

Happy Mother's Day to all of you.

I have two children, and as a young mother, I realized how profoundly their behavior reflected on me. You see, one of my children is an easy-going guy who gets along with everyone he meets. The other is a busy, noisy guy who sometimes comes in conflict with the world. Both are wonderful people, but they are quite different. Early on, it was clear to me that I was seen as a good mother when I would go out alone with my easy-going guy, and a not so good mother when with my other son. The judgment of the world was clear to me, and that judgment sometimes made mothering difficult and painful.

My children were born at a time when the world was undergoing a shift in understanding about nature versus nurture. From the 1970's to the end of the 20th century studies of the brain and genetics brought a new appreciation about nature, or that the characteristics a child is born with influence their thoughts, feelings and behavior. Before this time, children were thought to be born as "clean slates" or "tabla rasa", upon which we as parents wrote, and shaped who they were to become. And mothers were thought to be the primary shapers of children's behaviors. For years, mothers were given accolades for children who behaved, and blamed for the behavior of children who didn't. It has only been in the last forty years that we have come to see that the idea that who we are is God given, and is with us from the time we are formed and endures throughout our lives. God has given each of us free will. This has allowed many women to breathe a sigh of relief, and it has also expanded the idea of who is a mother and what mothering means. Today, we have blended families, single parent families, and same sex parent families. We have children being raised in environments never even thought about forty years ago. And, I believe, this has contributed to a new concept of what mothering is.

Mothering in the 21st century is not gender specific. Mothering can be done by anyone who nurtures and loves another. In fact, I think that probably everyone here has mothered another at some time in their life whether you be a man or a woman.

This is not a new concept of mothering, and that is illustrated in today's Gospel. Jesus' prayer and deep love for his disciples is a prayer that any mother could have prayed for her children.

Jesus believes that the disciples have been given to him by God, and he is concerned about their future. He asks that they be protected, he asks that they be shielded from evil, and he asks that they be led into truth. Who of us does not wish this for their children *or all children for that matter*

Jesus' prayer takes place right before he is arrested. He knows he is not going to be with his disciples much longer – and that they will be on their own to continue the work he has begun. --

--- To understand the magnitude of what Jesus is asking of his disciples is to remember who these men are. These are simple men; fishermen and craftsmen. These are men who have given up their former lives to follow Jesus. These are men who have seen miracles, witnessed great deeds, and endured hardship; and men whose lives have been transformed. Now, they are being sent into the world to be a witness to that transformation. But the important point to remember about them is that they are human. Before they will go into the world to proclaim the Gospel, they will betray Jesus, deny Jesus and hide out when the going gets rough. They will misbehave in ways that will surprise them, and Jesus knows this. Perhaps that is why the prayer for them is so fervent. Jesus knows that there will be missteps and Jesus knows there will be temptations. But Jesus' own are set apart for the *logos*, God's self-revealing testimony, God's act of love in the world.

The world, or kosmos, which appears 13 times in these 14 verses, is complicated in John. In our reading today we could understand it as a place where the evil one dwells, a scary and hate-filled place and one to be avoided. But that would be to dismiss the most famous of John's verses. God loves the world. For if the broken world isn't the one that is so beloved, then the lifting up of the Son makes no sense. Jesus need not die if he is only in the world for the sake of the people who like him. And Jesus' own will not be in danger if they are to bear fruit in happy isolation. The reason that they are mirroring the union of the Father and Son and carrying the love of God and Jesus for them into the world that doesn't know God is precisely that God loves that world and wants it to know that love. And that is where we, as disciples and nurturers are essential.

Carrying God's love into the world is an awesome responsibility as the disciples discovered. For carrying God's love into the world calls for a different way to react and behave in the face of

injustice, cruelty and hatred. Carrying God's love into the world means that we are called not into a tit for tat economy, but into an entirely new way of reacting. We can not respond to injustice by being judgmental and unjust. We cannot respond to cruelty by being cruel retaliating and certainly we can not respond to hatred with angry hearts and hateful words. For to respond in that way is to emulate what John sees as the world and not God's love. And while we can get away with it, with many around us nodding and agreeing with our behavior it does not lead us into God's plan. Just because I get away with it because it is understandable to the world around me, does not make it acceptable to God. To respond in that way is for me to perpetuate the idea that I am right to behave that way; that the means justify the end. However, if I am right, another must be wrong, and in the tit for tat economy that wrong must be dealt with; usually with cruel words or a violent action. Thus, violence and cruelty become the currency in my economy instead of love and nurturing.

Our transformation in the love of God begins in the realization that God loves each of us, just as we are. God loves everyone and every thing even when we do not. For God created us in love and to love. And just as in the case of the first disciples, we can be transformed in that love. I am sure that Jesus' disciples were amazed and surprised by what they were able to accomplish. And so it can be with each one of us. Find the mother within you. Even if you did not have a good model when you were a child, look to the mothering nature and nurture of Jesus with his disciples and emulate that kind of love. And then, just as those first disciples move into the world and be a difference that you never imagined possible.