



## Fourth Sunday of Easter C May 12, 2019

### Mother's Day Reflections

- ♥ **Origin of Mother's Day**
- ♥ **Fr. Ron Rolheiser shares thoughts on his mother and motherhood**
- ♥ **A mother gives her children back to God**
- ♥ **The importance of reading to children**

Mothers, we salute you and thank you on this, your special day! May you feel blessed for the way you co-created new life with our Divine Creator. We thank you for carrying us in your body for nine months, sometimes suffering much in the process. We thank you for all the years you cared for us especially those young tender years when we needed you the most.

In one of the Easter Season readings, Paul reminds us: *"You must undergo many hardships."* Mothers, in the course of your life, you have undergone many hardships in your role as mother. If at the end of the day you may not feel appreciated, know that God who sees all things appreciate the way you model his self-giving love to the world.

If at times you feel you have failed in your role as mother, you must forgive yourself because that is what God and Mary, our Mother, would want you to do. Carrying guilt around is soul-destroying. Say sorry to God and to your children and begin anew. If you have a poor relationship with your children or with your own mother, follow the wise advice of the serenity prayer:

*Change what can be changed;  
Accept what can't be changed;  
Pray for the wisdom to know the difference.*

Always remember that we are all in process. God is not finished with us yet. So here below we will often mess up and fail others and ourselves. Say a genuine "sorry" and go on praying for the grace to do better.

On this day, let us also remember all those women, especially aunts who played a motherly role in our lives. After the death of my mother at age 37, I was blessed to have several unmarried and married aunts who were very important in my formative years. If you had aunts

or other ladies who were an important presence in your early years, thank God for them today.

### Origin of Mother's Day

Today we celebrate Mother's Day, on which we honor our mothers—living and deceased—for their care, concern and unconditional love for us throughout the years of our lives. It is one of those special days we cherish and look forward to each year.

Few people really know, however, that Mother's Day was originally conceived by a mother and social activist, Julia Ward Howe, during the Civil War with a call for Peace, and to unite women against war. She wrote the Mother's Day Proclamation in 1870 after the War, as a call for peace and disarmament. Here is an excerpt from the Proclamation:

*From the voice of a devastated Earth, a voice goes up with our own. It says: "Disarm! Disarm! The sword of murder is not the balance of justice." Blood does not wipe our dishonor. As men have often forsaken the plough and the anvil at the summons of war, let women now leave all that may be left of home for a great and earnest day of counsel. Let them meet first, as women, to bewail and commemorate the dead. Let them solemnly take counsel with each other as to the means whereby the great human family can live in peace...*

Howe failed in her attempt to get formal recognition of a Mother's Day for Peace.

Her idea was influenced by Anna Jarvis, a young homemaker from West Virginia who, starting in 1858, had attempted to improve sanitation through what she called Mothers' Work Days. She organized women throughout the Civil War to work for better sanitary conditions for both sides, and in 1868 she began work to reconcile Union and Confederate neighbors.

Jarvis' daughter, also named Anna Jarvis, much later (when her mother died), started her own crusade to found a memorial day for women.

The first such Mother's Day was celebrated in Grafton, West Virginia, on May 10, 1908, in the church where the elder Anna Jarvis had taught Sunday School. Grafton is the home to the International Mother's Day Shrine. From there, the custom caught on, spreading eventually to 45 states. The holiday was declared officially by some states beginning in 1912. In 1914 President Woodrow Wilson declared the first national Mother's Day.

Nine years after the first official Mother's Day holiday, commercialization of the U.S. holiday became so rampant that Anna Jarvis herself became a major opponent of what the holiday had become. She was arrested for disturbing the peace at a war mother's convention where white carnations, the flower that was popularly associated with the holiday, were being sold for profit. Mother's Day continues to this day to be one of the most commercially successful days of the year, while its origins in mothers' opposition to war, has been lost.

So, in your remembrances of this Mother's Day, remember these brave women who, as mothers, called upon the whole nation not to forget the ravages of war. Make a promise to become a proponent of peace in the name of all our mothers who never lose sight of the need for protecting their own and all children everywhere.

### **Fr. Ron Rolheiser shares thoughts on his mother and on motherhood**

*For many years, I've had a bias against Mothers' Day. I'm not against the concept, it's a private grudge. My own mother died 40 years ago and my ignoring of Mothers' Day has been payback to the universe for that perceived injustice: Let the world celebrate, but count me out!*

*But time heals and occasionally makes us wiser. Now, on Mothers' Day, I'm always conscious of my own mother and find good reasons to celebrate. You don't have to be alive to nurture someone, and such is the case with my mother. Jesus told us that we receive someone's spirit more purely after they have left us and I know that's true. Forty years after her death, I am more conscious of who my mother was and what she gave me than I was during all the years of my childhood when she was alive and her motherhood embraced me tangibly.*

*What my siblings and I are now conscious of, more clearly than when she was alive, is that we drew a long-straw. We had a good mother. It's as simple as that. In everything that was essential, she gave us what's important: security, protection, a sense of being wanted, a sense of being precious, adequate food, adequate clothing, the underlying sense that life is good,*

*and, most of all, the sense that we are in the hands always of a God who is trustworthy.*

*None of this, of course, came perfectly. My mother wasn't God. She had real limits and so did the energy and the resources she drew upon to nurture us. We were a large family and were chronically strapped economically. We had enough, but just, just enough. There were never any extras. That was also true for the attention and the affection she could give out to us individually. She didn't have the time, energy, or luxury to dote on any of us individually, even as none of us ever doubted that we were getting as much from her as if each of us had been an only child. But still, all of us felt her limits and live with the effects of that today.*

