

My dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Last weekend we had First Communion in our parish. A visiting Grandmother told me this story. She was babysitting her darling Granddaughter who had recently lost her front teeth, that caused her to talk with a bit of a lisp. Since the child was soon to make her First Communion, before bedtime, Grandma, who isn't Catholic, thought she would read to her from her Bible, which was the King James version. She read such words as "sayeth" and "hath" and "doth", and so on. Sleepily, the little girl asked, "Grandma, did God's teeth fall out too?" I always wondered why the King James version read like that...

A young family recently moved into the parish. In meeting them, I asked the children how they liked their new home. The 8 year old son said, "It's really great. I have my own room and so do my other brothers. We all have our own rooms...except poor Mom, she's still in with Dad...and he snores really loud. Poor Mom, indeed..."

Little Andrew, one of the 4 year olds in our Early Learning Center recently set off his Mother by spilling his juice all over the new carpet. As she screamed in frustration, little Andrew looked up with tears in his eyes and said, "Mommy, you forgot to ask Jesus to help you be nice today, didn't you?" Do we teach our kids right—or what?

Finally, a missionary priest visiting a neighboring parish was encouraging people to volunteer to help out in his work in Haiti. At the end of the service, a woman dragging a little boy who had been carrying on throughout the Mass, came to the missionary and said she was interested. She said, "I always felt God was calling me to be a missionary." "He is indeed," said the missionary, and pointing to the little boy said, "And there's the little heathen he wants you to preach to."

HAPPY MOTHERS' DAY!!! It's not easy being a Mom. A recent study shows that by the time a child reaches 18, a mother had to handle some 18,000 hours of extra child-generated work. In fact, says this study, women who never have children enjoy the equivalent of an extra three months a year in leisure time! WOW! It really isn't easy being a Mom. It requires sacrificial love, the like of which can only be found in God.

Today Jesus compares his love for us, not just as the Good Shepherd, who cares for and leads us, but serves as the "sheep gate" through which the sheep enter and leave. We can only understand this imagery if we understand that once the shepherd has led his sheep into the fenced in area which is the sheepfold, he lays down at the entrance himself so the sheep will not wander off, because they will only follow the shepherd. And anyone who tries to disturb his sheep will have to enter over his body, which he has laid down for his sheep.

Such is the love that Christ has for us! Not unlike the love many of us have first experienced in the sacrificial love of our Mothers.

It was a cool, blustery day in late March or early April, I believe, because I remember that the forsythia along the back of our yard were in full bloom. Somehow or another I managed to stay home from school that day. Was I sick? Or, more likely, was I faking it? I was six or seven years old—so long ago I can't quite remember. But, I remember laying on one of those old metal gliders, wrapped in a blanket, as my Mother hung out the wash, that was billowing up as she hung the clothes to dry in the warm Spring sun (that was in the day before clothes dryers). When she finished, she came sat down with me and rested my head in her lap, as she gently caressed my brow (which back then was covered with hair). I remember that moment because it was the first time in my life that I felt completely, unconditionally loved.

From that moment to this, each time I hear of God's love or reflect on it, or, especially, when I have experienced it, it feels just like that, my Mother holding me close and gently caressing my forehead. It is in our Mothers' love for us, my dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ, that we first experience the love that God has for us

Jesus provides the beautiful image of his love for us as the Good Shepherd who lays down his body as the sheepgate to protect and care for his sheep, but it is our Mothers, who in loving us so completely, sacrificially, and unconditionally, that actually experience the love that God has for each of us.

Thank you, Mommy, for showing me God's love. Thank you God for giving me my Mother's love.

Thank you, Moms! Have a Happy Mothers' Day!