

WHEN GOD IS LIKE A MOTHER
JOHN 14:22-27

Dr. J. Howard Olds
May 11, 2008

Two occasions of celebration bring us together at worship today. On the Church calendar today is Pentecost Sunday, a day to celebrate the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit, a day to sing 'Happy Birthday, Church.' On the secular calendar today is Mother's Day. God could not be everywhere so he created mothers; or as Erma Bombeck used to say, "Mothers need 180 movable parts, 3 pairs of hands, and 3 sets of eyes." So, Mom, today is your day to bask in the sunshine and let someone else fix lunch.

When I think of God moving over the waters of creation, I call the Creator my heavenly Father. When I think that God his Son not sparing sent him to die, I think of Christ as my brother. But when I consider God to be omnipresent, everywhere, the one who helps and nurtures his children each day, I consider the Holy Spirit of God to be my mother. And that's what I want to talk about today.

LIKE A GOOD MOTHER, THE HOLY SPIRIT BRINGS US NEW BIRTH

"I didn't ask to be born," screams Dennis the Menace as he is dragged off to his room for misbehaving. Later Dennis laments, "There's another one that doesn't work any more." Technically speaking, Dennis is right. None of us ask to be born.

Birth is something that happens to us. While I have had enough sex education to understand that fathers participate in the creation of life, I suggest that birth is primarily a motherly affair. A mother's body changes with pregnancy. She feels the first movement of life, the pains of labor, and the ecstasy of delivery. While a father is elated, it is the mother who first senses that this child is flesh of my flesh and bone of my bones. Indeed this child is life from my life.

Jesus said to Nicodemus – *You must be born from above.* Just as there is a physical birth there is a spiritual birth. Most of my life I have read that statement and concentrated on the MUST – something to accomplish, produce. New birth is something I caused to happen. Nothing could be farther from the truth.

The wind blows wherever it wills, you hear the sounds it makes, but you do not know where it comes from nor where it is going. It is like that with everyone who is born of the Spirit.

Birth from above is not manipulated into being. It is a free gift of God.

David Tyree, a receiver for the New York Giants, made a fabulous catch from Eli Manning that helped the Giants win the Super Bowl 17-14 over the Patriots last winter. David became an instant star on the football field. But that was far from

being true in his personal life. David had started consuming large amounts of alcohol in Junior High. He smoked marijuana through college, got busted for selling drugs to pay off fines. He had a pregnant girl friend that was threatening to leave him. In that place where there was no peace, David Tyree started reading the Bible. The Holy Spirit turned his life around. Today he is sober, married, and attends church every week. That's what God can do for you – Give you a brand new birth!

LIKE A GOOD MOTHER THE HOLY SPIRIT TEACHES AND NURTURES US.
But the Counselor will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.

What are the top five things parents teach their children? They teach them to sit up, to eat, to control their bowel movements, to dress themselves and to act responsibly in the world.

The military, concerned about uprooting families in multiple deployments to Iraq, has a new program called Heroes at Home. It is a mentoring program for mothers with young children teaching them basic techniques of caring for a child. "I always thought my Mom would be the one to sit down and show me how to do things with my first child, but Mom is far away," says one participant in the program. Somebody needs to teach us the basics.

What are the top five things the Holy Spirit teaches us? The Holy Spirit teaches us to remember Jesus, to learn the scriptures, to love God, to live holy lives and to walk by faith.

That's pretty basic stuff. We need the Holy Spirit beside us to guide us, direct us, lead us, and instruct us lest we miss the way. Like a good mother, the Holy Spirit does that for us.

The Holy Spirit nurtures us. The Prophet Isaiah asked "Can a woman forget her own baby and not love the child she bore?" Then, as if remembering some rare example of a mother's abandonment, Isaiah exclaims "even if a mother should forget her child, God will never forget you." You will be like a child that is nursed by its mother, carried in her arms, treated with love.

The dominant symbol of the Christian faith is the cross, towering o'er the wrecks of time. But that has not always been the case. In the 12th through 15th centuries the predominant symbol of the Christian faith was Mary nursing the infant Jesus while looking out upon the world. In a time of plagues, wars, and malnutrition, the Virgin's breast was a symbol of God's loving provision of life. People were invited to find comfort in the bosom of Mary.

There is a hunger in the human soul to lean on the everlasting arms, and nurse from a fountain that never runs dry. Our souls long to be rocked in the bosom of

the Almighty. Let some soul near despair in the lowlands of strife be so filled with the Holy Spirit today that you will go home knowing you are never alone.

LIKE A GOOD MOTHER, THE HOLY SPIRIT LOVES US WITH A LOVE THAT WON'T END.

Years ago, when I was a student pastor, there was a family in my small church with seven boys. They were successful farmers who worked hard and went to church on Sundays. But like most families, one of those seven boys lost his way. He got to drinking too much. His wife left him. He lost a good teaching position he had held in Louisville for many years. With no where else to go, Tom came home to live with his parents and manipulate them into supporting his wayward ways. We who loved them watched them age while enduring the pain. One day, armed with a course in 101 psychology, I went to visit the parents. We talked about Tom and his troubles, and eventually I said, "You know, if Tom were my boy, I'd let him go. He's made his bed, and he's going to have to lie in it." On I went with my well-rehearsed speech trying to rescue these parents. When I finally ran down a bit, Tom's mother spoke up and said, "You know, if Tom were your boy I'd let him go too. But he's not your boy. He's my boy and I will love him all the way to the grave." Which is exactly what she did. Mothers love like that.

Henri Nouwen, upon the death of his mother, wrote a small book entitled *In Memoriam*. It is an intimate account of the power of a mother to influence a son. Nouwen writes: "From her I had come to feel an unqualified acceptance which had little to do with my being good or bad, successful or unsuccessful, close by or far away. In her I had come to sense a love that was free from demands and manipulations, a love that gave me a sense of belonging that could be found nowhere else."

When I was growing up, we referred to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit as the Baptism of Love. We were not much on hollering, shouting, speaking in tongues or getting slain in the Spirit, but we were sincere about being filled with a love that had no end.

That's what the Holy Spirit does. She loves you with a love that won't end.

Once upon a time a woman went on a cruise. She was short on cash so she became very careful about her spending. When dinner time came, she dined in her room on crackers and other snacks, hoping to save money. On the last night of the cruise, she finally decided to join the rest of the passengers in the dining room. There she was delightfully served a delicious meal. Only when she went to pay for her last meal on the ship did she discover that all the meals all week long were part of the package.

The Holy Spirit is part of the package offered to Christians. Why settle for anything less?

