

MOTHERHOOD

Ian Pinto, sdb

Victor Hugo wrote a story in his last book *Ninety Three*. It was about a French lady who had two children. They were driven away from their home after the Revolution and had to face harsh conditions. They had no food or shelter and with the cold winter arriving, death seemed imminent. One day as they were trudging around looking for some scraps of food to satiate their growing hunger they were greeted by the sound of two soldiers coming their way. Instinctually, the woman gathered her kids and hid in the bushes. The two soldiers, a captain and a sergeant were busy in their conversation when they noticed a bush nearby shaking slightly. The captain ordered the sergeant to check who was stirring the bushes. The sergeant did as he was ordered and discovered the frail, starving woman holding on tightly to her children. The captain took pity on them and asked the sergeant to give them a loaf of bread. The children's eyes lit up with joy on seeing the food. On receiving the loaf, the woman thanked the soldiers and proceeded to divided it into two pieces, giving one piece to each child. The captain was surprised at her action and asked aloud, "Is it because she isn't hungry?" to which the sergeant replied, "No, it's because she's a mother."

This is quite a touching story



and does give rise to some very warm feelings for it touches a sensitive area in almost every person's life: the mother-child relation. This connection between mother and child begins from the first moment the child is conceived. Over the course of the child's development within the mother's womb it forms a bond that lasts well into life. This bond is vital and sacred as it goes a long way in forming and molding the child into the person he/she becomes. Numerous psychological studies have been conducted to investigate various psychological characteristics and surprisingly many of them have been traced back to the pre-natal and early childhood. This goes to show that these periods are crucial to the later development and character formation of the child. The one person who plays a dominant and crucial role during this delicately important period is the mother.

Mothers are the most wonderful creatures on earth. The Jewish proverb captures this sentiment well when it says, "God

couldn't be everywhere so he created mothers." Mothers are like superheroes without capes. They juggle a multitude of responsibilities and make it seem like child's play. In most families, the mother cooks, does the housecleaning, laundry, child-rearing and so much more besides holding a stable job. She works as much as her husband at the workplace and is just as tired but comes home and takes up her household chores as if that's all she has to do. She seldom complains and rarely has a holiday since nobody can go a day without food or a clean pair of clothes!

Even though others may have a holiday, mothers don't. Their job and responsibility as mothers is a full-time activity that doesn't allow them a moments rest. The role they play and responsibility they shoulder is crucial and is in fact a service to the whole human race. Think about it, without mothers where would we be? First of all, we wouldn't be born. Even if we were born by some unimaginable means, we wouldn't be nurtured, supported and raised by someone who is capable of giving us much more than life. We would be missing out on a lot of the most basic human experiences: the experience of security, love, self-sacrifice, tenderness and freedom. These are necessary not just in helping us develop a healthy personality but in making us human.

A young boy said to his mother, "Mommy, you are a fairy." She laughed at his childish innocence. He reiterated once again, "I

am serious, mother. You know everything." My child", the mother replied, "I try to answer all your questions as best as I can. When you grow older, you will not need me." Immediately the boy retorted, "No mom, I will always need you. Nothing can change that."

I think this is a real experience for many of us. No matter how big or rich or famous we have become we cannot be so ignorant and conceited to think that it was all our own doing. We would be nothing without our mothers, and yes, we do need them. No matter how old we've grown we will always desire and cherish the warmth and support that our mothers give us. They needn't even touch us, their presence itself exudes security and motivation. God knew what He was doing when He made mothers.

WOMAN AS CO-CREATOR

God said, "Let us make man in our image, to our likeness. Let them rule over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, over the cattle, over the wild animals, and over all creeping things that crawl along the ground." So God created man in his image; in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number, fill the earth and subdue it, rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the sky, over every living creature that moves on the ground" (Gen 1:26-28).

