

Fourth Sunday of Easter
Year C
May 8, 2022

Acts 9:36-43
Revelation 7:9-17
John 10:22-30
Psalm 23

Mother's Day 2022

Today, as you may know, is Mother's Day. According to History.com, this holiday was created by Anna Jarvis in 1908 to celebrate the work of her mother, Ann Reeves Jarvis, who created Mother's Day Work Clubs to teach women how to "properly" care for children. Anna Jarvis, the daughter, "had originally conceived of Mother's Day as a day of personal celebration between mothers and families. Her version of the day involved wearing a white carnation as a badge and visiting one's mother or attending church services. But once Mother's Day became a national holiday (in 1914), it was not long before florists, card companies, and other merchants capitalized on its popularity." Jarvis was upset by this commercialization. She spoke out against what the day had become, and for most of her later years, she fought to get Mother's Day removed from the American calendar.¹

I understand her dismay. While cards, flowers, and gifts of appreciation are lovely to receive, many mothers would benefit so much more from the kind of support that helps them and their families thrive. Many mothers need good and affordable housing, stable sources of income, healthy food, assistance with childcare, healthcare, family leave policies, and safe schools and communities, so their children can grow into healthy adults. Mothers also need support and care for themselves. In addition to financial, social, and other resources, mothers could benefit if society acknowledged the tolls and stressors motherhood can have on their

¹ Source: <https://www.history.com/topics/holidays/mothers-day>. Retrieved May 8, 2022

mental health. We need to remove the stigmatization that prevents mothers from seeking mental health services, especially if they are experiencing post-partum depression.

The COVID pandemic teaches us a lot about what it takes to be a parent. Especially when economic, social, and emotional supports are limited or nonexistent. As a faith community, we need to acknowledge that it is not enough to “celebrate” motherhood. We need to advocate for mothers, educate ourselves about their needs, and support the women who embrace one of the most challenging jobs a person could have, raising and nurturing children.

I also think we need to adjust our perceptions and expectations of motherhood. Having grown up in the 1950s, I remember those television commercials and situation comedies that portrayed mothers doing things like vacuuming in a chiffon dress, pearls, and high heels. Who does that? I remember reading a guide for women also written in the 1950s on “how to be a good housewife.” It included making sure the children were fed and quiet before hubby came home. It told women to fix themselves up, look pretty, and maybe put a bow in their hair. The guide told women to have his slippers and a drink ready and make things as wonderful for him as possible because, after all, he’s had a hard day. Hmmm, maybe she did too?

It was not much better in the 1970s. I recall one commercial showing a woman who went to work all day, and when she brought that bacon home, she fried it up in a pan and had it on the table faster than you could say; what’s for dinner? Sadly, too many women are still trying to manage two full-time jobs, work, and family, with little or no support.

Unrealistic expectations are stressful. Judgments and comparisons cause suffering and discontent. And while it is great to recognize our mothers, one day each year that includes breakfast in bed will not make up for all the criticisms, unwanted advice, and lack of support many mothers experience. We can do better. We can listen to what women say about what they need; that will be helpful. We can offer childcare so mom can have a couple of hours to do what she needs to do for her care and personal growth. We can advocate for policies that help mothers experiencing poverty and difficulty feeding and housing their children. We can

work to ensure that our mothers and their children don't just survive; we can ensure that they thrive.

I receive a daily newsletter from the author, Ann Voskamp. I love her writing because she eloquently expresses her faith in God in gentle, kind, and compassionate ways. Here are a few things she said about motherhood in this week's newsletter:

- "It (motherhood) is kinda hard and tender."
 - "The work of every parent is to give the best they know how now-and the work of every child is to forgive their parents the best they can now."
 - "There is always grace coming to meet all of us."
 - "You need to carry out your mothering the best you can, the Shepherd carries your babies close to His heart, and he is the one responsible for carrying your babies home."
 - "God is ultimately the shepherd of our children, we just have to keep faithfully carrying on."
- And
- "You will get things wrong, you the prodigal parent with prodigal kids, and you and the kids will both make wrong turns, only to turn and find the arms of the Shepherd who left everything to come and find you and gently lead you all the way through."²

Her thoughts about co-parenting with Jesus are profound. In today's Gospel, Jesus tells us that His sheep hear His voice. He knows us, and we know Him. No one will snatch us out of His hand. Mothers do their part; Jesus takes care of everything else. Let go and let God.

Now I want to say a few things about how challenging this day can be for some folks. My mom died when I was twenty-two. She was my best friend, which is kind of amazing because I was a very moody and difficult teenager. She stuck by me, though, and after I left home at eighteen, we began to have a different relationship—one of mutual respect, understanding, support, love, and compassion. I grieve for all the conversations we never had and all the life experiences we did not share. I miss her very much.

² Voskamp, Ann. The Daily (Good) News Letter, May 6, 2022

Losing one's mother can be life-altering. Since my dad died when I was seventeen, I suddenly discovered what it meant to be an orphan. It took years for me to stop looking for gifts for my mom when I went shopping. I kept her eyeglasses for decades until I could finally put them in the Lions' Club donation box here at church about two years ago. There is no time limit on grief. Grief may ebb and flow, and like a scar, it reminds you of what was lost and cannot be replaced. I was lucky. I had a good mom. Some people do not. For them, Mother's Day is a reminder of what was or is painful to remember. And if they choose to share those experiences with us, it is helpful to remember to listen, guided by grace, to their stories with compassion and love.

I also want to acknowledge the women who wanted to be mothers who could not and the mothers who have lost children. I cannot describe that type of grief or loss, as I have never had those experiences. Maybe there is no way to describe them. I know that it is vital for me to be sensitive and thoughtful as I go through this day, knowing that if someone shares these stories with me, there is nothing I can say that will be helpful or ease their pain. I can only offer to be here, quietly present, and listen. And so, I may not say Happy Mother's Day today because there might be women for whom it is not a happy day. Instead, I offer this to all women, "Thank you. I appreciate you and am grateful for all you do to nurture those in your care."

I pray that all mothers, women, and those who aspire to be women know that they are loved. May you be happy, may you be safe, and may you know peace.