

Mother's Day reflection – May 14, 2023

Text: Honour your father and your mother that your days may be long upon the earth>
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I was happy to see King Charles include in his ceremony an Interfaith element. On this Mother's day, I find it interesting that Mohammed made this statement about mothers:

“A person came to Allah's Messenger and said: Who among the people is most deserving of a fine treatment from my hand? He said: Your mother. He again said: Then who (is the next one)? He said: Again it is your mother (who deserves the best treatment from you). He said: Then who (is the next one)? He (the Holy Prophet) said: Again, it is your mother. He (again) said: Then who? Thereupon he said: Then it is your father. The prophet was trying to address an imbalance that favoured men over women.

At the age of 6 Mohammed lost his mother to sickness. Perhaps also that is one reason for this teaching about the importance of mother.

The Hebrew Scriptures teach that both mother and father are to be honored equally. What does honour mean?

Honour means to respect one's parents: to follow their good advice, to speak of them well, to give them credit when they deserve it and to forgive them when they make mistakes.

The promise of that kind of honoring is the promise of a long life here on earth. But this is not automatic. People die of multiple causes who honour their parents. It is just that parents may be wiser, due to life experience and good ethics, life experience and ethics that a child might not have, thus the chances that children will live to old age are enhanced if they follow their wisdom.

The greatest figure in Judaism, Moses, was mothered by his own mother, his sister, and Pharaoh's daughter...without them he would have perished, but thank God he was rescued to bless the world with the ten commandments delivered at Sinai. How very different the world would have been if Mothers had not saved Moses's life as a baby. No wonder that Moses made sure that

God's command about children honouring mother and father made it in to the ten commands that were transmitted through the ages.

The mother of the historical Jesus had her tough times, pregnancy on the road, birth in a stable and the excruciating experience of watching her precious son die unjustly, on a Roman cross.

And what support she gave to her son as she watched him grow up! Due to her collaboration with St. Luke, we hear about his amazing interactions with the doctors of the law in the temple at the tender age of 12 years. How supportive of him she must have been, to be at his first miracle, giving directions to the servants and telling them to **do whatever he says** when he turned water into wine. It was she who said: "With God all things are possible." What a mothers teaching was that to her son! At his crucifixion Jesus in one of his last recorded words commended her care to that of his brother. "Son, behold your mother. Mother behold your son."

I can remember going to St. Peters in Rome and being in the presence of the Pieta. I felt a deep sadness as I looked at the famous sculpture. A mother's love for her son has never been so movingly portrayed in marble, where Mary holds her dead son in her arms. The only thing in my personal life experience that was as poignant, was when I saw a young mother in a hospital, cradle in her arms, a perfectly formed still born child...
So hard at times to be a mother...

Abraham Lincoln's mother, Nancy Hanks, a distant relative of movie star Tom Hanks, was not conceived in wedlock. As an 'illegitimate child' as they said in those days, for no child is illegitimate before God, Nancy became a remarkable woman and mother. She looked very like Abe Lincoln about the eyes. She was beautiful and adored by Abraham as a child and as an adult. The local cows in the village ate snake root and she died of what was

then called 'milk sickness' because the poison was transmitted through the milk. She was only 34 years old. Abraham was but 9 years of age at the time and yet he wrote later these words about his mother: "All that I am or hope to be I owe to my angel mother. I remember my mother's prayers and they have always followed me. They have clung to me all my life."

It is a very hard thing to lose one's beloved mother at an early age. Suddenly responsibility puts its heavy hand on our shoulder at an age when we are too young to bear it, but bear it we must. So many wonderful mothers I know have lost their mothers too young.

Fortunately for me, my mother lived into her 84th year with her mind sound although she was afflicted with Parkinson's disease. I remember that I put her through a lot, what with childhood pneumonia and asthma! At one point my sister and my mother used to carry me upstairs every night because I was too weak to climb them myself. Then there were the teenage years that every mother dreads. Somehow, we survived them as I kept both her and my guardian angels very busy when I got my driver's license.

I am so grateful that throughout my life I have known the most remarkable women who have nurtured me and others with a mother's heart of love. I have been incredibly blessed by them! They are mothers to many people's children.

What is it like to be a mother in Canada today? Most mothers have to work a job or career as well as be a mother. Because the bond is very deep from birth between mother and child, mothers often carry anxiety when news comes about other children, being killed. Every plane crash, every tornado or fire that kills a child...she knows that it could be her child just as easily. She drives her children to school every day to ensure that they are safe. Those who cannot drive their children, find any way they can to be there

at the end of school or put them on the bus with a lunch and a good bye kiss, worrying and hoping all will be well.

