

The Strength of a Mother

The classic image of a mother is a perfect blend of gentle compassion and tremendous strength. This was powerfully portrayed in a story I heard from the days of Asia's Tsunami. A survivor found a baby seemingly floating on the water in a building that had been flooded. Reaching out, he was overjoyed to find the child still alive. As he took the baby into his arms, he witnessed something that would remain forever engraved on his heart: two hands of a mother which had held the infant up at the surface, now sinking slowly into the dark waters below. Her mission completed, having delivered the child of her womb to safety, the mother accepted the cold embrace of death. Or maybe she had already died, but kept on loving.

A story from Katrina showed the same kind of heroism from a mother. As a family clung to a capsized boat following the flooding, mom realized that the small, damaged craft could not support all of them. Apparently, she was also seriously wounded. "Take care of the children," were her last words to her agonizing husband. Then, she let go, and slipped into silence.

My mother is still alive and well. But I cannot begin to count the number of times she laid down her own self-interest to invest herself in her children. At 78, more fragile than in days gone by, my mother still plays tennis, still can be feisty, and remains an archetype of graceful conviction.

Yet when she fell some years ago and injured her leg, I almost lost it. *This mother is my mother*, and my mother is not supposed to suffer like this. *She was made to last forever*. I could not handle my mother's mortality.

Mother's Day is that yearly opportunity for us to remember that mothers do not last forever -- at least not on this earth -- and that ultimately, many of us will be called upon to care for the one who nursed us into this world.

I hope and pray that we will recognize more fully the tremendous sacrifice which is essential to healthy motherhood, and will return the favor in gratitude. May this Mothers' Day serve to remind us all of our blessings.

In conclusion, I would like to re-present this moving story from National Geographic. The incident took place several years ago. It still inspires me.

“After a forest fire in Yellowstone National Park, forest rangers began their trek up a mountain to assess the inferno’s damage. One ranger found a bird literally petrified in ashes, perched statuesquely on the ground at the base of a tree. Somewhat disturbed by the eerie sight, he knocked over the bird with a stick. When he gently struck it, three tiny chicks scurried from under their dead mother’s wings. The loving mother, keenly aware of impending disaster, had carried her chicks from the nest up above and put them under her wings, instinctively knowing that the toxic smoke would rise. She could have flown to safety but had refused to abandon her babies. When the blaze had arrived and the heat had scorched her small body, the mother had remained steadfast. Because she had been willing to die, those under the cover of her wings survived. *“He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge.”* (Psalm 91:4)

May we appreciate the immeasurable sacrifices of our mothers, in order to live with greater gratitude and a more fervent sense of a mission to service.

May God raise up many good and loyal married couples within the church.

May we remember that all life is sacred, and therefore so is motherhood.

May God bless our mothers. In the context of today’s world, they need it.

*Truly you have formed my inmost being;
you knit me together in my mother’s womb.
I give you thanks that I am fearfully, wonderfully made;
wonderful are your works! (Psalm 139:13-14)*

*Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.
“Honor your father and mother”—which is the first commandment
with a promise— “that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy
long life on the earth” (Ephesians 6:1-3)*

Fr. Dean McFalls, Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish, Lathrop, May 10, ‘06.

