

[Readings: Acts 10:25-26, 34-35, 44-48; Ps. 98; 1 John 4:7-10; John 15:9-17]

Happy Mothers Day! It is an appropriate day to consider the ultimate possibilities of love. Through the centuries, women take the risk of love to bring children into the world. Often in terrible circumstances, under difficult, lonely, economically strained conditions. Women became mothers at the risk of their lives in times past and still in many parts of the world where medical care is sketchy or non-existent. And once the children are born, good mothers continue to put the welfare of their children above their own need for rest, for recreation, for all they might have had without the burden of care for dependent lives.

Whether they stay at home with their children or must work outside to provide their care, mothers remain the primary model of constancy in our world. Even mothers who neglect or deny their children prove the model because we expect them to behave otherwise.

A mother's love is irreplaceable. If we got it from our mothers it needs no explanation; if we didn't get it, we may spend our whole lives looking for it or suffering its lack. Father-love, of course, can be equally heroic and is certainly as indispensable, if in distinct ways. Psychologists have only begun to explore how we need our parents. A father and a mother. The happy adult will originally have had, or restored for themselves through mentors, the necessary sources of love and constancy we seem to require at the root of who we are.

And maybe this isn't so strange, since God is love, and we are God's children. Love is literally at the root of our identity. We seem to know this and need it as much as air and food and shelter. We're made from love, and for happiness, according to the most basic catechisms. Unless and until we discover this love for ourselves, we won't really be happy. Like St. Augustine said, we're restless until we rest in ultimate love: "Our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee." So Jesus tells us: "Remain in me, as I remain in my Father."

How do we find our way to this kind of love, especially if we didn't experience it originally or lost it along the way?

From the words of St. Peter in our First Reading from Acts of the Apostles: “In truth, I see that God shows no partiality. Rather... whoever fears him and acts uprightly is acceptable to him.” Now remember here what “fear” means. It doesn’t mean, “Wait until your father comes home!” Or, even worse, “Wait until I tell your mother what you did!” It means reverent respect and obedience.

Do mothers show partiality to their children? Moms? (Wait for an answer). You probably cannot answer that question right now because your kids are with you. But, we know. I know I was my Mom’s favorite and my sister Kathy was my Dad’s favorite. I remember my mom saying point blank, “I love all my children equally.” And then privately, she would tell each one of us, “You know YOU’RE my favorite!”

St. John in today’s Second Reading from his first letter tells us to “love one another, because love is of God.” I don’t think he is speaking about a conditional love or a masked hate.

When the verbal sparring matches between the four of us siblings, two boys and two girls, got out of hand, mom would make us get a chair and sit across from each other, almost touching noses. Then we had to look each other in the eye and keep saying, “I love you, I love you, I love you, I love you...” Then our anger was diffused and we would laugh, hug, and move on.

Today’s Gospel repeats the challenge of remaining in God’s love by following God’s commandments. How many teens like to be told by their parents, “as long as you’re living under this roof, you will obey my rules?” If we fail to obey the house rules, we might end up in the street; if we fail to obey God’s rules, we might end up in Hell. It’s as simple as that.

Jesus points us to the one unshakeable command of his Kingdom: Love one another as I love you. It’s no good to lament that we didn’t get the love we needed or don’t get it now, or if we’re unwilling to give it to those who need it from us.

Jesus doesn’t *invite* us to love each other. He doesn’t *recommend* that we do. He doesn’t *think* it’s a good idea. He *commands* it. Love is an imperative, because the fulfillment of life is impossible without it.

Mother's Day is often a time of celebration, appreciation, and joy. But for others, it's one of the most difficult days of the year. This is especially true for women facing infertility or those who have recently experienced the loss of a mother, a child, or other loved one. How can this be a Happy Mother's Day?

First, embrace your emotions. Give yourself permission to grieve. It's OK to feel sad and even cry -- it's okay to be emotional on Mother's Day. It's also helpful to realize that emotions are not good or bad. They are just messengers that tell us about what's going on inside of us. They are meant as stops along life's journey rather than destinations. If you continually feel sad over a lengthy period of time or it seems as if there is no hope at all, then consider getting help from a professional.

Second, seek support. Support groups can be a great source of comfort.

Third, do something special. The kind of action you take depends on your personality and the nature of your loss. For example, if you lost your mother then you might write her a letter. After Mom's death, we discovered letters she had written to each of her children. If you lost an unborn child, you might donate to a crisis pregnancy center in his or her honor. You and your spouse might look at photos of the sister you lost to cancer or visit a place where you used to go together.

Finally, hold on to hope. God sees each one of us. He knows how many hairs are on our heads and how many cares are in our hearts. Whatever you're going through this Mother's Day, you're not facing it alone. May God surround you with love, fill you with hope, and give you strength for each moment -- especially this Mother's Day. May you be wrapped in Mary's mantle of love and know that you are loved by her. By us. By God Himself. AMEN! ALLELUIA!