

To God Alone Be The Glory

Once on a day off I was listening to an afternoon talk show host give the opening monolog. The host is an excellent communicator; I enjoyed listening to the word play. The monolog started with a reference to how tough it is to be alive right now with the way things are in the world. No specifics were mentioned at first. We were each left to fill in the bad thing that bothers us most. The host then wondered aloud, Wouldn't life be simpler if we were snails? Snails don't worry about what's going on in the world. With humorous twists and turns that kept the audience laughing, the host quickly considered daily life as a snail. But if you were a snail, you'd always be late for everything. The host doesn't like to show up late for anything. | So what about life as a spider instead? They too are unaware of all the bad things going on. No, the host wouldn't like to be a spider—they have too many children. | Then the host considered life as a dragonfly. But they eat mosquitoes. Yuck! | So how about life as a bee? You could spend your life stopping to smell the roses. No, the bees are disappearing. “So,” the host concluded, “I'm just going to face life as a human. I'm going to try to stay positive. And a good way to stay positive is to do a happy dance.” And the audience erupted with applause and happy dancing.

That well-written monolog bounced around in my brain for the next three nights. ¿“I'm just going to try to stay positive?” Then it dawned on me: the host is admitting that life is a mess, and there's not really any

solution for it except to find a way, any way, to have happy thoughts. Is this optimism or pessimism? Is the host an optimist because there is this constant striving for staying positive? Or is the host really a pessimist in positive clothing: “Life stinks, and the best solution I can come up with is, ‘Be happy anyway.’”

So how do you handle all the bad things happening? Are you an optimist or a pessimist? Maybe you constantly battle sadness. You know there's lots to be happy about (God is in control, he loves you in Christ, he listens to your prayers), but you feel sad anyway—and it probably has to do with things that aren't turning out the way you want. Or maybe you're just too tired to be happy.

I hope God blessed you with a realistic disposition that knows full well why life is so messed up (it's because of sin), and yet you focus on blessings from your gracious God anyway: the sun rose, you're alive, Jesus is alive, someday he's going to put an end to sin and its misery, it's church day and you tuned in to hear God's saving Word!

Today our Lord comes to us in his Word and encourages us to be happy. And not for some pointless reason like “just think positive.” No, our God calls out to our faith and hands us a promise worth trusting, a promise that has to do with Mother's Day. **MOTHER'S DAY CALLS FOR REMEMBERING AND REJOICING IN GOD.**

Because God commanded us to honor our father and our mother, it seems reasonable that he is pleased when we set aside a special day to remember and rejoice over our mother's love for us. There's something special about a mother's love. Think of the tenderness a mother has for her newborn after carrying that life around for nine months... or maybe in spite of carrying the child for nine months. And consider the bonding which happens when she nurses her newborn. This pleasure and joy no male will ever know—not from a mother's point of view. It is denied to males by God solely on the basis of gender.

There's something necessary about tender love, the kind that is communicated more by touch than by voice. Consider a crying baby. You could talk tenderly to it till you're blue in the face, but the baby won't stop crying until you pick it up. And do we ever get tired of being touched by our mother? Well, sometimes it's awkward during the teen and pre-teen years, or when hugging is overdone. This doesn't mean people stop needing to be touched, but unfortunately, some in this life learn to do without touch. That's why someone anonymously wrote the poem "Please Touch Me." Have you heard it?

I am your baby; please touch me,
Not just when you feed and diaper me,
But stroke my legs, my arms, my back, my head.
Hold me close in tenderness that says, "I love you."

I am your teenager; please touch me.
I need to feel a bond of love

Coming through your hand, your arms.
I need to see it in your eyes,
Hear it in your voice,
Even when we disagree; some of me is still a child.

I am a child with a family of my own.
Please put your arms around me, Mother,
Father.
Now that I am a parent, I see you differently
And love you even more.
When you embrace your grandchildren, don't forget me.

I am your aging parent, please touch me.
The way my mother did when I was young.
My hair is course and gray, but please stroke it.
Embrace my tired body; I need your strength.
Please touch me. —Author Unknown

How wonderful and needed a mother's love is! Is it possible that a mother could forget about the child she has nursed or forsake the one in her womb? Young King Solomon was counting on a mother's love when he tried to resolve a dispute between two women, both of whom claimed the same baby. The real mother couldn't bear the thought of her baby being divided in two by a sword so that each claimant could have one half. If the only way to keep her baby alive was to give it up to the other woman, she'd rather do that. Solomon was able to figure out, on the basis of mother's love, whose baby it was (1 Kings 3:16-28). This is the way a mother's love is supposed to work.

