

Mother's Day Reflections - 5/8/2016

How has being a parent impacted my spirituality?

Kelly Bohrer

I've had the joy of becoming a mother in two different ways - through adopting and through giving birth. Each way brings its own unique joys, challenges, tears, fears, hope, and love. Both ways gave me ample time to think about what was about to happen, but neither way fully prepared me for what truly was about to happen. Both ways change your heart and change your world. Both are beautiful and sacred. And I am forever thankful for both.

As a mother of two boys I don't think there is a minute to rest, so I am stealing a few minutes at almost midnight to have some quiet time to write this reflection. I can't quite seem to put what I feel about being a mother into words - perhaps it is too quiet, perhaps I am just super tired, or perhaps it is because the love of a mother goes beyond words and thoughts and just can't be explained. But, I'll try...

I have always loved how the bible mentions that Mary "ponders these things in her heart." Although I am not quite sure how she got the time to ponder with a boy on her hands, I can identify with that sense of pondering. Each night I ponder in my heart what happened that day - the cute things said, the eyes rolled at me, the climb up into a tree, the uncompleted and messy homework, the kiss good-night. I also ponder if my responses to my boys were out of love and patience or out of authority and ego. I ponder if I was the perfect mom for my boys that day - would I get the "best mom ever" award that day or the "needs work on many virtues" award for the day? Or, perhaps both awards each day?

The pondering leads me to the fact that I am not perfect nor will I ever be perfect. However, I can offer to my boys more important things = who I am along with love, hope, safety, food, laughter, experiences, gentleness, empathy, and determination to help my boys be the best people they can be. The pondering gets me through the moments of hardship and into moments of walking silently together along a road magically filled with twinkling fireflies.

Motherhood has made me more patient and much better at listening, truly listening, to people's needs and stepping into people's shoes to understand their world. It allows me to ask better questions, to point out more ways that God is adding goodness to the world, to be more determined and faithful, to never give up, and to laugh at myself more.

Motherhood has also made me appreciate other mothers - my mom, my mother-in-law, my sisters and aunts and cousins and friends who are mothers, etc. How much love they have shared with me, how much love they share with their

children. How much they dedicate their time, energy, and love to raising one of God's own gifts to our world. WOW!

As a mom, I have also learned so much about the sacrifices mothers have to make and the challenges they must go through and that it does take a village to raise a family. So, my prayers are always for the mothers who don't have the support I have, who were not able to have good role models, who do not have a lot of resources, who fear for their children's lives everyday because of race, war, violence, poverty, mental illness, drugs, etc. Let's keep these moms in our prayers always.

And, last but not least, because of how challenging motherhood has been while also so joyful and life giving, I ponder how we can better support other moms as moms - how can we avoid being critical of how well they are or are not doing. Avoid being critical of their children and how they act or don't act. There are days I need someone to just smile at me and say, "bedtime is soon, tomorrow is another day." We all need to share that smile with each other, to encourage each other on, to provide respite relief, to cry together, to laugh together, to sing and dance together. Motherhood is tough. Motherhood is great. Motherhood is life changing. Motherhood is..... WOW!

Now, on to that changing water into wine...

Tanya Groff

Becoming a mother has been one of the most wonderful blessings of my life. I was given a greater purpose the day I became a mom, God was entrusting me to guide my girls towards God's purpose for their life. I have had the greatest joy of having the opportunity to be needed. I became anew again by living through them, seeing all the wonders of this beautiful creation, the world and everything that it is. I have experienced the feeling of unconditional love which has made me open to loving others even more deeply. Motherhood has helped me to understand God's purpose for my life. I feel my relationship with God has grown stronger since becoming a mother. My children are a legacy for my life and all I was sent here to do for the Glory of God.

