

Easter 7
 St. Paul's/Resurrección, Mount Vernon, WA
 Mother's Day

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 Rev. Paul Moore

Mothering and Othering

I remember very well one time when I was in my late 30's. All of us siblings were grown with families of our own. We were all discussing Thanksgiving and Christmas, and how to manage the needs of in-law families with that of our own. We settled on a plan, and then my mother referred to us as "my children."

I countered, "Mother, I'm not a child anymore." After all, we had been making very adult decisions about balancing expectations between families.

She looked at me with one of those patient looks that says, "You'll understand someday," and responded, "You may be all grown up, but you'll always be my children."

Now, of course, my own children are on their own, with their own families, and we have the same kinds of conversations. I now understand what my mother meant. I don't care how old they get; they will always be our children. Now, I am not a mother, but I live with one. If her children are well, she is well. If they are not, it troubles her soul. If I can say anything about motherhood, it's that those who mother, invest incredible effort and resources into the ones they mother. There seems to be no ceiling to the price willing to be paid.

Happy Mother's Day to all of you who mother, whatever your gender. May your children be well, and God grant you what you need to pay the price you pay.

In today's lesson we see Jesus being like a mother. The Scriptures abound with descriptions of God that match traditional mothering roles, "I bore you in my bosom," "I carried you on my hip," "I would gather you as a mother hen her chicks," etc. The tradition of Christian mystical writings are also full of such references. Here is one from someone who, for all that we know, never actually bore children, yet she speaks eloquently of Christ as mother. Julian of Norwich writes,

And furthermore, I saw that the Second Person, which is our Mother as anent the Substance, that same dear worthy Person is become our Mother as anent the Sense-soul. For we are keeping as anent our Sense-soul: our restoring and our saving; for He is our Mother, Brother, and Saviour. And in our good Lord, the Holy Ghost, we have our rewarding and our meed-giving for our living and our travail, and endless overpassing of all that we desire, in His marvelous courtesy, of His high plenteous grace. For all our life is in three: in the first we have our

Being, in the second we have our Increasing, and in the third we have our Fulfilling: the first is Nature, the second is Mercy, and the third is Grace. For the first, I understood that the high Might of the Trinity is our Father, and the deep Wisdom of the Trinity is our Mother, and the great Love of the Trinity is our Lord: and all this have we in Nature and in the making of our Substance.¹

Today's Gospel lesson paints a picture of Jesus with a mother's heart. He knows that the Cross is coming, he knows that it will change everything, and he knows that in the end he will ascend to heaven and the Holy Spirit will come. His mother's heart seems to worry about his children. Will they be OK? He's done everything he can do so far for them, and he is about to pay the greatest price any mother can ever pay, so he does what he knows to do: he prays.

He prays that they may be a harmonious family, gathered around their love for one another, their unity with him in the Father, and their mission to the world. He prays, not that they be separated from the world, for he sends them into it. He knows that the world will treat them as "other," and that it won't be easy, but he also knows that the true enemy is not the world, it is the evil one: The one that can come and sow discord; the one who can point at the otherness of others and blame it for one's discomfort; the one who can push the good purposes of the ego and our natural ethnocentrism beyond their proper places, to where, imagining it the path to safety, they justify violence and exclusion.

Truth be told, we have a host of mothers who are "other." When I was very young, living among the Tsachi people, they would often come to the house after their work day. Part of the arrangement to allow us to live in the tribe, was that Dad would run a small store. They would come and buy essentials, and often purchase sodas, and sit around on the porch to visit. When they went home, I would often tag along, unbeknownst to my own mother. After a while one of the Indian family I had followed would notice me, and an older girl would take me by the hand and bring me home, mothering me, even though they were to some extent "other."

There are many such "other mothers" in my life, some of whom did not share a common language, whose culture was only superficially known. We all have them, "other mothers." They pay a price to mother us, and we should be grateful.

My challenge to you this Mother's Day is this:

Can you allow the "other mothers" to care for you, to influence you, to teach you wisdom and compassion? Can the folks in Resurrección, or especially individuals within that congregation, mother us? Can we open our hearts as we would to a mother, learn to appreciate the wisdom of spontaneous activity, the power of emotion shared and the

¹ Julian of Norwich. Revelations of Divine Love (Kindle Locations 1628-1634). Kindle Edition

beauty of different symbols? Can we let them guide us in finding joy in family, food and fiesta? Can we learn to be family?

Can we rise to the challenge of mothering the "other?" You all heard the Rev. Baudelina's plea on her last Sunday here before leaving for her curacy. "Take care of Resurrección." In other words "mother my people..." Can we carefully build family, making sure that each member and each constituent body has equity of voice? Can we go to the work of learning to build and work in multicultural teams and managing multicultural spaces? Can we learn to share insights on leadership development, financial management, organizational structure and pastoral care? Can we learn to be family?

Can we mother and be mothered by the "others" who live with us here?