

“A TRIBUTE TO WOMEN OF FAITH”

Easter 6C May 9, 2010 Mother's Day

Acts 16:9-15; Psalm 67;

Revelation 21:10, 22-22:5; John 5:1-9

Introduction:

I read a story about a young man whose phone rang in the middle of the night. When he groggily picked up the receiver it was a long-distance call. His heart was hammering as he heard his mother's voice, "Is that you, son?" "Mom!" he said, nervously, "is everything all right? What's wrong?" "Nothing's wrong," she told him. "It's your birthday." The young man was less than thrilled, "Good grief, you didn't drag me out of bed at 3:00 am just to say 'Happy Birthday,' did you?" "Well," she answered, "you made me get out of bed at 3:00 am 30 years ago tonight- and I felt it was high time I paid you back!"

Today is Mother's Day

a day reserved to honor mothers and recognize the importance of motherhood. It became a National Holiday in 1914, culminating a long effort to recognize and reconcile mothers whose sons had died in war, beginning after the Civil War.

God thought motherhood was significant enough that He had Jesus experience it. Think about it: the eternal Word of God, who was present with Almighty God

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at Creation, had to empty himself of all his heavenly prerogatives and agree to enter this world through the womb of a young woman chosen to become His mother. Jesus had to become an embryo within Mary; be born out of her womb into this world of the material; become an infant totally dependent on His mother's love and care for Him to survive. That is how significant motherhood is – even the Savior of the World needed to have a mother in order to be fully human. Today, on Mother's Day, I want to

Proclaim a Tribute To Women of Faith.

To do this I will mention a few women we encounter in the Bible and how their faith in God can be an example for us on our own faith journeys.

The first woman to recognize is one already mentioned, Mary, the mother of our Lord. Giving birth is probably the event for which we most remember Mary. And it's the aspect of Mary that most women who are mothers identify with. There is a certain amount of faith required for all women who are about to become mothers for the first-time, let alone under the unusual circumstances Mary went through. She found herself – in God's will – an unwed, pregnant teenager. Yet, she

humbly accepted her role, and she praised God for having chosen her for this great task!

How much faith did that take? And, there are other distinct moments where we encounter her. First, in the annunciation, an angel appears to her and tells her she will give birth to a son who will redeem God's people and be known as "Immanuel," - God with us; next, her visit to Elizabeth, who is pregnant with Jesus' cousin, John, later to be known as John the Baptist.

We next encounter Mary along with Joseph in Bethlehem searching for a place to stay, and then, giving birth to Jesus in a place no woman would consciously choose; another example of the faith she exhibited. Most folks don't really remember the next Biblical encounter; it gets passed over because of how we mix the Matthew and Luke accounts of Jesus' birth and have the Magi showing up on the night Jesus was born.

But actually, in Matthew's account, the only mention of the Magi, they don't arrive for a couple of years. Scripture says they go to a house to see the "mother and the child," and King Herod, in his attempt to kill Jesus, orders all males two years and under to be

killed. So, folks don't usually recall this account of Mary and the two year old Jesus. Like all good mothers, Mary would endure any hardship to protect her child. So, off to Egypt they go.

Then we have the wonderful scene in Luke, the only one of its kind where we see Jesus as a youth growing up, staying behind in Jerusalem while his parents think he is in the caravan returning to Nazareth. They discover he isn't there. They have to walk another day to return to Jerusalem, and after frantically searching they find him in the Temple debating with the scholars. All Mothers identify with Mary's terror at the prospect of losing her child. Jesus realizes how hurtful his actions have been to his mother and he determines to place himself under her authority until he is grown and the time is right.

Next we encounter Mary at a wedding in Cana where she asks Jesus to solve the dilemma of having run out of wine. Apparently this is a family wedding and Mary is one of the women in charge. As a result of Mary's intercession, Jesus performs his first recorded miracle. Mary, like most mothers knows she can presume on her son's time and talent; their relationship is that comfortable.

Then it's not until his crucifixion that we encounter her again as Jesus charges his beloved disciple John to take care of his mother. She is not one of the women recorded at the resurrection. There we encounter another Mary, a Mary who has gotten a really bad reputation, and quite undeservedly. The Mary I'm speaking of is Mary Magdalene. Nothing in the Bible says she was a prostitute. Nothing. Only by assuming she was the woman caught in adultery, or the sinful woman who poured expensive oil on Jesus' head, can we project upon her the role of prostitute

Yet, just like today, once such a rumor starts, it is very hard, maybe impossible, to dispel it even with proof and fact to the contrary. And, in God's providence, this Mary Magdalene, is the first person to see the risen Lord.

There is a third Mary we encounter, and that is Mary the sister of Martha. Probably the three most famous passages regarding Mary and Martha are where Mary washes Jesus' feet wiping them with her hair; where Martha complains to Jesus asking him to tell Mary to get up and help be hostess, and not just sit and soak up Jesus' teachings; and where Jesus comes to them because their brother, Lazarus, has died. It's in this

encounter that we have the first person mentioned in the Gospels – a woman - acknowledging who Jesus is. Martha runs to meet Jesus and says, "*Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who has come into the world.*"

And it is women, going to the tomb to lovingly prepare Jesus' body for final burial, who are greeted by an Angel and told that Jesus has risen. They run to tell the male disciples who don't believe them, who dismiss them as being overly emotional, maybe even hysterical. Gee, that sounds pretty current, doesn't it?

Over and over in Scripture, throughout the Old and New Testaments, women play an integral role in God's revelation of His will and manifestation through Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

We mostly concentrate on the men in the Bible, but it is the women who also labored to build and sustain the early church. Paul and other apostles went to various cities to preach the gospel and establish churches, but it is women like Priscilla (1 Corinthians 16:19), who kept the church going by opening their homes for gatherings of the believers. There were also women, like Lydia of Thyatira,

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who was a successful merchant in purple cloth, who took in Paul and Silas and supported them as they spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

There were many women whose names are known but who seldom receive the credit they're due. But they didn't do it to garner fame for themselves; their acts were in service to the Lord, and in faithfulness to their witness

about Jesus, the risen Christ.

It's only through the grace of God that the church has survived to this day. And the grace of God has been manifest in women throughout the ages. We know of women mentioned in the Bible from whom we can draw examples of courage, faith and devotion. But God didn't stop creating amazing women. Every congregation that exists today exists through the love and labor of a cadre of dedicated women.

God includes us in the plan of redemption by asking us to be part of it. We are given an opportunity to play some role. We can accept it or not. If you choose not to, you can be sure that God will find someone else, but

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we will have lost out on the special role God intended for you. God isn't done with us if we choose not to accept a particular role, and will ask us again and as long as we live. The longer we take to accept, the longer we'll be losing out on the blessings of becoming a partner with God in the drama of salvation.

Some women accept role after role. God keeps asking them when they have finished one role, to accept another. Even in sickness God will still ask us to accept a role. It's not the role of being sick, but the role of not being overwhelmed by the sickness. Amazing women, amazing grace. We experience the grace of God through our Savior, Jesus Christ, and also through different women God chooses to be the bearer of that grace. God chose women named Mary, and Martha, and Lydia, and Deborah, and Miriam, and Sarah and God has chosen you. Listen again to verse one from our Sequence Hymn: *For all the faithful women Who served in days of old, To you shall thanks be given; To all their story told. They served with strength and gladness In tasks your wisdom gave. To you their lives bore witness, Proclaimed your pow'r to save."*

Happy Mother's Day!