

From the desk of Fr. Jim

IN PRAISE OF MOTHER

A war continues in a foreign land, and a debate also rages in our own, concerning what is right and what is wrong. Politicians debate or dodge debate, and issues invade the expert conversations at the proverbial water cooler. Perennial concerns about the stock market, the endless decline of morality, gas prices and potholes will fill the air surrounded by stale donuts and coffee stained cups. The concern will not, however, likely turn to a conversation about the importance of our mothers.

I think a lot of people do not have a good feeling about their mother. I wonder whose fault that is. Perhaps it is mother's. Sometimes mothers confuse their role. Actually they confuse the nature of their love for their children. Mothers think that motherhood is something for which there are supposed to be certain rewards. After all, all those late nights, walking children through upset tummies and the terrors of bad dreams; diapers, and interminable messes. It's always amusing to see young mothers who still retain most of the beauty of their youth and although there is some slippage in hair and dress, their nails are still perfect, even though they are being used to clean all sorts of things from the crevasses in the kitchen floor. It is love that motivates this, but truly, you hope there is some kind of reward.

Then one day you realize that your child is almost a teenager and they want hardly anything to do with you. That child that you rocked to sleep at night now falls asleep with an iPod in their ear. As much as they once wanted nothing other than your attention, which motivated their first steps and their first communion, now they want you out of their room. In one desperate attempt to hold onto the relationship you had with them, you ask, secretly, in the darkest place in your heart, "All this time I loved you. Can you not love me back, just a little?"

Of course, that is not the nature of being a mother. While it may seem to be an overwhelming sacrifice, the role of a mother is to love with no expectation of reward. The child is fed with food and love, dressed in clothes and affection, taught with truth and kindness, and then mother stands at the door and waves goodbye, sometimes forever. They come home, but each time they do they are little different. Sometimes they seem like strangers. Then one day they seem not to fit their room, or even at the table. They are visitors, and we try to make them friends, but it is obvious that they are anxious about getting on with their life. The moment comes, as painful as the cross, when we love them with everything that we are and we know that, for now they cannot, in the same way, love us back.

There is one scene in the scriptures that is captured in a painting that hangs in my office, and that I occasionally notice. Jesus sits looking over the city of Jerusalem with a longing that only a mother knows. Remember his words: "Jerusalem, Jerusalem ... how many times I yearned to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her young under her wings, but you were unwilling! (Matthew 23:37) It is a divine love that only a mother knows.

There are obviously some necessary ingredients to this love, like patience, even patient suffering. There is understanding and compassion. We understand that while our children gladly skip out of our life, that one day they

will come back, perhaps with their own little ones in tow, and they will then recognize in the eyes and heart of their own mother the strength that they now need. Mothers stand patiently waiting, compassionately forgiving the fact that we have forgotten their sacrifices, that we have swept them aside for passing, fleeting love and all the time, they are the bedrock upon which all life is built.

I have always thought that mothers were the most powerful people in the world. Only the powerful can love the way they do. And their love is not taught or preserved or appreciated, but without it our family will not survive; our churches and schools will not survive; our country will not survive. So, tell her, even if you can only tell her in your prayers, that now, at least for today, you love her back.