

OK, in the Church it's the feast of the Ascension. In America, it's Mother's Day. As a baby priest I learned that I would pay dearly for NOT dealing in here with what's in full swing out there. So here is my nod to Mother's Day.

One of my friends is very artistic, and he made the best Mother's Day card I've ever seen. It looked like a third grader had printed it. On it was a little boy with a dirty face and torn pants pulling a wagon load of toys. On the front it read: "Mom, I always will remember the little prayer you used to say for me every day." Inside the card was the prayer, "God help you if you ever do that again!"

A woman had three little boys, all one year apart. The youngest boy, Gregory, had just started school. A teacher commented to Gregory that she couldn't believe he was already in kindergarten and asked what his mother did all day now that her 3 boys were all in school. "Cartwheels," Gregory answered. I'm guessing some of you moms understand.

First just a bit of background. What are we to make of Jesus' levitation into the clouds, since in our post-Copernican era we know that the earth is not a flat plate under a heaven that one reaches by going 'up' in the atmosphere? But we should not get hung up on the spatial logistics of this story. Jesus was simply conforming to a world model His disciples in the first century could understand. The point of the ascension is not that Jesus went up from the earth, but that He assumed His rightful place at the right hand of God. The ascension of Jesus is the story of His departure from this time-and-space-bound plane we call earthly life. And truthfully, though the disciples could not even imagine it at the time, because Jesus left them physically at the ascension, He could now be even more present with them through the Holy Spirit. From now on Jesus would not be bound by space and time. By leaving the disciples on that ascension day, Jesus could be present with all of us who love Him, all at the same time, all over the world.

So for 40 days Jesus appeared to them after Easter. Although He did not seem to be present to the disciples every minute, He was there often enough. It probably did not occur to them that this new reality would ever change. But Jesus, the master teacher, knew His students would never fulfill their calling if He stayed physically with them. And so after over a month of this renewed intimacy and instruction after the resurrection, Jesus gave His disciples His final gift. He left them. (adapted from GRACEWORKS, 12 May 2024, p. 26 and 25)

But He left them – and us – with a job. To be His witnesses. To carry on His work. To love and care and forgive and include and serve others in His place. Now I think too often we think of all this church stuff – gospel stuff – witness stuff – as something far removed from our daily lives. Nothing could be further from the truth. So point 2, on this Mother's Day, points to a way that many mothers witness throughout their lives. An anonymous author describes feelings that most mothers probably will relate to. Here are her words: "We are sitting at lunch when my daughter casually mentions that she and her husband are

thinking of 'starting a family.' 'We're taking a survey,' she says, half joking. 'Do you think I should have a baby?'

"It will change your life,' I say, carefully keeping my tone neutral.

"I know,' she says, 'no more sleeping in on weekends, no more spontaneous vacations....'

"But that is not what I meant at all. I look at my daughter, trying to decide what to tell her. I want her to know what she will never learn in childbirth classes. I want to tell her that the physical wounds of childbearing will heal, but that becoming a mother will leave her with an emotional wound so raw that she will forever be vulnerable.

"I consider warning her that she will never again read a newspaper without asking 'What if that had been MY child?' That every plane crash, every house fire will haunt her. That when she sees pictures of starving children, she will wonder if anything could be worse than watching your child die.

"I look at her carefully manicured nails and stylish suit and think that no matter how sophisticated she is, becoming a mother will reduce her to the primitive level of a bear protecting her cub. That an urgent call of 'Mom!' will cause her to drop a souffle or her best crystal without a moment's hesitation.

"I feel I should warn her that no matter how many years she has invested in her career, she will be professionally derailed by motherhood. She might arrange for child care, but one day she will be going into an important business meeting and she will think of her baby's sweet smell. She will have to use every ounce of her discipline to keep from running home, just to make sure her baby is all right.

"I want my daughter to know that everyday decisions will no longer be routine. That a 5-year-old boy's desire to go to the men's room, rather than the women's at McDonald's will become a major dilemma. That right there, in the midst of clattering trays and Big Macs, screaming children and supersized fries, issues of independence and gender identity will be weighed against the prospect that a child molester may be lurking in that restroom. However decisive she may be at the office, she will second-guess herself constantly as a mother.

"Looking at my attractive daughter, I want to assure her that eventually she will shed the pounds of pregnancy, but she will never feel the same about herself. That *her* life, now so important, will be of less value to her once she has a child. That she would give it up in a moment to save her offspring, but will also begin to hope for more years – not to accomplish her own dreams, but to watch her child accomplish theirs.