Could a mother have no compassion on her child? Unfortunately, the news regularly

reports children being neglected, abused, or abandoned. Then there's abortion: one happens about every twenty seconds in the US. So it would seem, some mothers are able to forget. But experience shows that the forgetting is only temporary. Later on there is often remembering and regret and sometimes mental health issues to deal with. We need to be there to love the mother and point her to Jesus as the one who took away all sins, big and small, yours and mine. We can let go of all guilt and shame, and live the rest of our life for the glory of God and the benefit of our neighbors.

Is it possible for a believing mother to have no compassion on the child she has born? Yes. Even the Lord acknowledges this with the words: "*though she may forget.*" Sometimes Adam's rebellion gets passed along to mothers as a brain chemistry imbalance that leads to post-partum depression. We know the resulting feelings are skewed, so we help the mom work through the situation. There are other occasions when a mom forgets about loving her children—we are all are capable of great wrong.

But a mother's love is supposed to be the kind of love you can count on when everyone else fails. And that's why God chose to use a mother's love as a way to teach us how he feels. While we are honoring our mother today, or are being honored by our children, let's remember and rejoice over God's love for us. ¹⁵*Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and*

have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you. See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands! I hope you have enjoyed your mother's love. But think how much more the Lord loves you. Do you remember what Jesus said during Holy Week? "*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often I have longed to gather your people together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings*" (Matthew 23:37). Jesus, the Son of God, understands mother-love. He wants us to think of his love for us as even better than a mother's love.

When I was in college, Prof. Eichmann told us about the day his daughter was born. She had Downs Syndrome. He and his wife hadn't even considered the possibility of a baby with defects. They were crushed. It felt like God had decided to punish them for some sin they committed a while back. But their pastor came to visit them in the hospital and shared this very verse with them: "*See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands. I love you even though I have chosen this hardship for you to carry. I'm going to help you with it and draw you even closer to myself than you already are. I love you like a mother.*"

Wait a minute: How could God know what mother-love is like? Isn't God a 'HE,' a male? A friend once heard someone say, "The Father is male, and the Son is male, but the Holy Spirit is female." Many people now refer to God as female, as if purposely trying to contradict the Bible.

It is true that God refers to himself in the Bible in the masculine gender. But that's because in most languages the masculine pronouns and verb forms are generic. "He" can mean a male or a female. The wife of one of our missionaries, during their time in Cameroon, was regularly referred to as a "whiteman." It's only because of sociological developments in the last 45 years that we Americans now say, "he or she" or even "they" when speaking about a generic person.

But even if the pronoun "he" were not generic, we can know from Holy Scripture that God the Father and the Holy Spirit are neither male nor female. God is spirit. He doesn't have a corporal body. Neither do the angels. From the way Jesus talks, the angels too are neither male nor female (see e.g. Mark 12:25).

God created both male and female (humans, plants, animals). He knows every part of our anatomy, every function, every emotion, every hormone of both genders. Now do you see how God could love us more tenderly than a mother loves her suckling child? He knit us together in our mother's womb (Psalm 139:13). He birthed us into his family, the Church, through Holy Baptism. He could never forget or forsake one of his believing children. *"See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands."*

God feels our afflictions. He cares when we scrape our knees, when our joints ache,

when we are depressed, when we are scared of a virus, even when we go off on our own to play where he says it's dangerous. He still cares when we fall into sin. He cares when we needlessly carry around our guilt because we are too ashamed to come into his open arms and admit what we've done. He loves when we repent. It's marvelous to imagine him giving us a big hug of forgiveness, pulling us up onto his lap, tenderly telling us again the story of his dear Son who died for us and rose victorious over sin and death.

This is how the Lord wants mothers to love their children. But even if your mother didn't love you like this, or isn't around anymore to love you this way, God still does. Even if a mother didn't love her child that way, or went so far as to have an abortion and now regrets her decision, tell her about the God that will not leave her, the God who forgives her through faith in Christ, the same way he forgave you all your sins.

See how much reason we have to rejoice this Mother's Day? 1) God made us and he brought us into his family: he cares what happens to us every day. 2) Because he is love, he cannot forget or forsake us. 3) He gave mothers to love us and to teach us his Word. He wants us to forgive our mothers for their shortcomings. How great it is to combine Mother's Day with God's Word! May we always remember God's love and rejoice in him.