*But her chronic over-extension was also her special gift: Like Jesus she multiplied the loaves and the fishes. Somehow she always found enough of everything, food, clothing, educational supplies, an extra cake or ribbon or whatever for a special occasion. Somehow we always had what we needed, just as somehow she made our family table stretch enough to feed anyone – neighbor, teacher, priest, salesman, or uncle-down-on-his luck – who happened to be around near mealtime. She believed something most of us don't, namely, that when you are with the Bread of Life you always have the resources you need, no matter how meager they appear. She trusted that there would always be enough, and there always was.*

*And she complemented my father perfectly. You couldn't have ordered a better marriage from either Hollywood or a Catholic dating service. They found each other, soulmates, at a parish picnic and their affection and respect for each other was what, perhaps more than anything else, gave us, their children, an inchoate sense of safety, stability, and faith. My father was the moral compass, she was the heart; but they could reverse those roles and she could offer the moral challenge while he provided the sensitivity. Either way, they did it together and by the time they died, leaving behind a family that felt too young to be on its own, they had given us what they needed to, all the basic tools to build our own lives and to live with some buoyancy and joy.*

*She died of pancreatitis and a broken heart, just three months after she had nursed my dad through a year-long, losing battle with cancer. As my dad lay dying, one of my brothers and I took her to a shop to buy a dress for the funeral. She splurged and bought the most expensive dress she'd ever purchased. When she tried on the dress the sales clerk told her: "You look terrific in that dress! I hope you enjoy wearing it!" She wore it just twice, once to her husband's funeral and once to her own. The irony of the salesclerk's comment hasn't been lost.*

*For whatever reason, she disliked her name, Mathilda. Her woman friends shortened it to Tilly, which she disliked even more. I'm not sure what my dad called her in the privacy of their intimacy, but I suspect it wasn't either of those names.*

*Anthropologists tell us that our mothers are our symbiotic link to life. They have to let us know that the universe wants us, that we're loveable simply for who we are, that love doesn't have to be earned. My mother was too busy sometimes to nurture each of her children individually with that sense that we were unique, beautiful, and precious; but she mothered us in such a way that life itself and the God who grounds life, give us that precious gift.*

### **A mother gives her children back to God**

The mother who wrote the following piece worried herself sick fretting about her children. Then a wonderful thing happened. This is a little piece of the story.

*The life of a mother is one great adventure. Not a day goes by without surprises. One such adventure that changed my own life and that of our family considerably I want to share with you. I am a mother of five children who are now twenty-one, twenty, nineteen, fifteen, and nine years old. I am a very happy mother now, but that was not always so. There was a time—not so long ago—that I was very unhappy. I realized that I was no longer able to help my children in their problems. We did not understand each other anymore. The children withdrew from my husband and me. The situation reached the point that psychological stress affected my health. I experienced heart failure; during the night I could hardly sleep. The atmosphere in our family was extremely tense.*

*I prayed much. One day I prayed to the Lord, "Lord, you alone can help. Tell me what I have to do!" And I received the answer, "Give me back your children. I have entrusted them to you for a while so that you can accompany them. But now, give them back into my hand. Don't you think that I can guide them better than you?" And that is what I have done—with much pain and deep joy. Each child individually I gave back to the Lord, with his or her weaknesses and faults, charm and love, hopes and dreams.*

*How much has changed since then! I am no longer afraid, no matter what happens to my children. If they go along paths which I do not understand, I still am sure: they are held in God's hands. All shall be well.*

*Something else has changed as well: our family life! Parents and children have found each other anew. Now, during the weekends, our children come home from college not just to get their laundry done, but they look forward with joy to our being together, to our sharing with each other, our experiences and conversations. It seems to me that the Lord has given me back my children in a new way. Thanks be to God!*

### **On the Importance of Reading to Children**

Recently, I watched the author of *Enchanted Hour* speak on EWTN on the importance of Reading to Children.

The subtitle of *Enchanted Hour* is: *The Miraculous Powers of Reading Aloud in the Age of Distraction*. The inside cover of the book says:

*Imagine an elixir so strong that a daily dose would make your family smarter, happier, healthier, more successful, and more closely attached. Now imagine that you could have it without spending a dime.*

*It all starts with a book, a voice, and a place to sit . . .*

From a beloved *Wall Street Journal* columnist comes a book that will transform your understanding of reading aloud. Grounded in the latest brain science and behavioral research, and drawing widely from life and literature, *The Enchanted Hour* reveals the stunning advantages that await people of every age and background when they partake of this ancient practice.

Meghan Cox Gurdon shows how reading out loud is a fast-working antidote to the fractured attention spans, atomized families, and unfulfilling distractions of the tech era. From a thrilling look at what happens in a toddler's brain when a grown-up reads a story, to the way shared books are keeping far-flung military families connected; from the imaginative transport of classic novels, to the rejuvenating late-life consolations of poetry and prose: the evidence is clear and the benefits are irrefutable.

Taking us into hospitals, homes, bookstores, and schools, Gurdon blends cutting-edge science with funny, touching stories of real families – including her own – in a compelling testament to the power of what Charles Dickens called the “spoken syllable.”

Lively and authoritative, with practical tips and reading recommendations, *The Enchanted Hour* will inspire readers to share this invaluable, life-altering tradition with the people they love most – and perhaps rediscover an enchanted slice of their own childhoods in the process.

Author, Meghan Cox Gurdon is a book critic, essayist and former correspondent with the *Wall Street Journal*.

I asked a former teacher to look at the book. Liz read three chapters and said: “marvelous”.

Help get the word around about the importance of reading to children. Especially tell parents (and grandparents) with young children.

Have a very blessed Mother's Day

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