

## 4<sup>th</sup> SUNDAY OF EASTER – C (May 8, 2022)

[Archbishop Jackel's letter on ArchdioceseOne appeal]

I wish all of you moms and any expectant moms who are here a very happy Mother's Day; I'll have a special blessing for you after Communion. It's the day when the kids go all out to show their moms how much they appreciate all they do for them. The current issue of "Our Iowa" magazine has a great article about the kindergarten students in Riceville and their ideas about what their moms would like for Mother's Day:

- Frances—"My mom looks like a doll...She knows how to fix glass. I think she would probably like chocolate and Cool Whip for a gift"
- Declan—"My mom's favorite thing to do is fish. And her favorite food is fish. She's good at vacuuming. I hope she gets a pretzel."
- Gavin--"My mom looks like a mom and is tall...She is good at carrying me. I think she would like robot that does the dishes and folds clothes."

And one last story from a different source: the children told their mom they would do all the cooking on Mother's Day; she could relax. So they took out three pots, two frying pans, a double boiler, three mixing bowls, a chopping board, six measuring spoons, and eight serving dishes. Mom was delighted; she said it was the best Jell-O she ever had!

Our annual May celebration of Mother's Day leads us almost naturally to recall our spiritual mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary who we honor as well in a special way this month. Her motherhood for us stems from Calvary when Jesus from the cross entrusted the care of his mother to John, the beloved disciple, telling him "behold your mother". The Church from her earliest history has seen all of us as sharing in the motherly love and care that Mary extended to John.

And that notion of spiritual motherhood goes ever farther with the Church herself being spoken of in this maternal way; the title "holy Mother Church" has a long and strong heritage. In fact, the feminine image of the Church has its origin in the New Testament. St. Paul in his letter to the Ephesians refers to the relationship between husband and wife as a reference to that between Christ as bridegroom and the Church as his bride.

How is it that the Church is 'mother' of and for us? Let's go back to our own moms on this Mother's Day. The first and most obvious thing moms do for us is to bring us to birth. In an analogous way, the Church brings us to birth as well--not physically or bodily, of course, but in the life of grace and union with Christ through baptism. Vatican II tells us that in baptism the Church brings forth children who are conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of God. Jesus himself uses this image in his famous conversation with Nicodemus when he says that no one can enter God's kingdom without being begotten, or 'born again' of water and Spirit—a crystal-clear reference to baptism.

But moms, you know that your work as mother doesn't end in giving birth; now comes the task (among many others) of feeding and nourishing your child to grow strong and healthy. Just so does Mother Church nourish and strengthen us, her children who are baptized or 'born into' Christ—and she does so with best of all food: the Body and Blood of Christ in the Eucharist.

Jesus told the apostles at the Last Supper to do what he instituted for them there, and the Church as the faithful bride of Christ and mother of the Christian faithful has been doing so ever since and will do so until the end of time.

Yet another vital mothering task: teaching her children. Fathers certainly share in that role, of course, but no one can deny mom's unique role here. How many times have you moms told your children: "say 'please' or 'thank you'", "don't touch that--it's hot and you'll burn yourself", "stop fighting with your brother/sister!" You want them to learn about safety, good manners, getting along with others, and so many other important things. Well, the teaching responsibility of our Mother the Church is also most important. Jesus came into this world to teach us the Father's love for us and his plan for our redemption through his death and resurrection. He charged the apostles and his Church with the job of teaching the human race the truths revealed by God; and the Church, loving Mother that she is, has been doing so ever since.

Truth be told, we may not always like that teaching: "it's too hard/inconvenient/out of date". And in our growing-up years we probably didn't always like it when Mom had to teach or discipline us. But as we matured into adulthood, we came to realize: "gee, maybe Mom was right about that after all..." It's the same with Mother Church: the more we grow in our spiritual life and learn about our faith and why the Church teaches what she does on various issues, the more we come to appreciate her wisdom and fidelity in handing on the saving truths of Jesus Christ.

In the gospel today Jesus declared that he and the Father are one. Back in the third century, St. Cyprian (bishop and martyr) spoke of another important 'oneness': he said "you cannot have God for your Father if you have not the Church for your mother." Of course the Church is not God; the human failings, sins and scandals committed throughout the history of the Church make that all too clear. Still, the Church was founded by Jesus and is sustained and guided by the Holy Spirit to hand on the truths of our faith—that divine origin and protection is real and essential.

The Church's work and mission retains that maternal, motherly character; the Church is not just some cold, faceless, inhuman institution. All that is best about human motherhood is true about the Church's spiritual motherhood...and infinitely more so because of that divine protection and guidance. Indeed: happy Mother's Day to all you moms. And happy Mother's Day to all of us who are privileged and graced to belong to our Mother the Church—given to us by the risen Christ for our sanctification and to lead us to eternal life, love, and joy with him.