"My daughter's relationship with her husband will change, but not in the way she thinks. I wish she could understand how much more you can love a man who is careful to change the baby or who never hesitates to play with his child. I think she should know that she will fall in love with him again for reasons she would now find very unromantic.

'I wish my daughter could sense the bond she will feel with women throughout history who have tried to stop war, prejudice and drunk driving. I hope she will understand why I can think rationally about most issues, but become temporarily insane when I discuss the threat of nuclear war or a debilitated planet due to ecological destruction to my children's future. I want to describe to my daughter the exhilaration of seeing your child learn to ride a bike. I want to capture for her the belly laugh of a baby who is touching the soft fur of a dog or a cat for the first time. I want her to taste the joy that is so real it actually hurts.

'My daughter's quizzical look makes me realize that tears have formed in my eyes. 'You'll never regret it,' I finally say. Then I reach across the table, squeeze my daughter's hand and offer a silent prayer for her, and for me, and for all of the mere mortal women who stumble their way into this most wonderful of callings. This blessed gift from God.....that of being a Mother." (from King Duncan, A MOTHER'S LOVE, sermon on Jn 15:1-17, in SERMON AND WORSHIP RESOURCES, retrieved 4/24/24)

So many of those dynamics are present in our lives when we fall in love with God-in-Christ. Everything changes – priorities, how we spend our time and money, who we know, how we feel, and what gets us out of bed in the morning. To be His witnesses is to realize how much we have been loved, how much we have been given, and then compels us to share it in some way – because it's all been infinitely more than we could ask for – or even imagine.

And so my third point. In departing this earth, Jesus promised the power of the Spirit would make us, His disciples, His witnesses. But the fact that after 2000 years of being at it, how much of the world has been changed? How effective have we been? How effective have I been? The snare into which so many of us fall, is that of thinking we don't have anything worthwhile to say or do. That our life is not all that exciting, that our gifts and energy are so insignificant, our witness doesn't mean much. But this is a fallacy.

What we need to remember is that our life is the argument. Our life is the argument. That's what Albert Sweitzer said. He was once asked why he left a prestigious academic career in theology, to spend his life as a missionary doctor in the jungles of Africa? He replied, "I decided to make my life the argument." He did just that. And the powerful persuasion of his example was a dramatic witness which still inspires people. Now don't miss the point. The point is not the dramatic witness that received international attention, but the content of the decision. "I decided that I would make my life the argument." That can be with any one of us. Whatever the shape of our personal witness, it is essential for Christ's total witness. Every witness here is essential for Christ's total witness. In a world of unbelief, Christ needs persons who live from their certainty of God's love for every person in the world, no exceptions. In a world of despair, He needs persons who live with hope and say yes to life. In a world of cruelty and inhumanity, He needs persons who are kind and caring. In a world of loneliness and alienation, He needs persons who reach out in love, persons who enter no man's land with forgiveness and bring persons together. In a world of starvation, He needs persons who will share their bread and work to reverse the causes of hunger. In a world of false glamour and moral confusion, He needs persons who seek first the Kingdom of God, persons who stand for righteousness and beauty and integrity and inclusion. In a world seemingly hell bent on nuclear or ecological suicide, He needs person who will say 'we can do better!' In a world where the color of one's skin and economic status are still the chief factors which lead to oppression, He needs persons who will stand against oppression and stand for justice and equality.

I like the witness of Benaral Overstreet. She tells about how this truth broke in upon her, that her life could make a difference. She was in a discussion group, as many of us have been many times, where there was serious talk about the problems before us -- world peace, the economy, civil rights, world hunger, care for the earth. Constructive suggestions were being made by various members present, but every time someone would propose an idea, someone would make a disparaging remark about the improbability or futility of any such action, whereupon Ms. Overstreet said, "I took an envelope from my purse and on the back of it I wrote," and I quote her – "you say the little efforts that I make will do no good. They will never prevail to tip the hovering scale where justice hangs in the balance. I don't think I ever really thought they would, but I'm convinced beyond debate in favor of my right to choose which side shall feel the stubborn ounces of my weight." And so it is, when we decide to make our life the argument; and when we call upon the Holy Spirit for power, we will make a difference.

It will begin in the intimate circles where we live every day. And then it will move out, and we may never know where and how far it goes. We're not asked to do everything, but each one of us is asked to do something. In a world like ours, where the something we're asked to do may seem little, the least we dare to do is the most we can. Get that now. In a world like ours, where the something we are asked to do may seem little, the least we dare to do is the most we can.

BE the argument! BE a witness! Amen! (last point adapted from Maxie Dunnam, Sermon for PENTECOST, in SERMON AND WORSHIP RESOURCES, retrieved 5/7/24)