

GOD BLESS OUR MOTHERS—LIVING AND DECEASED

“There is no perfect family. We have no perfect parents, we are not perfect, we do not get married to a perfect person, and neither do we have perfect children. We have complaints about each other. We are disappointed by one another. Therefore there is no healthy marriage or healthy family without the exercise of forgiveness.

“Forgiveness is vital to our emotional health and spiritual survival. Without forgiveness the family becomes a theatre of conflict and a bastion of grievances. Without forgiveness the family becomes sick. Forgiveness is what sterilizes the soul, cleanses the mind and liberates the heart. Anyone who does not forgive sickens physically, emotionally and spiritually. That is why the family must be a place of life and not death; an enclave of cure not of disease; a stage of forgiveness and not of guilt. Forgiveness brings joy where sorrow produced pain; forgiveness brings healing where pain caused disease.”

Those words were spoken recently by Pope Francis. As I listened to those words I got the sense of what it was like in his family growing up in Argentina. A lot of love, some dysfunction and then occasional moments of forgiveness. I’m guessing his mom was a part of that, not that his dad didn’t care but moms are often around more and often engaged more in the lives of their children. Sometimes I wonder about the prayer of a mother’s heart. What does she wish for her children, those she has loved into life? Today, as I listened to the gospel reading from the Gospel of John I heard a prayer and it spoke to me of what may well reside in the heart of every mother. Except the words were prayed by Jesus.

We hear the gospel each week or read it with the priest or deacon but sometimes we don’t grasp the fuller dimension of what we hear. Today we are privileged to be able to eavesdrop on another person’s very private prayer. That person happens to be Jesus. And it is not just any prayer. It is the prayer he prays in the presence of his disciples knowing that he will be dead in less than 24 hours. It is a very powerful prayer. In addition, it is about you and me. What does his prayer say?

He prays for those who will come to believe in him. That would be you and me. Us. He prays that we will be one. United. Not estranged. Living in harmony. That we be an integral part of his own relationship with God the Father. That we will be brought to perfection. That we will be loved by him. That we may be with him. Present with and present to. That He may be in us. That is what Jesus prayed for the night before he died. But it sounds to me like any mother’s prayer for her children. Perhaps in this most intimate moment from the life of Our Lord and Master as we listen to the prayer of his heart we actually hear the prayer of another heart, a woman’s heart, a mother’s heart. His own mother’s heart. The one who fashioned and formed his own relationship with his Heavenly Father.

In his words of prayer, we hear her words of prayer. That is how a mother often prays. It’s just that we seldom are privileged to hear such a prayer. Last summer you will remember the tragic and horrendous shootings of 9 church members at a Bible Study in a church in Charleston, South Carolina, A young man was welcomed to the group that night, sat with them for an hour or so as they discussed the Scripture reading and then drew his gun and murdered nine people. He had planned the attack for six months. He wanted to start a race war in the United States. He had

intended to take his own life but did not. At his arraignment were the family members of those he had killed. One after another different members stood up and faced him. One named Nadine Collier spoke of her mother whom he had murdered. She said this. “You took something very precious from me. I will never talk to my mother again. I will never, ever hold her again. But I forgive you. Hate will not win here. And may God have mercy on your soul.” Others said similar things. I forgive you. Hate will not win here.

“Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.” Those were Jesus’ words. But how many times did our moms say to us: “Tell your sister you are sorry. Apologize to your brother for hurting him. Apologize to your father for the tone of disrespect in your voice.” Mothers are so often forgiveness centers in our families. They are not perfect people as Pope Francis reminds us but they remain our mothers throughout this life and into eternity. They are the glue in the family, the unifying force. Their role in the family is similar to the role of the Holy Spirit in God himself, the unifying force of love. As humans they are both profound and flawed. God knows that and works with that.

Listen to this reflection written over 60 years again by a woman in England after the Second World War:

“It is through his risen life in us that Christ sends his love to the ends of the earth. That is why instead of startling the world into trembling adoration by manifesting his glory, he sent the woman, Mary Magdalen, who had been a sinner to carry the ineffable secret, and sent the two disciples who had been bewildered by their blind inability to reconcile Scripture and Calvary, and sent the friend who had denied him, Peter, to give his love to the world, and to give it as simply as a whispered secret or a loaf of bread. So it is that we, sinners, wranglers, weaklings, provided only that we love God, are sent to give the life of the risen and ascended Christ to the whole world, through the daily bread of our human lives.”

And what is true of us is true in spade for those women whom we each call—Mom. Let us lift them up in prayer this day in forgiveness and in love.