

Sermon May 9, 2010  
Mother's Day  
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*M is for the million things she gave me,  
O means only that she's growing old,  
T is for the tears she shed to save me,  
H is for her heart of purest gold;  
E is for her eyes, with love-light shining,  
R means right, and right she'll always be,  
Put them all together, they spell MOTHER,  
A word that means the world to me.*

Happy Mother's Day. You know, after Valentines Day, I think this holiday is the second biggest set up known to woman.

Think of it, our shared mental image. Mother is soft, wrinkle free and generous. She listens and holds us when we are afraid of the thunder. Mother smiles, gently and knowingly. She packs our lunch with care and never loses faith in us.

And then we wake up. And then we begin to feel cheated. As we stand in the pharmacy, before the rows of adoring tributes to that Tang in the Spiderman thermos mother, a pool of self-pity gathers under our feet. Surely I have been robbed. And then it dawns on us that our children likely feel the same way. Mother's Day is a total set up.

One satirist restructured the familiar ditty to more accurately express his experience.

*M is for the Massive guilt she gave me;  
O is for the Outbursts that she had;  
T is for her Total domination;  
H is How she drove out dear old dad;  
E is for the Eunuch that she made me;  
R is my Respect she stripped away;  
Put them all together, they spell MOTHER —  
The reason I'm so messed-up today!*

We laugh, but many never cease to rail against the immense gulf between the greeting card ideal and their woefully inadequate live models. Whatever the issues and objections, founded or otherwise, many carry these deep resentments to the grave, allowing the festering, untended rage to color all of the days along the way.

Similar dynamics tend to surround the search for a new priest, beginning with a shared ideal.

The joke among clergy has long been that if you look carefully at parish profiles you will notice that they are all looking for the same thing: Jesus. Sensitive and capable, mindful of the needs of all, compelling preacher, prayerful, powerful, good with kids. I would contend that given our present demographics, today's normative specs look more

like Jesus, or Mary, with 2.5 children, and a blog. Nevertheless the shared ideal remains in tact.

As clergy we laugh at the Jesus Profile, but it is an anxious laugh, born of deep personal knowledge of what it feels like to walk into a parish that is lying in wait for the arrival of its *false* messiah. The one who will fill all the holes left by that other guy, and be so much more sensitive than that one woman-boy, was she bad.

Resentments born of unmet priestly expectations can settle in and hunker down, with destructive repercussions, as the feelings we carry towards clergy mirror our deep and unresolved maternal ambivalence.

Yes, I am talking about you, blessed people of Saint Ann's. Some here have not yet let go of their resentments towards or idealization of priests who have served in this place. Nancy, me, and John, and Pat, and Jack Connely, and that interim guy who was never here, and Kirk Smith, and Charles Griswold, and yes, Peter Vanderveen.

Having already failed to fulfill anyone's messianic expectations, I am now going to offer my not so humble opinion on the matter: If these feelings and their resulting behaviors are not more fully faced and tended, then this community's discernment process will continue to be compromised. AND the extent to which you fail to face your disappointments and loss is the extent to which the new priest will be set up to fail, for it is not he or she with whom you will interact, but rather the ghosts of others who have gone before.

As usual, today's Gospel speaks to the heart of this matter and offers us a place to start this work.

First, Jesus instructs the disciples to discipline their hearts. Do not *let your hearts* be troubled. He does not take their trouble away; rather, he instructs them that they must manage their own hearts.

Now, you all are going to have to figure out how to do that. Attend to your thoughts and your words. Meditate on scripture. Go out for drinks and put it all out on the table. Whatever will help you tend your hearts in obedience to Christ's insistence. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.

One way we can together protect our hearts from some trouble is by appropriately situating priesthood in our minds. The service of priestly ordination may help. Here are some snippets from that service:

*God's mission in the world is to draw all into unity with God and one another. The function of a Presbyter is to teach and preach and equip the saints to participate more fully in that work.*

*(Ordination) is a gift from God for the nurture of his people and the proclamation of his Gospel everywhere.*

And finally, the Bishop's charge to the priest,  
*In all that you do, you are to nourish Christ's people from the riches of **his** grace, and strengthen them to glorify God in this life and in the life to come.*

All power and authority is derived from and returns to God. It is all about God and God's mission in the world. It is not about our needs and desires, it is about God.

Finally, and most important, to move through this transition successfully we must relocate our hope. We must discipline our minds eyes to discern between the Spirit's provisions and the World's. They are connected, but they are not the same. Both motherhood and priesthood are iconic; both point to the truth of God's perfect love. Both can glimmer. Those who embody those roles are often servants and saints, loved and loving, and they are **always** of this world. Our clerics, our parents. They are human, which is can nourish and inspire us, if we are able to experience their gifts and challenges as one beautiful authentic, grounded package. But their ways are not God's ways. And they are not our hope. Christ tells his disciples, I do not give as the world gives. Jesus is our unfailing high priest. Human priests are broken, earthly, destined to fall short. But Jesus does not ever.

He is the light of the world and the true and only satisfier of every need. In the picture we get from Revelations today of the heavenly city, we are reminded that Jesus is the true source of light and life. In that day there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

We need to relocate our hope. Not sure how it happened that we ended up heaping these expectations on clergy, because our texts are pretty clear. Here is the collect from the service of the ordination of a priest in the Book of Common Prayer. I'd like us to listen and pray it at the same time.

Let us pray.

*O God of unchangeable power and eternal light: Look favorably on your whole Church, that wonderful and sacred mystery; by the effectual working of your providence, carry out in tranquility the plan of salvation; let the whole world see and know that things which were cast down are being raised up, and things which had grown old are being made new, and that all things are being brought to their perfection by him through whom all things were made, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

Things are being raised up, made new, and brought to perfection, the plan of salvation is being carried out, not through any human being but by him through whom all things were made: Thee love light shining, Jesus, the dazzling lamb at the heart of the city of God, the lamb who takes away the sins of the world.

Do not let your hearts be troubled. Do not be afraid. Receive Christ's peace, which the world can never give. *Amen.*