rio de Janeiro’s favelas, there is lack of basic public security services and urban planning. This void has been filled with organised crime. Women, youth and children, particularly girls, face particular risk in this context. They are victims of abuse that ranges from harassment to sexual assault and rape. This daily reality restricts their freedom to participate in education, work, political and economic life.

“...You need to be circumcised to be married, so that if you get pregnant you don’t bring shame to your family, explains Nengai, a proud, 26-year-old school teacher. In Gelai, the rural village where she grew up, all of the girls she knew were circumcised, usually after they just 9 years of age to a man with four wives — the man who would become Nengai’s father. As it is for countless girls in the region, when Nengai finished her primary education, history looked certain to repeat itself with chilling symmetry. Her father wanted her to be circumcised “so I could get married to a rich man, who already had four wives, in exchange for some cows.” This circumcision is known as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). FGM is often justified on the grounds that it is a ‘tradition’, but it is internationally recognised as a human rights violation. Besides the emotional trauma associated with the painful procedure, FGM carries an increased risk of HIV/AIDS transmission as instruments are shared, as well as the risk of infection or prolonged bleeding, which can even result in death.

While this is a terrible custom that brings so much trauma, it is not the only way in which men control women’s bodies. Can you name other ways in other traditions?

How often it is women themselves who keep the custom alive by forcing the next generation to undergo what they have undergone! What would you like to resolve for yourself into the future?
Say a little prayer for young girls everywhere.

Thank God for your own parents and for the care you received as a child.

[After reading the above passages we take some time to reflect on what is happening to girl children around our world. Why is this happening? Such a pattern targeting the girl child is not the result of accident. It is the result of policy! And every institution in human society is affected by this policy – including religious institutions.

Our Judeo-Christian Bible is full of examples where girls and women undergo shame, torture, discrimination and death when their male counterparts are spared. Just compare the treatment of Isaac and Jephtha’s daughter, the latter not even given the dignity of being named. Then Lot’s offer of his daughters to save the male guests who visited him; The story of Dinah, Jacob’s daughter; and so on… right up to Mary Magdalene in our Gospel stories.

'The word patriarchy literally means the rule of the father or the patriarch...It refers to male domination, to the power relationships by which men dominate women, and to a system whereby women are kept subordinate in a number of ways through discrimination, disregard, insult, control, exploitation, and violence. This is done within the family, in social relations, at schools and workplaces, in laws and the media...The experience of subordination destroys self-respect and self-confidence and sets limits on women’s aspirations...Unfortunately every religion is guilty of the sin of patriarchy]
• As I read the passages, how do I feel about my vocation as a Good Shepherd Sister, or as one associated with the Good Shepherd charism?
• Have I had any experiences myself when young (or as a woman) that make me resonate with what I have read? Can I recall those experiences? How did I feel at that time? How do I feel now? As a man, how do I act insensitively and ensure continuing patriarchy?
• What can I/We do to slowly ensure that there is a change in attitude to girls and women in society?
• Is there any way in which I am upholding patriarchal systems of thought and action? (e.g. imagining God as male!) Will I do anything to change my own behaviour and attitudes?
• As you look at the life of Jesus, how did he try to change patriarchal attitudes in his time?

Take ten minutes now to share with one other person what has touched you in your reflection. Listen carefully to each other as you share. This is a sacred time.
Close this time of prayer with a few moments of silence. Again, allow some gentle music to play in the background. Thank God for each other and for your call as a Sister/volunteer/Mission partner which places you in such a privileged position to make a difference.

Prayer prepared by Sr. Agnes-Claire, Province of Singapore-Malaysia

“The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development provided us with 17 development goals, but also SDG 5, which is about “Achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls”, in all circumstances, including in crisis and humanitarian situations. This is a big win and a commitment of the international community and we must all work to see that it is realized, most of all in crisis situations.

The 2030 Agenda has pledged to leave no one behind. This means that in our development efforts, girls must be a priority. The world should ensure girls are granted all the opportunities they deserve as they mature into adulthood. I would also like to mention something that has not been touched upon, which also plays out in crisis. The whole culture of ‘boy preference’ and ‘girl aversion’ has to be changed, where an equal valuing of girls is something that we must inculcate in all contexts.

Enabling girls to avoid child marriage and unwanted pregnancy, protect them against HIV transmission, and acquiring the education and skills they need to realize their potential, is a key priority toward 2030 and also a priority in crisis. Sometimes we forget that these are essential elements to be taken forward in crisis situations.

Gender equality and empowering all women and girls is something that we seek to advance and if we fail to address girls’ differentiated needs and aspirations too, a generation will be lost and with it, our hope for sustainable development, prosperity, peace and security.

It is therefore critical to EmPOWER Girls: Before, during and after emergencies”