

May 9, 2010

## THE MOTHERLY SIDE OF GOD

*“I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.” John 14:18*

Today is the day when we honor Moms. See if anyone here recognizes this Mom:

You stand up to take pictures at your son’s school play even after they’ve asked people not to.....You insist your child wear a sweater when *you’re* cold.....You tell your daughter how much prettier she looks with her hair out of her eyes.....You hear yourself say (things like), “Your face will freeze like that,” and “If all your friends jumped off a bridge, would you?”.....There’s a used Kleenex stuffed up your shirtsleeve.....The first thing you ask when someone walks into your home is, “Do you want something to eat?”.....You spend your vacation wondering if you left the iron turned on.....Your daughter says smugly that she’ll never be anything like you.

Sound like anyone you know?

Our text is very appropriate for today. “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.” One translator has Jesus say, “I will not leave you comfortless.....” Both renderings of the text sound like Mother’s Day to me. I don’t want to be guilty of over-generalizing, but when most of us think of being comforted, do we think of our Moms or our Dads?

A survey asked boys who they would be most likely to confide in if they had a problem, and about 23 percent said their father. The remaining 77 percent said they would confide in their mother. “I will not leave you as orphans,” said Jesus. “I will not leave you comfortless.” There are a lot of Dads who are doing a splendid job of comforting their children, but in the majority of cases, for comfort, we think of Mom. Yes, God is like a Father, but God is also like a Mother who comforts her children. Let’s consider for a few moments where comfort is found. What is Jesus promising us?

**JESUS SAYS, FIRST OF ALL, HE WILL COMFORT US BY HIS PRESENCE.** “I will not leave you comfortless,” he says to his disciples, “I will come to you.” Jesus is going away. But God will send a comforter – the Holy Spirit. They will not be alone. God’s Spirit will be with them.

There is no greater gift that we can give those we love than the gift of our presence. It’s hard to love somebody you never see.

Suzy Parker in an article in *USA Today* notes that according to some studies, 75 percent of us live within minutes of at least one of our parents. Some 23 percent of us are within hours of a parent. Only 2 percent of us need to drive for days to see a parent.

So why do so many of us see our parents so seldom? Nothing says “I love you” like being there. Being there for our parents – Being there for our children.

Years ago there was a country western song titled, “Roses for Mama.” In the song, it is Mother’s Day, and a man goes to a florist shop to buy his mother a bouquet. He knows he should visit his mother, but he has more exciting plans, so he decides to send her flowers instead. At the florist shop, the man encounters a little boy who wants to buy some roses for his mother, but he doesn’t have enough money. The man gives the boy some money, then buys his mother’s bouquet.

As the man drives away from the florist shop, he happens to pass by a cemetery. Glancing in the cemetery, he sees the little boy kneeling on a grave, a bouquet of roses in his hand. The man pulls into the cemetery and asks the boy what he’s doing. The boy explains that his mother has been dead a year, and that he comes there all the time to talk to her and, on this special day, to give her flowers.

The man turns around and drives back to the florist. There, he asks the florist if his mother’s flowers have been delivered yet. When the florist tells him no, the man tells him to cancel the delivery; he wants to deliver them himself.

There is nothing that says, “I love you” like simply being there. Children need parents who are there for them – if possible, both mother and father. Aging parents need children who will come to see them. Jesus is leaving his disciples, but he wants them to know he is not forsaking them. “I will not leave you as orphans,” he says, “I will come to you.” He will be there. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, he will be with them.

But there is a second way in which Christ comforts his disciples. **HE COMFORTS THEM WITH HIS UNDERSTANDING AND LOVE.** Physical presence is wonderful, of course, but it is not enough. We need not only someone who is there, but someone who understands and forgives. Here is where Jesus shines. No one was more understanding than Jesus. See him hold little children in his arms. See his concern for those with physical challenges, for the person whose life has been broken by sin, for the penitent thief on the cross. And here is the

Good News. That is what God is like, Jesus teaches us. “In that day you shall know that I am in My Father....” Jesus and God are of one character. If you want to know what God is like, look at Jesus. The comfort that the Spirit provides is the comfort Christ would provide if he were still here physically. It is the comfort of empathy and understanding.

Did you ever hear about the bank in Pennsylvania where they trained their employees to get “a better feel” for customers with handicaps? Employees of the 180 branches of the Meridian banking group had to fill out deposit slips with Vaseline smeared on their glasses and count money with three fingers on each hand taped together. The idea was to give them a better understanding of what older customers with glaucoma or arthritis may be going through. What a difference a little empathy, a little understanding, can make in a relationship.

