

Pentecost Sunday, May 11, 2008, Liturgical Year "A"

ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S CHURCH IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA, NY

The Rev. Fr. Arthur W. Ward, Jr.

"The Magnificence of Motherhood"

THE 100TH ANNIVERSARY OF MOTHER'S DAY

Well as this is Mother's Day, I again would like to welcome all our moms here this morning. This year marks the unofficial 100 year anniversary of Mother's Day. It was in 1908 that the first Mother's Day was celebrated. It all started when a woman named Anna Jarvis who loved her mother greatly, asked her pastor if they could have a special service on Sunday to honor all of the mothers of the congregation. So on May 10, 1908, they had a special service and presented a carnation to all the mothers who were present. Why the carnation? It was Mrs. Jarvis' mother's favorite flower.

Somehow that tradition seemed to catch on and on May 9, 1914, President Woodrow Wilson proclaimed the second Sunday in May every year as Mother's Day. He said it would be a time for our nation to express its love and reverence for the mothers of our country. And I do believe it is fitting that the recognition of mothers began in the Church of Jesus Christ. For motherhood is a gift from God.

But today is also significant not only because it's Mother's Day, but also because it's Pentecost Sunday, the day we remember the birth of the Church; when the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples and 3000 Jews came to Christ in one day during the feast of Pentecost some 2000 years ago in Jerusalem (**Acts 2**). And I think it's fitting that Mother's Day and the Day of Pentecost are on the same day this year, for in many respects they represent the same thing – they represent the love and power of God.

ONE OF TWO ESSENTIAL PILLARS

You see motherhood represents one of two essential pillars in life. If the Lord is the foundation, then mom and dad are the two pillars for the rest of society. Contrary to what presidential candidate Hillary Clinton says, it doesn't take a village to raise a child, it takes a mom and a dad. That doesn't mean the village isn't important but the family ultimately must be the backbone of any society if it is to succeed. If you have strong families, you will have a strong community and nation.

And it is because of this fact that Satan is going to attack motherhood. He has done it a number of ways. He has done it through *Feminism*. Leading feminists have contended that if a woman pursues motherhood first, it is enslaving. Simone de Beauvoir said "*no woman should be authorized to stay at home and raise her children...Women should not have that choice, precisely because if there is such a choice too many women will make that one.*" I am reminded what another feminist leader asserted, this time concerning the family. Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, said "*the family is a decadent, energy absorbing, destructive and wasteful institution.*"

Back in the 70's, as a result of the feminist movement, it was popular to think that men and women could be interchanged; that there were no real differences between the sexes. It was the age of the she-man and the he-woman.

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But studies have since shown that in many respects the differences between men and women extend far beyond just the physical body, but include the way we perceive and process things. In other words, women and men differ both psychologically and emotionally. God made us that way and that is why He tells us to honor the differences between men and women and not gloss over them.

I am reminded of what God said through Moses in **Dt. 22:5**: "***A woman should not dress in men's apparel and a man should not put on a woman's garment; for whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord your God.***" Now what God is saying is that a man shouldn't look like a woman and a woman shouldn't look like a man. God created us differently to compliment not compete against one another. I mean a man ought not to dress so you have to look twice to find out whether or not he is a man! I remember going into a restroom one time and I was embarrassed. I thought I was in the wrong place. A guy was in there, and I couldn't tell whether it was a she or a him. It was a shim! You couldn't even tell. The Bible teaches a man needs to be manly and a woman is to be feminine.

But I believe these days a more insidious attack on motherhood is simply *materialism* – that somehow having more stuff is more important than making sure the children have what is really important in life – your time and attention. The truth is, being a mother is the greatest responsibility and privilege a woman can have.

In **Genesis 1:27** we are told that God made man, male and female in His image. Both the man and the woman reflect God's image. And God said to the man and the woman be fruitful and multiply. The woman was given the name of Eve for she was the mother of all the living. So Motherhood magnifies the family.

