

Sermon - May 12, 2024 - Mother's Day John 17:11b–19 -Pastor Ventura  
Embraced in Love

Dear friends in Christ, may the grace and the love of Jesus embrace you today.

Happy Mother's Day to all moms here and out there! The fourth commandment tells us to "honor your father and your mother" and so today we honor you, but it is not only today that we should honor our mothers, but we should also do always. But how are we to honor you? If not by giving thanks to God for each of you and by celebrating the memories, memories you plant along the way in your children and those around you.

We all have some wonderful memories of our mothers, who she is, or was, the guidance she gives or gave us, and even their influence and most importantly by the love and the sacrifice with which she takes care each of her children.

I'm sure many of you today, if not all of you hearing this message today, have wonderful stories and memories about your mom. Memories that you are building now, or memories that she left with you and now she is resting in the bosom of the Lord. No matter how old you are our heart softens when we hear the word Mom, or at least it should, right? Yes, there are some who don't like to be reminded of their mothers because the kind of life she gave them. But if you are one of them, stick around for you will be hearing of one who really, really loves you no matter what.

Yet those stories and memories do warm up your heart as you remember them, as you recount them, and as you celebrate them, even today.

This morning if you allow me, I'll share some of the memories I have of my mom. The work, the care, and the guidance he has given us her children, and her influence in my life. In fact, God's calling me to be a pastor was her doing, I say. Jokingly I say that it is her fault I'm a pastor. As you see she prayed incessantly that God would use her children, if not all, at least one, to serve God in any capacity. When we were children, we used

to sleep in a one-bedroom house, a big bedroom and lots of beds in it. Every night she would pray, she would kneel in her bed and pray out loud. My father sometimes would complain to be quiet or stop praying, but the more she would hear that the louder her praying become. And almost every night in her prayer she asked God her children would serve God. So here I am.

She never went to school, she doesn't know how to read, yet she knew much of the scriptures and certainly of the power of prayer, and the spiritual life of her children even to this day, were and have been her priority. She took care of us materially too. There was a time when my father's income wasn't enough there were lots of mouths to feed, so there were days when we went without food. So, my mom went out to work, but the work she did wasn't the cleanest or desirable one, she went and recycled bottles. She went from house to house asking people to sell their bottles and then she would resell them for a profit. It was hard and dirty work, but with that she was able to feed us well and even send us to school, God blessed her so much, that she was making even more than my father was making at that time. She never let us go hungry, naked, or uncared for. That is how she loved us. Such is the power of her love. To see her children taken care of spiritually and physically. To this day she still sacrifices herself for the sake of others. To the point where she has become the matriarch of her congregation, even to this day she is the one leading the ladies of her congregation.

That's my Mom' story, I'm sure you too have wonderful stories to tell about your mom, celebrate them and above all give thanks to God for them.

And you moms with young children, and I'm sure you too will become, are becoming a treasure box of memories for your children even now as you are building them up, as you are caring form them. Let God involved in his care first, in his grace, and led you by the hand through word and sacrament to enable you to grow in the type of mother he wants you to be. And give you the strength and the boldness, the resilience to face the enemy and his attacks against you and your loved ones.

Now Mother's Day offers us something else too. That the love and care of a mother as she tenderly nourishes her children, reflect in many ways, and perhaps even a testament in a small way, of what the Love of Jesus is for each of us.

In today's Gospel reading we hear Jesus earnestly asking the Father to care for his children. In our text we find Jesus praying for his disciples just before he would be taken from them, first by dying on the cross, then being buried, and then be ascended to the Father. He was going to go away so to speak, he will not remain with his disciples, in the flesh, any longer. So he prays: "Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one. While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them." (vs. 11b–12a).

Keeping and guarding his disciples, is what he himself has done and now asks the Father to do. Jesus asks the Father to embrace them in his love, even as God's will is that his Word and Spirit would embrace our whole life in his love for us. Just as a mother would embrace her child—first in the womb and then in her arms.

How appropriate that on Mother's Day we consider the parallel between a mother caring and nourishing a baby, with the Redeemer taking care and nourishing us! Think of how your life was when you lived in the care of your mother, protected, loved care for! Those are the words that summarize the memories and stories we have about our mothers.