It is very difficult to handle a career and motherhood at the same time. Either one may suffer. Every mother wants to see her children achieve their dreams. But what about **her** dreams? Does she put them on hold, take a part time job in order to accommodate her child? How hard is it for a mother dying of cancer who cannot see her beloved child graduate?

I well remember President Obama's grandmother who died just hours before a presidential election in which her grandson became the first African-American to win the nation's highest office.

Perhaps she did see that day, but from another shore and in a greater light...

At that time in Charlotte, N.C., Sen. Obama, looking upset, said:

"She was one of those quiet heroes that we have all across America, they're not famous, their names aren't in the newspaper, but each and every day they work hard, they look after their families, they sacrifice for their children and their grandchildren."

Obama's mother, Ann Dunham, died of ovarian cancer in 1995 at the age of 57. Then his grandmother stepped up to the plate and cheered him on.

When a mother becomes pregnant and bears a child everything changes including the relationship with her husband, if she has one, or if single, the relationships change with all her friends. There isn't the time anymore that she had before. Her world shifts on its axis. The same thing happens when she becomes a grandmother looking after her grandchildren while their mother works.

A mother's values often change and become broader. She can develop a bond with all the mothers of history who have seen their

sons and daughters killed in wars. She may identify with the mothers who have lost children to drunk driving or to drugs. She understands the threats of nuclear war and climate change to her own children and children's children.

She knows the exhilaration of seeing her child hit his first baseball home run, or put his first puck in the net. She is proud to see her girl play soccer with the best of them.

There are very few women who regret motherhood, although there can be some very tough times when a child is in prison for a serious crime, or a child rejects them and blames them for everything going wrong in their lives.

Perhaps for some reason you have had a troubled relationship with a father or a mother, and on Mother's Day it is hard for you? You feel diminished or guilty or not confident. If you were being honest you would say that you hate mother's day. When Mother's Day comes around you repeat the feelings and the sadness comes. Does it have to be that way or is there a way to break that cycle?

I want to tell you a story of how one woman handled the rejection she felt as a child from her father and mother.

Rosemary Geisinger was the first-born child who could never live up to her father's expectations. As an adult, she normally felt secure in her education, she felt intelligent, organized and creative- except for two weeks a year when her parents came to visit her! In those two weeks she suffered, and so did her husband who was long suffering over this annual event.

She would bake the freezer full of food, go over etiquette with her children about keeping their rooms neat and not raising their voices. When her dad came, she would analyze what he had said with her husband Dave, over and over, before she went to sleep.

She would usually cry herself to sleep. She was a spiritual person but even that deserted her, once a year.

Then a year came when her father was diagnosed with Parkinson's. With the clock ticking faster for both of them, she now had to handle a man who had been the vital intelligent and **an athletic God** of her childhood, suddenly turned into a stumbling, gaunt, confused old man. Rosemarie realized that it was now or never if she ever was to have any kind of relationship with her father. She had somehow to let go of her feelings of never living up to his expectations. But how?

She had tried everything she could think of except one thing: the only thing left... was to forgive him...

So, she did.

She kept saying over and over to herself "I forgive you" and that slowly changed her self doubt to peacefulness. She let go of 'I woulda, coulda, shoulda' and 'I wish'.

Rosemarie never told her father, that she Had forgiven him, but it must have been apparent to him on some level **because their entire relationship changed.**

The summer before he died, he came alone to stay for two weeks in August. Rosemarie did not do her maniacal cleaning, or buying of sheets or going through her usual tension.

Because she had forgiven him, she could now talk with him as a friend and a companion- **not as a resentful, disappointed, wounded daughter.**

They talked about nature and the things they both loved. He said for the first time ever in her life, that he admired her intuitive intelligence and how he loved her home and the gardens she grew.

Most stunning of all he told her for the first time, **that he loved her!**

She said later, after his death, that her life with her father was those last two weeks in August. She didn't need to see the video that had been made of his life for the funeral. Her memories of her father were of him sitting on her porch amidst streams of sunshine and overflowing flowerpots, joking; talking; sharing; loving her!

What is the secret which gives to every relationship the possibility of repair?

Complete and unconditional forgiveness!

That was what brought Rosemary Geisinger's soul soothing peace and opened the door to a life she never dreamed possible.

If you can't forgive, ask God to help you and give your resentments, feelings of disappointment and your wounds over to God. Let go. Let God. And you will be able to forgive. And your life will change.

I think that Rosemarie had finally discovered mother love at its best, which is unconditional. The good news is we can all give this kind of nurturing, forgiving love as a father, as a child, as a friend, as a lover, a husband, a wife and as a mother!

To all those who have mothered us, may this be a day of healing, thankfulness for lessons learned, of forgiveness, of love and Grace!

And may our days be long and happy upon the earth...

Have a Great Mother's day!

Amen.