



The Ascension of the Lord B

May 13, 2018

- Reflections on Mother's Day
- Happy Feast Day to our Church family!

The following reflection is by Deacon Keith Fournier.

It is Mother's Day. In fact, if you still get a morning paper and picked it up today, you would have noted it is the 100th Anniversary of Mother's Day. The Holiday, as we currently know it in the United States, is attributed to a woman named Anna Jarvis.

However, some special day to honor mothers and mothering is a part of every major tradition, culture and Nation. That is because we know instinctively the wonder, miracle and gift of mothers and mothering. They carry us in their wombs, the first home of the whole human race. They offer us to the family, and the whole world.

They gave us life and birthed us into the network of relationships which gives that life meaning, the family. They taught and nurtured us on the way, by offering wisdom, example and practical experience. They picked us up when we fell and unconditionally loved us back when we strayed.

There is no one like a mother, no substitute for her place, no equal to her love and placement in our own formation. Mothering is an ongoing relationship of love and care.

That is why, the more ancient roots of the celebration called it mothering Sunday. In fact, in much of Europe, mothering Sunday is still celebrated on the Fourth Sunday of Lent. People not only honor their mothers but return to visit their mother Church that day. It is called mothering Sunday - indicating the truth that mothering is active and continuing.

In Ethiopia and some other Eastern orthodox churches, the celebration of such a mother's day is tied to the celebration of St Mary's Birthday, which is kept on May 1, and honors the Mother of the Lord and all Mothers who participate in the mystery and beauty of mothering.

Throughout the Nation today, florists are on high alert. Sherries Berries and other talented Marketing mavens have the greatest day of their business year. Restaurants are booked, some years in advance. Our hearts and minds all turn to the woman who gave us life and showed us the beauty of steadfast love throughout our entire lives.

Feeling the loss of one's mother

This is the second Mother's Day I have faced without a mother on earth. On Tuesday, March 4, 2013, my beloved mother Ellen died in her sleep. She had struggled for months as her aging body ran out of steam. She never fully recovered from the loss of the love of her life, her husband and my father, Duval, who died in 2001. She died the day after his birthday.

I remember her last question to me the day before when we spoke over the phone, "Keith, when can I go home?" She barely had the strength to speak. Her body was unable to support her on legs which simply seemed unwilling to cooperate any longer. It was so hard to hear her ask me when she could go home.

I knew she meant that the little cinderblock house where she and my dad lived. The home where they raised Derek, my youngest brother who was born the year I left home. I also knew that was not the home to which she would go to when Love finally called her.

On the day before she died, I told her on the phone that Laurine —my wife whom she loved as her own daughter—and I would be coming to visit with her again on Easter weekend. She took comfort in the thought.

Sadly, I knew her short term memory was not working well. I hoped she would remember. I was able to pray with her over the phone. I will forever remember that precious experience. I looked forward to the opportunity to hug her again, kiss her, and pray with her in person as I had done at Christmas.

Over the Christmas before she died, knowing she was nearing that final chapter of life, my whole extended family drove, from all over the country, to be

with Ma, or Nana as the children and grandchildren called her.

I did not know how physically depleted she had become in her last illness before that last visit. After all, she always had that reassuring and happy voice, accompanied by that wonderful breathy laugh, whenever we spoke on the phone.

When we commended her to the Lord and placed her next to my father in final repose, the grief I felt was only slightly relieved by the sure and certain faith I have in the triumph of Love and the final Resurrection.

Yet, when I received the first of several well intended E-mails on the days after her death—from friends encouraging me that she was in the presence of the Lord—which I believe with my whole heart—I discovered that the emotions surrounding her loss were still just below the surface, only too eager to erupt again.

Grief and love are companions. I often tell others in my work as a Deacon of the Catholic Church, that the depth of the grief is a sign of the depth of the love; another face of love. Today, I am speaking those words to myself. However, they do not take away the pain.

They only help to soften the ground within which they must be planted in order to bear the fruit which all love bears. Jesus said it so simply, "unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (John 12:24). It will take much more time and care from the Lord to give this loss the growth. I am profoundly sad today and I know the sting of death.

A priest friend captured the mystery and beauty of motherhood so well for me in the days after Ma's death when he wrote: "Dear Deacon, she will be remembered today and I will offer a Holy Mass for her soon. I know the sting; it is unique with mother, our life bearer."