O sure, we have those moments when her discipline was felt and perhaps, we didn't like it or made us cry, but it was because at some point we misbehaved, we renounced even for a moment, her love and care. Jesus knows that, that in his prayer he says: "I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction" (v 12b).

This was Judas he was talking about. Judas chose to get out from Jesus' embrace, from the covering of his love. Judas "turned aside to go to his own place" (Acts 1:25), our first reading says.

Judas and countless others before and since who leave God's embracing love have done so because of a corruption that infects all people. Sin, and sin makes leads us to rebellion. Sins even makes us twist and kick our way out of our mother's arms and out of God's embrace too.

The corruption, the sin, we inherit from our forefathers, from Adam, is so powerful that we would not only twist and kick our way out of God's design for life in creation, but we would also turn against him, hold him in contempt, and then turn against those around us with contempt as well. It's a shock to consider our rebellion against God compared to his creative love for us, just as it's a shock and bitter deep grief when children turn against their mothers. What has God ever willed for you that's bad for you? What has a godly mother ever willed for her children that would do them harm? Honestly, it has been our self-determination, our will against God's will and against family and neighbor, that has made all the trouble.

Judas was lured into rebellion against God and antagonism toward the neighbor—at least in part—by choosing a false god, he chose money. Just like we do, we too chose our own gods. We even insist on being our own gods, as if we had not been given our life by God and by means of our parents. Why did taking “selfies” spread like wildfire and to this moment consume so much of so many peoples' thinking? We make gods in our own images, just as Adam did. We craft an image of ourselves, now digitally, by showing the world how we are in control, how we look better, have more of what is better, and are busy doing more of what is best than anyone else. And if we should see someone challenging our self-idolatry, we bully them! But what's the result? Desperation!

Yet in our desperation, God calls to us. And through that desperation sometimes God gathers kicking and screaming. But that is nothing compared to the sacrifice Jesus did on our behalf. The miserable trial, suffering, and cursed death of Jesus not only impresses on us the consequences of replacing God with our own ego but also demonstrates how deep and wide is God's love that comes to embrace us his wayward children.

Jesus didn't dwell on Judas's desertion but immediately rejoices that his disciples will share in the truths about God that they haven't yet fully grasped: "Now," Father, "I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves. . . . Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. . . . And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth" (vv 13, 17, 19). Jesus prays. The disciples were about to learn truths like these: that God sacrifices himself to restore us, that God, who grieves over each dear child who leaves, never forgets his care for us and so continually reaches out to embrace us again in his love.

In Jesus' prayer to his Father on our behalf, the grace and love of God truly embrace us. So, how's your love for your children today? Have you failed? Come to Jesus and his forgiveness. You have bad memories of your mother because she didn't take good care of you? Come to Jesus, for his loves is deep and wide, he will make your heart whole again. He loves you!

And to all he promises he will never, ever, leave us. So he prays: "I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. . . . As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world" (vv 15, 18,). While they are in the world, Father, keep them; embrace them in your love.

This world is evil, it's in the domain of the evil one. But the love of God embraces us all. And even as we live in this evil world, God's Word is at work, brining us back to the bosom of Jesus, who like a mother embraces us back with a kiss on the forehead and tells us welcome home. Thus, if Jesus takes his rightful place in our lives as God, then we let go of everything else, especially our corrupt ego, and that will move us to run, to run and embrace and hold Jesus tight, the way a frightened child runs to and finds deep comfort in the arms of his mother. Fear of the loss of all things, in the world of idolatry and human corruption, makes us desperate for a safe place. But Jesus is our safe place, in him we have life, and in him we learn how to love. For Jesus said: "If you abide in my word, you are

truly my disciples, <sup>32</sup> and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” (Jn 8:31–32)

And that word of God is here for you, for you Mom as you strive to be the mother God wants you to be, it is for you the child of God, as you grow continually in your faith. The word of God is for you!

Happy Mothers’ Day! We honor you today! We celebrate the memories you have planted and are planting in the minds and hearts of your children. And doing so we honor God’s word that tells us that through Christ, God embraces us in his love, and never let’s us go. And even when we try to rebel against him, he does bring us back. He wants us to experience the embracing arms of love, grace and mercy, that result in the forgiveness of sins, and life everlasting.

Happy Mother’s Day! Amen.