

[Readings: Acts 13:14, 43-52; Psalm 100; Rev. 7:9, 14b-17; John 10:27-30]

Happy Mother's Day! Believe it or not, Heaven is brimming with mothers -- mothers who lived and loved and have some wisdom for all of us. In honor of Mother's Day, here is a look at a few life lessons from those holy women whose glorious titles include "mom" as well as "saint." Providential that we should be doing this in light of the Roe vs. Wade "leak" which further divides this nation.

The struggles that come with the vocation of motherhood -- no matter who the mother is -- are many and real. To this even, and especially, our Blessed Mother can attest. One thinks of the sword of sorrow piercing her heart at Jesus' presentation; of the panic and fear felt while she and Joseph frantically searched for him at age 12; and, of course, of witnessing his excruciating Crucifixion. For all of its joys, motherhood brings with it its share of crosses. Such is the blessing and curse of unconditional love.

In a general audience in January 2015, Pope Francis acknowledged the many challenges that come with saying "yes" to the vocation of motherhood, and he encouraged a deeper understanding and empathy of their daily realities.

"Perhaps mothers, ready to sacrifice so much for their children and often for others as well, ought to be listened to more," he said. "We should understand more about their daily struggle to be efficient at work and attentive and affectionate in the family."

Motherhood in the 21st century brings with it its own special set of challenges. In addition to the not-so-simple task of raising kids to understand and appreciate the Faith, mothers now are faced with a culture that is antithetical to many Christian values, that is full of technology that both distracts and tempts, and that operates at a breakneck pace. At one time, even though public schools could not teach religion, they at least taught the difference between right and wrong.

"I think the world has become a scary, scary place for children, and I think the world has become a scary, scary place to raise children," Marcia Segelstein, author of "Don't Let the Culture Raise Your Kids," says.

Despite these challenges, though, mothers also serve as a vital part of the antidote -- and this is where they can find encouragement and hope.

“Without mothers,” Pope Francis wrote, “not only would there be no new faithful, but the Faith would lose a good part of its simple and profound warmth.”

As we celebrate Mother's Day this year, take heart, all you moms. There will be times of struggle. There will be times of sacrifice and pain. But you play an indispensable role in the life of your children.

“A society without mothers would be a dehumanized society, for mothers are always, even in the worst moments, witnesses of tenderness, dedication and moral strength,” Pope Francis said.

And when in doubt? Remember, others have been there.

One way mothers can combat their own isolation and keep tabs on their children is to form their own relationships with other parents, especially the parents of their children's friends. That way, they can assure their 9-year-olds that no, they are not the only child in their class without a smartphone, because they know that at least three other kids don't have one.

I like what the mother of one friend said to the mother of another friend: “I will believe half of what my kid says goes on in YOUR house, if you believe only half of what your kid says goes on in MY house!

It makes parents feel less alone to know that other parents are going through the same thing. Finding that community is important for both parents and for their children, who benefit from the positive example.

Parents also have to make sure they spend time with their children even when they think their children don't want to. Teenagers have told me often in the past that they want their parents to be with them and to talk to them. Even if it doesn't look “cool” at first glance.

Parents looking for practical ideas can turn to online sources such as CatholicMom.com, which was founded in 2000 by Lisa Hendey. She started the site, which was acquired by Holy Cross Family Ministries in 2017.

That means telling other mothers that they're doing great when they need to hear that, and calling them to step up when they need that. Sometimes what

we need to hear is, "You can do this." We need to affirm each other and build each other up." Thanks to you moms out there for hearing the call to motherhood, listening to it in your heart, and responding to it with a lifetime of loving service.

"The word of God is never silent -- though it is not always heard," St. Augustine once preached, touching upon what is really at the heart of the spiritual life. And that is, to listen to God.

It's been God's plea since the beginning, ever since he called out to the first man and woman fallen and hiding in Eden (cf. Gn 3:9). It's also the Lord's invitation. Which is how we are to hear these beautiful words of the Lord. "My sheep hear my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish. No one can take them out of my hand" (Jn 10:27-28).

I have the childhood memory what when large families or groups of people gather for a social event, the grown-ups sit in one area, and the kids play in another area. And when one of the kids calls out in distress, "Mom!" "Dad!" the proper parent stands up immediately and goes to the child in distress. The parent recognizes the child's voice before any of the other parent. Or how about the opposite? A parent screams out the name of their child, and that child better be running -- especially if the middle name is used!

Belonging to the true Shepherd is not merely a matter of law or custom but, rather, a matter of relationship and faith, like being the sheep of a shepherd.

To belong to Jesus the Shepherd is to hear his voice -- unashamedly obedient, unashamedly a sheep of the Lord's pasture. Such is how God welcomes believers: He calls them, and His sheep hear His voice.

In our Second Reading, we see that every true vocation has Heaven as its ultimate goal, and is ordered toward bringing other people to Heaven.

At the first meeting for marriage prep, I used to ask the couple why they want to marry each other. The usual answer was given 95 % of the time: "Because we LOVE each other!" Until one groom pointed to his fiancé and said, "Because SHE is going to get me into Heaven!"

Parents: your ultimate Catholic job description is to get your children – and each other -- into Heaven. And sometimes even for children to get their parents into Heaven.

When I was in my first years of priesthood formation, I challenged my parents to return to the practice of their Catholic Faith. Dad was struggling with alcoholism, and mom with the mental illness that comes with that. I said to them, “What would it look like to have a son who is a priest, and you are not even practicing the Catholic Faith? Spoiler Alert: CATHOLIC. GUILT. WORKS. I

In time, my dad embraced sobriety and eventually became a permanent deacon in the Church. Mom eventually became a parish secretary for twelve years in our home parish. With God's grace, they turned their lives around. I believe there is a special place in Heaven for mothers of priests, for wives of permanent deacons, and for parish secretaries. Mom was all three, and I believe that she inherited a triple crown in Heaven!

Ask yourselves: when you stand before the throne of God on Judgement Day, whom will YOU have helped get into Heaven?” Who is in Heaven now because of YOUR example and YOUR witness? Because of YOUR words and YOUR prayers? Can you imagine standing before Jesus and Him saying to you, “Well, look who's here because of YOU!” ALLELUIA and AMEN!