Mothers are life-bearers. I gave my dear wife of 38 years, Laurine, a Mother's Day card this morning. It was hard to even find the time to get one at the store! In the pace of watching our grandson this weekend—and then cleaning out the bedroom closet so our youngest son can return home after having suffered what he thinks is a setback on the road of life—I say thinks because age has taught me that such "setbacks" are usually corrections on the map of mercy—we had a very, very busy weekend.

Jesus' Mother

Each year on Mother's Day, as we express the gratitude we feel for our earthly mother, I am increasingly drawn to reflect on that last gift the Lord gave to us before his total gift of Himself on the Cross, the gift of His mother to be our own. May is the month dedicated to Mary, the Mother of the Lord. This is no coincidence.

Jesus called her Mother. As one of his last and greatest gifts to his beloved disciple and to the entire Church, he entrusted her with these tender words recorded in the Gospel of John: *When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple there whom he loved, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son." Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his home* (John 19:26, 27).

Mary was there at the Incarnation, Birth, Crucifixion, and Resurrection of God Incarnate. She was there throughout the often called hidden years in Nazareth. In the life of the Redeemer, every word and every act was redemptive, revealing the very life of God, the mystery of heaven touching earth, and the deeper purpose of our own lives. She was there in those moments whose impact is timeless. They are still as filled with the invitation of grace today as they were when they first occurred. She was—she is—Mother.

She was there on the great day of Pentecost, the birthday of the Church, which we will soon celebrate. She was there as the first evangelizer and disciple, as she gave the first Christian testimony to her cousin, Elizabeth, and won the first convert *in utero* in the person of John the Baptist. This event, traditionally called The Visitation, is recorded in the Gospel of St. Luke (Luke 1: 39-45). We meditate upon it in the prayer called the Rosary.

That encounter immediately followed the visit of the Angel Gabriel to Mary (Luke 1:6-38) and is one of the fruits of her humble obedient response. That response was not a one-time reaction. It was the fruit of a life of surrendered love and stretched forward to characterize her whole life on this earth and her participation in the eternal communion of Saints.

Her Fiat (Latin, *let it be done*), given in response to the visitation from the messenger of heaven, the angel, provides a way to live for each one of us. Mary said *Yes* to the invitation to love and she humbled herself. She

confronted her own fears and she entered into a way of living. All of this in continued response to an original invitation of love, a gift, initiated by a loving God.

On this Mother's Day I will mourn the loss of my earthly mother Ellen and draw strength and hope in reflecting on Mary, the Mother of the Lord, my heavenly mother. I believe that the motherly love which my mother revealed so beautifully to me has now found its fulfillment. I know she is in the communion of love with the Mother of Jesus. I know she still prays for me.

I will offer a crown of roses to Mother Mary today, by praying the prayer my mother taught me as soon as I could speak, the prayer we call the Rosary. Somehow, I know it will help to ease the sorrow and point me in the right direction, to continue on the way to the triumph of love.

Mothering is active and ongoing.

For those whose mothers and grandmothers are still alive—cherish them today. Hug and kiss them. Honor them. Thank them. For those whose mothers have gone home to the Lord, remember them.

For all who bear the name Christian, the name of our eternal family, let us also honor the Mother of the Lord today. Her maternal care for Jesus still embraces all those who are joined to Him, as members of His Body, by that great new birth of Baptism.

Finally, let us ask the Lord to open our eyes, and our hearts, to come to more fully understand the great mystery and gift of the Church as our Mother. Let us live our lives as Christians, by living in the heart of Mother Church, for the sake of the world into which we are sent to bear the Good News.

Happy Feast Day, Church Family!

Today all over the world, as we in America celebrate Mother's Day, our universal Church family celebrates the Ascension of the Lord into Heaven. And we, as a local church family, celebrate our parish's Feast Day. We are gratefully Ascension Church family!

Our parish was founded in November 1959, almost 60 years ago. This day, I am grateful:

- For the hundreds of young families who gave birth to our Church family by sacrificing to build our first Church (now our Parish Hall) and our first School (now our Ministry Building). As we remember our Founding Families (some of whom are with us today), we remember in a special way our Founding Pastor, Monsignor Powers, and our beloved Sisters of Mercy who were here from day one, Sister Immaculata being one of those sisters. Sister Joseph served for some years at Holy Name before becoming our school principal for 30 years.
- We remember and give thanks for the thousands of mothers and fathers and children who stood on the shoulders of our Founding Families and have continued to sacrifice to build the eight facilities and 80+ ministries of our Ascension Church family.
- Finally, we thank God for all the wonderful parishioners who *currently* volunteer Time, Treasure and Talent to build up the Body of Christ in our little part of the Lord's Vineyard.

Blessed Mother's Day,

Le Paron