In the book *The Aladdin Factor*, there is a story by Jane Nelson that could help a great many mothers and fathers. Nelson once received a call from a frantic single mother who was caught in a real power struggle with her fourteen-year-old daughter. The mother had found a six-pack of beer in her daughter’s closet, so when her daughter came home, she said, “Okay, Maria, what is this?” “It looks like a six-pack of beer to me, Mom,” her daughter answered. “Don’t get smart with me, young lady. You tell me about this,” said the mother. “Well, I don’t know what you’re talking about,” the girl replied. “I found this six-pack in your closet, young lady. You’d better explain,” her mother continued. Maria thought real fast and said, “Oh yeah, I was hiding that for a friend.” “You expect me to believe that?” asked her mother. Maria gets mad and stomps off to her bedroom and slams the door.

Does any of this sound familiar to some of you?

When the mother called for advice, Jane Nelson asked, “Why were you so concerned with finding a six-pack of beer in her closet?” “Because I don’t want her to get into trouble,” the mother answered. “I understand that,” Nelson replied, “but why is it you don’t want her to get into trouble?” The mother answered, “Well, because I don’t want her to ruin her life.” “I understand that,” Nelson replied, “but why is it that you don’t want her to ruin her life?” Finally the mother got it. “Well, because I love her,” she said. “Do you think she got the message?” Nelson asked. The answer is, “Of course not!”

“What do you think would happen,” Jane Nelson asked, “if you started with that message?” If she were to start with, “Honey, I love you so much that I got

really scared when I found this six-pack of beer in your closet. Could we talk about this? Because I'm real afraid you could get into trouble, could we talk about it?" In this approach, Jane Nelson says, you start by being vulnerable instead of conducting an inquisition that inevitably leads to denial. Starting from the position of love and vulnerability evokes closeness and trust so that the child can then open up and work together with you on some kind of solution.

Parents, can you see how effective this technique could be in dealing with young people? Can you also see that this was Jesus' method? Time and time again, he resisted the temptation to lecture, to scold, to harass. Rather he asked caring questions, and he allowed the person an opportunity to discover his or her own solutions. "What a Friend We Have in Jesus." Why? Because he is empathetic, because he understands.

"I will not leave you comfortless...." Christ will be there. Christ understands. But there's one more thing to be said. Christ not only sends his Spirit to be with us. Christ not only sends his Spirit to empathize with us and comfort us. **CHRIST GIVES US THE POWER TO CONQUER OUR PROBLEMS.** "I will not leave you comfortless; I will come to you," said Jesus. "Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live." How many people have been encouraged by those words, "Because I live, you also will live." Because he is with us, we can cope, we can endure, and we can conquer.

A parent who is there is wonderful. A parent who understands is even better. But best of all is the parent who prepares us for life and gives us the tools to succeed.

In 1942, hysteria over Japanese involvement in World War II led to the relocation of some 110,000 Japanese Americans to internment camps. Years later, Carole married a man who had also spent time in the camps. When she delivered their baby daughter, they noticed that the child's feet turned inward, the toes facing each other. Carole was determined to do whatever it would take to help her daughter walk normally.

For four years Carole provided the child with corrective shoes. Her daughter was walking normally by age six, but Carole wasn't satisfied. "I wanted her to do anything in which she would use her legs," she says. The girl chose ice skating.

The girl was a natural on the ice. Before long, the youngster was bugging her mother for more rink time. She'd refuse to leave the ice until she got a particular move right. Soon Carole was rising at 4 a.m. to get her daughter to the rink. Finally, after 15 years of lessons, young Kristi Yamaguchi represented her country in the Olympics.

As the U.S. flag was hoisted during the 1992 medals ceremony, Carole and Jim Yamaguchi watched Kristi receive the gold medal. Kristi Yamaguchi stood on that victory platform because of a mother who stood behind her and helped her conquer.

“I will not leave you comfortless; I will come to you,” said Jesus. “.....because I live, you also will live.” There it is! There is the promise we need most of all: The Spirit that comforts us is not only one of presence, not only one of understanding, but it is one of overcoming. It is like a mother slowly helping her daughter walk with straight feet. It is that Spirit that gives us wings like eagles.

And so, we honor our mothers this morning. But more importantly, we honor God who is like a loving parent who is ever present, ever empathizing, and ever giving us the strength to overcome. Because God lives, we can live! And that's good news!

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