MOTHERHOOD MAGNIFIES THE FAMILY

We read in **Ps. 139:13**-"***For You (God) created my inmost being; You knit me together in my mother's womb...my frame was not hidden from you when I was being made in secret.***"

From the moment of conception there is a unique human being, with a unique genetic blueprint we call the DNA. This DNA predetermines all our physical and psychological traits and characteristics. And it is there by the hand of God. But it is the mother who provides the home for the child. She provides the nourishment, the protection, all that the baby needs for life.

And then what happens during pregnancy? The mother's body goes through changes both physically and emotionally. Personal sacrifice is the norm. She has to watch what she eats and what she does. She has to get plenty of rest. And then when it comes time to give birth, the mother experiences constant discomfort and intense pain. But once the baby is placed in her arms, she knows it has been worth it and there is an instant bond with her child, an intense desire to nurture and care for her newborn. Without such love, her baby will not fully develop socially, psychologically or even physically. It is that love from a mom that enables the child to be prepared to face the challenges and trials of life.

President Theodore Roosevelt had it right when he said, "*When all is said and done, it is the mother, and the mother only, who is a better citizen than the soldier who fights for his country. The successful mother, the mother who does her part in rearing and training aright the*

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boys and girls who are to be the next generation, is of greater use to the community and occupies if she would only realize it, a more honorable as well as more important position than any man in it. The mother is the one supreme asset of the national life. She is more important, by far, than the successful statesman, businessman, artist or scientist."

MOTHERHOOD MAGNIFIES THE LORD

The truth is God gives a mother the unique opportunity to be the instrument of His unconditional love. So Motherhood not only magnifies the family, it magnifies the Lord and specifically His never failing love.

Jesus said in **Jn 15:12**, "***This is My commandment that you love one another as I have loved you.***" And prior to that statement, He said, "***I am the vine you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit for apart from Me you can do nothing.***" The vine provides everything that the branches need; everything. Therefore, Christ is in this respect spiritually what a mom is to us physically.

How else did Christ show His love for us? He sacrificed his life for us, didn't He? Jesus said on the night before He died, "***Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.***" (**Jn. 15:13**). When we speak of the unconditional love a mother has for her child we are also speaking of laying down one's life for her child. Most mothers won't think twice when it comes to laying their life down for their child. They may think twice for their husband, but not for their child. And that again is exactly the kind of love Christ has for us.

Without question, motherhood magnifies God's love. And I find it interesting that our Lord chose to come to earth through a mom – the Blessed Virgin Mary. He could have come so many other ways, but He didn't. He came as a babe to be cared for by a mom.

But not only does motherhood magnify the family and the love the Lord He has for us, motherhood magnifies the Church.

MOTHERHOOD MAGNIFIES THE CHURCH

Today, Pentecost Sunday, we celebrate the birth of the Church. If God is our Father, then spiritually the church is our mother. Now the Church is the body of Christ. We are born again in a real sense through the Church. In **Ephesians 5:22-31**, the Apostle Paul likens the relationship of husband and wife to the relationship between Christ and the Church. We see this imagery again in **Revelation 21:2 & 21:9** where the New Jerusalem is seen as a bride prepared to meet her husband, the Lamb (Jesus).

And so if the Church serves as our spiritual mother, what are we to do in return? We are to cherish it, honor it, and learn from it. And that means making sure we are part of the life of the Church of Jesus Christ.

Please turn with me now to **Ephesians 4:11-15**. Here we are given our role in the Church. Jesus gave spiritual gifts of leadership so that the saints (holy ones – that's the people of God) "***could be equipped for the work of service/ministry.***" For what purpose? ***To build up the body of Christ until we attain the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son***

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of God, to a mature man, to the ...fullness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men...but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up into Him, who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love."

Thus, what begins with love ends with love. We begin in our mother's womb and experience the love of our family. We continue by learning and experiencing the love of God in Christ both through His Word and through His Church. And we build ourselves up in love as fellow members of the Body of Christ. So on this Mother's Day and Day of Pentecost, I ask you, how will you honor motherhood in this life? Will you let it magnify the family, the Lord and the Church? My prayer this morning is that we all answer with a resounding, YES! In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, AMEN!