Luisa Watts

Being a mother has impacted my life in innumerable ways. From the beginning, I was astounded by the lack of control I had over something that my body was making. When the baby was born, again he had his own personality that I had to learn to understand. Having worked hard all my life to get what I wanted, I was surprised by how little I had to do for him to grow. It seemed so simple: just love him, give him the milk that my body was already making for him & keep him clean. Things that came so naturally and instinctual -- much like the birthing process: somehow my body just knew what to do. The simplicity of it all was

beautiful. As my boys have grown up, it is still sometimes a surprise that they are their own thinking beings and come up with ideas, likes and dislikes so different from my own. I have experienced the extremes of all emotions being their mother: extreme love, extreme frustration, extreme happiness, extreme confusion, and I have never known fear so greatly either. Being a mother has also increased my understanding of the human life cycle and to have compassion for other mothers and families around the world.

Jeanne Holcomb

So when I first heard that Fr. Tom invited us to talk about the connections between parenting and spirituality, I laughed a little. I thought to myself – well, I could talk about how my patience is tested almost every single day, how mass is a very different experience with kids, how I feel like I'm on repeat play talking about the importance of love and respect for all God's people and creation, or about how dinner time prayers often devolve into wildly off-topic conversations. There were so many options! At first glance, it seemed as though parenting and a healthy spirituality were not the most mutually supportive elements of life, at least in my experience.

And then I spent some time this past week thinking about it, and I was drawn to reflecting on Mary's experiences of parenting. While I don't know a whole lot about her experience as a mother, or about her relationship with Jesus, I think there are stories in the bible that are rather insightful, like the ones about the trip home from the temple, the wedding feast, and her presence at the crucifixion. Fr. Tom said to try to keep it close to two minutes, so I'll focus just on the temple

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Every year Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the Festival of the Passover. ⁴²When he was twelve years old, they went up to the festival, according to the custom. ⁴³After the festival was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it. ⁴⁴Thinking he was in their company, they traveled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends. ⁴⁵When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him. ⁴⁶After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. ⁴⁷Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers. ⁴⁸When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you." ⁴⁹"Why were you searching for me?" he asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?"^[a]

The scripture passage goes on to say, "Mary kept these things in her heart." I think this can show us that children are full of surprises, and at times, can have their own valuable knowledge that we may not fully understand. They can be

wise beyond their years, or sometimes their simple statements can be quite profound, or sometimes they encourage us to look at things from a different perspective. If we “hold these things in our hearts,” I think we can be transformed by them. Children can be great teachers, sources of insight, if we open ourselves in that way.

So how, specifically, has my spirituality been impacted by my experiences with parenting? Well, to start, there are times in my life where I would consider it fair to say that I was not a person of strong faith, where I doubted and questioned, and wanted rational answers, and did not want to feel God’s presence. In one of the bits of a homily that I actually heard between my children’s requests to go get a drink, or go to the bathroom, or to know how much longer mass would be, Fr. Tom mentioned that the manner in which a mother comforts a child can be a genuinely faithful act. That struck me, and I held it in my heart. I think, most fundamentally, my kids have encouraged me to think about what it really means to be a person of faith and what it means to be a member of the catholic church. If I truly want my kids to believe in goodness of the world, if I encourage them to have the faith that things will be okay, if I want them to know that God really, truly loves them, if I want them to be able to experience the significance of faith community, then I also need to believe and know and act upon those things, or else I fear I am giving them empty words. I’ve had to hold things in my heart, in ways that I don’t think I would’ve without their prompting.

So – while kids can certainly challenge us and push us to our edges, that’s not necessarily a bad thing, because it’s usually at the edges, when we’re pushed beyond, that we can encounter our own growth, if we allow it. I imagine Mary might have been a little pushed beyond, when she found Jesus after days of looking for him, and he said, “Why were you searching? You should’ve known where I was.” But she simply held all these things in her heart. I wonder how often we allow ourselves to take things in, to hold them in our hearts, to take the time to reflect on them, such that they can help us grow in our own spirituality. Or are we so sidetracked by the chaos and unpredictability, the daily frustrations that exist in parenting, that we lose sight of how to hold all these things in our hearts? While we often think of ourselves as teaching and guiding our children, I think our children can also be the wisest of guides, if we allow ourselves to hold in our hearts the wisdom, and the mysteries, and the challenges they present to us.