

'Receive the gifts you are'

Forum keynoter speaks to young Catholic women

BY MAISY SULLIVAN | Catholic News Service

Sister Bethany Madonna of the Sisters of Life opened the first day of the GIVEN Institute's annual Catholic Young Women's Leadership Forum with a keynote titled "Casting the Vision," a reflection of her work in GIVEN and a strong reference to the concept of the entire forum.

The first day was centered on introductions and providing a meaningful start to a short journey toward the understanding of the importance of femininity in the Catholic faith, while simultaneously realizing it is a gift from God.

Sister Madonna spoke about the three themes encompassing the June 9-13 gathering, held at The Catholic University of America in Washington.

"Receive the gifts you are"



(CNS photo/Tyler Orsburn) Sister Bethany Madonna, vocations director of the Sisters of Life, speaks April 23, 2019, during the National Catholic Prayer Breakfast in Washington. Sister Madonna was the opening keynote speaker at the GIVEN Institute's annual Catholic Young Women's Leadership Forum June 9-13, held at The Catholic University of America in Washington.

was the first theme. She explained that many women, including some who may have been at the forum, don't realize God invites them into his arms. To receive one's gifts from God, everyone must be accepting of his presence in

our lives.

The second theme was to "realize the gifts you've been given."

"God actualizes our gifts, we have to acknowledge them, and the only way to do so is through God," Sister Madonna said.

To convey this theme, Sister Madonna quoted St. Francis of Assisi: In a time of confusion about his own faith, he asked: "Who are you, Lord, and who am I?"

She told the women at the GIVEN forum to similarly ask God what he has in his hands for all individuals. He invites and loves each person first by actualizing their unique gifts, but will wait for love and acknowledgment in return, she said.

The final theme was to "respond with the gift only you can give." Each person's gifts are distinctive and personalized, and God's plan includes unique vocations for all. Some are meant to do more than others, but to fulfill the vocation fortitude is required, Sister Madonna said, using the example of white and red martyrs. White martyrs stand for God without shedding blood, while red martyrs shed blood.

Most Catholics are called to "white martyrdom," which does not demean its importance, she explained. Facing hardship to reach God is an essential part of all faith journeys.

Each woman is called to express her unique gifts for the sake of the Lord.

The annual GIVEN Forum is meant to build a path toward personal initiative and faith for women at all different levels of their religious journeys.

YOUNG ADULT CATHOLICS

With a combination of talks, Masses, adoration, mentoring groups, leadership training, small group discussions, the five-day event is "designed to help young adult Catholic women with a heart for mission and an aptitude for leadership identify their particular gifts and find practical pathways to put them in the service of the Gospel," as stated on the GIVEN website.

Susie Lopez, a first-time participant from Houston, talked about how Sister Madonna relayed her message in her speech.

"Sister Bethany spoke about the particularity of each woman and her gifts," Lopez told Catholic News Service. "It is something that so often, we as women, try to compare (each other). ... Her calling that out, particularly for me, is a strong thing that I think we all could lean into."

Info: About the GIVEN Institute and the 2021 GIVEN Forum, <https://giveninstitute.com/given-forum-2021>.

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