

HOMILY

The Sixth Sunday of Easter *Mother's Day*

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Today, on this beautiful day, we honor our mothers. I heard about the worship committee of one church that was discussing what to do to recognize Mother's Day. They decided to give a rose to the oldest mother in the congregation and one to the mother with the most children and grandchildren. They also decided to have all the mothers stand. Then someone on the committee got worried. What should they do about Miss Smith? She never had any children but she has been teaching the first grade Sunday school class for thirty years. "She is like a mother to all of us," someone said. "We ought to be able to recognize her on Mother's Day." And that makes sense, doesn't it? In fact, we ought to have a day to honor all those people who give loving service to others.

Some of you are at the point in life where you are being parents to your own mother and/or father. "Sandwich Generation" is a popular term—looking after your children and looking after aging parents at the same time. There ought to be a day to honor all people who are caregivers. We might include nurses and workers in assisted living centers. We might include teachers. Our "Other's Day" celebration could get out of hand. We have Father's Day coming up in a few weeks. That's important because an increasing number of men are in care-giving roles today. But for today we will limit our focus on women who are responsible for the well-being of children—moms, grandmothers, foster mothers, every woman involved in a parenting role.

Jesus said to his Disciples before he left them, "*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.*" Jesus wanted his Disciples to have a sense of inner peace when he was no longer with them. He didn't want them to be afraid. So even if he was not physically with them, he was still a living presence. With Jesus in their hearts, the Disciples had an inner peace. Isn't that what you desire above

all for your children? You cannot protect them from every snare, every heartache no matter how much you may want to. I know some of you try. So how do we give them the peace that the world can neither give nor take away?

First of all, we tell them who they are. If they have a strong sense of identity and a sense of self-worth, they are on the path to inner peace. Some of you may be familiar with the African-American singing group, Sweet Honey in the Rock. They have a song entitled "No Mirrors in My Nana's House." One of the singers explains how this song was created. One of her friends was telling her about growing up in a very poor neighborhood. She grew up in her grandmother's house and she said, "You know, in my nana's house there were no mirrors." Her friend asked her, "Well then, how did you know what you looked like?" "Well," she said, "my nana told me. Every morning I would get up and get dressed and comb my hair. And then I would go to my nana and I would say, 'How do I look?' She would tell me I was beautiful. She said my skin was smooth and golden brown, kissed by the sun. And she said my eyes shone like silver moonbeams. In my nana's house, there were no mirrors, so I saw myself through my nana's eyes who loved me and the beauty of everything was in her eyes."

Wow! What a wonderful gift to give a child. God help the parent who fills a child's head with negative messages, who takes out their frustrations on a little one.

Oh, I know it is not easy to care for a small child. During a flood, one family sent its little boy to stay with an uncle in another part of the state accompanied by a letter explaining the reason for the nephew's sudden and unexpected visit. Two days later, the parents received a telegram: "Am returning boy. Send the flood." Those of you who have little ones in your household understand. It is not easy being a parent. It's a challenge. But somehow, we need to grab hold of our own emotions from time to time so that we can communicate to our children that they really are the center of our attention, that they have inestimable worth in our eyes. We help them develop inner peace when they get positive messages about themselves.

Here, let me tell you about a man named Walter whose mother helped him find God. When Walter was a child, he thought he was the only person in church who couldn't see Jesus. His mother took him to church every week. He noticed the joy

and the peace that radiated from the church members' faces. He wanted to meet this Jesus whom they talked about; but he had never even seen Jesus in his church. So little Walter went on a quest to find Jesus. He searched all over his Sunday school classroom but found no signs of Jesus. He crawled under the pews but still didn't spot Jesus. He poked his head in the pastor's office. He even sneaked up to the pulpit and looked. No Jesus.

Finally, little Walter thought of one room, holy and mysterious, into which he never dared venture...the Ladies' Rest Room! That must be the place where Jesus hung out. So that Sunday Walter worked up his courage and sneaked into the ladies' rest room. He checked all the stalls, but Jesus was nowhere to be found. Walter returned to church just in time for Holy Communion. Ordinarily he paid little attention to this sacred ritual. But this time he noticed how peaceful and happy his mother looked after eating the bread and drinking from the cup. He leaned in close to her, sensing that she bore the answer to his quest.

"Mama, what is that?" She tried to overlook him but he wouldn't give up. "What is that, Mama? What is that smell?" She finally replied, "Oh, that is Jesus. It is Jesus inside of me." And little Walter finally understood a tiny piece of the mystery. Jesus wasn't lost. Jesus was living inside of Mama. Some of us probably wouldn't have found Jesus if he hadn't lived inside our mama or our papa or our grandparents or some other loving adult. That's how we come to Jesus. We come through the influence of someone very close to us whom we love and admire.

And so the question for every mother this day—indeed a question for every adult—could a child sense Jesus in your life? Could a young person find faith in your witness? What we want for our children is the same thing Jesus wanted for his Disciples—a peace that the world cannot give nor take away. We can help them by having a sense of who they are and by showing them Jesus in our own lives!