God created human beings in his own image and likeness and

bestowed on them the power to carry forward His work of creation. He made them co-workers with Him in the work of creation and also gave them the responsibility to take creation forward. This task belongs to both man and woman for it is only together that they can truly “be fruitful and increase”. Despite contrary opinions, man and woman are designed to be one. The second creation story in Genesis shows woman being created from the rib of man. Upon seeing her Man said, “Now this is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh. She will be called woman because she was taken from man. That is why man leaves his father and mother and is attached to his wife, and with her becomes one flesh” (Gen 2:23-24).



Man and woman received a divine vocation: to be co-creators. This is both a gift and a responsibility to be used appropriately and in accordance with the Will of God. They complement one another in fulfilling this mission and contribute their own unique resources. It is this uniqueness that gives rise to such diversity within creation. No two beings are alike and their diversity does not simply lie in their

genetic make-up but also in their environmental nurture. Hence, even a pair of identical twins who are similar in most ways, can turn out to be poles apart in terms of likes and dislikes.

It is in this capacity as co-creator that a woman partakes of motherhood. “The man called his wife by the name of Eve, because she was the mother of all the living” (Gen 3:20). Motherhood is intrinsically connected to one’s vocation of co-creator. Fecundity and child-birth are only secondary characteristics of motherhood. Hence, motherhood is available to all women irrespective of marriage and children. By the very fact that one is a woman, she is called to be a mother. For this reason, even women who choose to remain single either because of their religious vocation or otherwise share in the common motherhood that is bestowed on the female race. In the act of bearing children one becomes a mother in a direct and real way but this does not restrict one’s motherhood merely to one’s own progeny although it ought to be primarily directed toward them.

HOME-MAKER

The first thing a marriage accomplishes is that it creates a basic unit of society and the Church, namely, the family. In the coming together of a man and a woman, no more as two but as one, the family takes on its distinctive character. It becomes a reflection of the image and likeness of God since it was in and through the divine image and

likeness that man and woman were created and ordained to the creative vocation. Hence, the church teaches that marriage aims at the good of spouses and the procreation of children. This is what a family is about: it is the space where new life can take root and blossom and where each person finds the resources to realize his/her divine destiny.

In this regard, a woman has a delicate and powerful role. She is the one who transforms a house into a home by exercising her creative capacity and feminine influence. Being a home-maker is a tough job. It demands a lot of work and is quite stressful. Unfortunately, this task is often reserved for women. While women may be better equipped to take up this responsibility, by no means is it only her job! The father is equally responsible for building a home and this doesn’t stop with the nurturing of children but also implies sharing in the other household responsibilities. It is a common misconception among men to think that being a home-maker is a feminine thing. It isn’t actually, it is a human thing!

Mothers are capable of building up the home and family in more ways than one. Besides the most basic functions that she performs, feeding the family, cleaning the surroundings and looking after the upkeep of the members, she also nurtures and educates the children and supports and cares for her husband. She is, in most cases at least, the focal point around which the whole family moves. The impor-

tance of a mother within a family cannot be stressed enough.

As the wife of President John Adams, Abigail Adams (1744 – 1818) was the second First Lady of the United States. Because her husband was often away from home for work, she often single-handedly ran their farm, wrote letters supporting equal rights for women and the abolition of slavery, and educated their five kids—including future president John Quincy Adams. Quincy Adams wrote: “My mother was an angel upon earth. She was a minister of blessing to all human beings within her sphere of action. Her heart was the abode of heavenly purity... She was the real personification of female virtue, of piety, of charity, of ever active and never intermitting benevolence.”

Mothers have the capacity to bring God close to the members of their family as well as to all other people they encounter. Through her activity as a mother she reflects the divine motherhood of God. She reveals the kindness, compassion, predilection and motivation that God gives to each of his children. She is also her children’s first educator and also their first link to the world. So a mother reflects God and the world to her children quite literally especially in the early stages of life. The image she reflects will be the foundation from which the child will later respond or react and therefore the value of the jewel that is the mother cannot be underestimated. □