FEMINISM

KAI: Libby, I'm going to let you take the lead today, because I obviously can't call myself a feminist.

LIBBY: Because you want to slack off while I do all of the work.

KAI: I'm holding this for someone. I better go give it to him... her. It's a woman. I'm going to give this to her.

LIBBY: Who hired him?

CATHOLIC CENTRAL OPENING TITLES

LIBBY: Hi, I'm Libby...

KAI: ... and I'm Kai. Welcome to Catholic Central.

LIBBY: Today, we'll be diving into Catholic feminism. Can you be a Catholic and a feminist?

CHURCH LADY LIBBY:

No. Feminism is evil. Feminists hate men -- but also want to be them -- hate marriage, family, and hate the Church.

LIBBY: It sounds to me like a hysterical, inferior, weak person, who needs to shut up and get back in the kitchen.

KAI: Whoa, Libby.

LIBBY: Kai, that's what some people think of women, and that attitude is why we need feminism.

KAI: The short answer to whether a Catholic and be a feminist is yes.

LIBBY: At its most basic, feminism means supporting equal social, political and economic rights and opportunities for women and men.

KAI: Nothing heretical so far, but the implications of that belief have looked different throughout history. Allow me to mansplain. Generally, we've got three waves.

LIBBY: Feminism as a movement started in the 19th to early 20th centuries when women sought the same legal rights as men. such as the right to vote and own property.

KAI: Think Susan B. Anthony and the mom in “Mary Poppins.” As legal rights increased, the focus of feminism shifted in the 1960s to sexual liberation, gender roles, an end to discrimination based on sex, and workplace equality.

LIBBY: Feminism rode that wave until the late '80s, which brings us to the third wave.

KAI: The third-wave feminism reacted to the perceived failures of the second wave. While not really an organized movement, third-wave feminists focused on the intersection of women's rights with those of other minorities, and the breaking of gender boundaries.

LIBBY: Why does any of this matter? Because even with feminism, there is a lot of disagreement about the way things should be and how to achieve that.

KAI: For example, you'll find feminists who believe in marriage...

LIBBY: ... and those who don't...

KAI: ... those who hate lipstick ...

LIBBY: ... and those who love it.

KAI: There are also a lot of movements within feminism.

LIBBY: That means that, A, you can't talk about feminists like they're all the same; and, B, there's no inherent contradiction when we talk about Catholic feminism.

KAI: At least nowadays. Historically, some people ... OK, some men in the Church haven't been super pro-woman.

LIBBY: Many Church Fathers and saints blamed Eve's weakness for the introduction of sin into the world and described all women as inferior and morally weak.

 St. Clement of Alexandria theorized that, when God created Eve from Adam's rib, He purged man of all softness and weakness. St. Augustine said that, "Women were of small intelligence," and couldn't see why women were created, except to procreate. St. Thomas Aquinas wrote that, "Women are morally defective and misbegotten."

 Wow. Yikes.

KAI: Official Church teaching recognizes that misogyny -- prejudice against women -- has been practiced by people in the Church over the years, and it condemns that.

LIBBY: True. John Paul II apologized for people in the Church's past treatment of women. He emphasized that sexism is a sin, and that Catholics have a mandate from the faith to root it out of our hearts and out of society.

KAI: The Church, guided by the Holy Spirit, is always called to renewal. In an effort to uphold the equality of men and women, John Paul II also called for a new feminism, “to reject the temptation of imitating models of male domination in order to acknowledge and affirm the true genius of women in every aspect of life and society, and overcome all discrimination, violence and exploitation.”

LIBBY: The oppression of women is one of the many effects of Original Sin, but that's not how things were supposed to be when God created us. In fact, it's together that men and women fully represent who God is.

KAI: What are some of the qualities that women bring to the table?

GENIUS LIBBY:

The feminine genius.

KAI: In his 1988 Apostolic Letter on the Dignity and Vocation of Women, John Paul II praised what he called the feminine genius. It speaks to the unique way that women interact with the world and uphold the human person.

LIBBY: Broadly, it means intuitive receptivity, emotional capacity, generosity and maternity.

KAI: These qualities aren't meant to be an invisible measuring stick for women to feel like they can never live up to.

LIBBY: Each woman expresses them differently, so it doesn't mean that you're better at doing womanhood if you get married at 19 and homeschool your family of nine, or if you get a PhD or become a CEO. In fact, in John Paul II's 1995 Letter to Women, he thanked us for a varied, active presence at home and in the workplace.

KAI: To see varied womanhood in action, look no further than the tons of female saints who have busted cultural norms throughout history.

LIBBY: Through her receptivity to God, St. Joan of Arc fought as a soldier. St. Catherine of Siena exercised her emotional capacity to heal and to bring an end to a major schism in the Church.

KAI: St. Katharine Drexel expressed her generosity by giving up a comfortable life and fortune to feed and educate the poor. Then, of course, there's Mary.

PROTESTER: LIBBY:

Don't tell me to imitate Mary as a way of telling me to sit down and shut up.

KAI: OK. Mary is often portrayed as quiet and submissive, but that ignores how powerful and active she was in the life of Jesus, and doesn't do justice to her choice to do God's will.

LIBBY: Catholics try to imitate Mary not because she didn't seem to talk a lot, but because she was fully the woman God created her to be and did everything she did out of love for God.

KAI: Catholics want all women to have the freedom to pursue that in their unique vocations. And, part of fighting for that freedom is fighting against injustice and oppression especially those that particularly impact women, like poverty, violence, education, discrimination, sexual harassment and assault.

LIBBY: This doesn't mean that Catholic feminists hate men, but that does mean that all of us, even men, have to recognize that inequality and abuse exist. Everyone benefits when women are empowered and respected.

PROTESTER LIBBY:

You can't tell me the Church really respects women when it won't make women priests.

LIBBY: OK, this is a touchy subject. Let's start by saying that ordination is not a right for anyone.

KAI: The Catholic Church teaches that priests get their authority to be priests from Christ Himself. who, for reasons maybe only He knew, selected only men to be priests.

LIBBY: Even though he didn't hold back when it came to reaching out to women in other ways, not even His mother, who Catholics believe is Queen of Heaven, got to be a priest. So, the Church's position is that there's no authority to ordain women, but that doesn't mean that women are lesser, that they'd be bad priests, or that they are not essential to the Church.

KAI: Women actually hold a lot of influential positions in the Church.

LIBBY: In other words, Catholic women do have a lot of power, and, speaking of power, I'll use mine to end this episode. I'm Libby.

KAI: I'm Kai. Thanks for watching.

LIBBY: Be sure to subscribe to our channel and check out our website at CatholicCentral.com for more resources on being both Catholic and a feminist.

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