

Mother' s Day

Mother's Day is being celebrated in America. Serbian Mother's Day is celebrated two Sundays prior to the Feast of the Nativity...Christmas. Across this land, attention is focused on mothers. Emphasis is on the heartwarming aspects of the day and the contributions mothers have made to the lives of their children. Everyone has a mother. This is the basis for the widespread appeal.

A special place for mothers is established in the Ten Commandments. At a tender age we hear the words "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land which the Lord your God gives you."(Gen.20:12)

The book of Proverbs provides an omen for those who would be less than loving and respectful of mothers. Proverbs states: "The eye that mocks a father and scorns to obey a mother will be picked out by the ravens of the valley and eaten by the vultures."(Prov.30:17)

Mothers are cast in a positive light and there are ample reasons. Mothers and children share a unique and giving relationship related to life. By the grace of God, mothers are the first to know of the stirring of new life within themselves. They are charged with the responsibility of tending to the care of this new life.

From the outset, mothers must make decisions regarding their children. The mother's care of herself will impact on the life of the child. The mother must come to terms with the role God has played in the birth process.

Decisions must be made regarding the naming of the child, the choice of Kumovi, and the scheduling of the Baptism. Physical care of the newborn child is important. The mother must devote a great deal of attention to providing the necessary care.

Mothers have a personal relationship with God which requires on-going nourishment. Mothers must be spiritually healthy to provide the optimum atmosphere for the growth of the newborn children. The challenges of childbirth and childbearing summon the innermost strength of mothers.

Motherhood is not limited to the birth process. Children go through various cycles of growth and mothers are called upon to respond. Fathers are a consideration throughout the growth process.

In Holy Scripture, there are many mothers who come to mind about whom we have learned through the years. There is Eve, the first mother who gave birth to Cain and Abel and Seth.(Gen4:1-25). When we consider our origin, our thoughts will wander back to Eve.

And then there is Sarah, Abraham's wife. Sarah bore Isaac at a time when Abraham was a hundred years old(Gen.21:5) Sarah and Abraham were hosts to the Lord at the oaks of Mamre. It was at this manifestation of the Holy Trinity as recorded in the eighteenth chapter of Genesis, that Abraham and Sarah were promised the child(Gen.18:9)

When we consider motherhood, we must think of the mother of Moses who hid her child to protect his life. She was able to raise him for Pharaoh's daughter.(Ex.2:9)

Another important Old Testament mother is found in the First Book of Kings. The widow with whom Elijah was staying was faced with the death of her son. The child's illness was so severe that there was no breath in him(I Kings 17:17). The woman became distraught.

Elijah prevailed upon God with the words: "O Lord my God, let this child's soul come into him again.(I Kings 17:20). We know that the Lord hearkened to the voice of Elijah and he was able to say to the woman these magnificent words: "See, your son lives."(I Kings 17:22-23) The account of the mother and Elijah is a heartwarming record of hope for those faced with dire circumstances.

Motherhood continues to hold our interest in the Old Testament when we review the prophetic words of Isaiah. These words capture our hearts and direct our attention to the birth of Christ. In Isaiah 7:14, we read "...the Lord Himself will give you a sign. Behold a young virgin shall conceive and bear a son and shall call his name Immanuel." The Virgin Mary, the Mother of God is foreshadowed in the words of Isaiah.

When we consider the Virgin Mary, we should recall Elizabeth and Zechariah. Elizabeth and Zechariah are reminiscent of Abraham and Sarah in conceiving a child in their old age through the direct intervention of God(Luke 1:18-19). In this instance the child was named John. We know him as St. John the Baptist.

Orthodox Christians have many mothers in Holy Scripture to integrate into their world view. These mothers were forerunners who helped to shape and directly influence our life in the Church. In many ways, though they were born and lived many centuries ago, they are our contemporaries and consume our attention as we worship.

In the present, as we have for many centuries, we look to the Mother of God to intercede with her Son, Christ our God. Regularly, prayers are offered which acknowledge the special role of the Mother of God. We look to her with hope for ourselves and for others.

The Orthodox Church calendar directs our attention to the Icon of the Most Holy Theotokos known as "Unexpected Joy"(St.Herman's Calendar, Platina, California, p.33). Indeed true joy emanates from the Mother of God, for from her came the joy of all the world.

The Pentecostarion describes the Mother of God as a Temple, a gate, a palace and a throne of the King. She is called Mediatrix for the salvation of our faith.(Pentecostarion, Holy Transfiguration Monastery, Brookline, Ma., p.158).

We hold our own mothers in the same awe and reverence we have for the mothers of Holy Scripture. Mothers of all ages have faced difficulties with bravery, sacrifice and pain. In times of war, mothers have had to see their sons and daughters sent off to battle, perhaps never to return.

In times of famine, mothers have had to implore the Lord God to provide as we know through the Lord's Prayer, to give the daily bread. Mothers must tend to ill children and find ways to deal with the mischievousness of their offspring.

When illness strikes a mother, she must address her own illness and still meet the needs of her children. When tragedy strikes the child, the depth of pain felt by the mother is unequalled.

The Mother of God stood at the foot of the Cross, the prototype of mothers whose pain and loss is profound.(Jn.19:25). In hardship and in joy, Christ is present. Jesus looked to His mother from the Cross and provided for her by uniting her with the beloved disciple.

At His darkest hour, Jesus said: "Woman, behold your Son!" He said to the beloved disciple: "Behold your mother!" From the Holy Gospel according to Saint John, we know that the beloved disciple took Mary to his home. (Jn. 19:26-27).

The Mother of God had the unique perspective of being with Jesus from His birth to His death. This relationship between the Mother of God and her Son has been the focus of interest and veneration for centuries.

Sons and daughters are challenged by the expectations and teachings of their mothers. Sons and daughters are inspired by the qualities which are inherit in their mothers.

At the Cross, Mary did not abandon her Son. Nor did Jesus abandon His mother. How many times have we heard accounts of the hardest of criminals being supported and portrayed in a good light by their mothers? It does us well to remember that Jesus died between two criminals and His mother was present to show her support.

We must view Mother's Day in the context of the Church. Our world view must be contemporary and yet linear, reaching back to the earliest times. We are in the twenty-first century celebrating Mother's Day. God has given us many mothers through the centuries for whom we must be grateful.

Together with God, our own mothers have helped to form and shape us. We are created in the image and likeness of God.(Gen.1:26). Mothers have been chosen by God to participate in His creativity.

We go through life, often not realizing the full stature of mothers in the role they play in the development of civilization. Taking time on Mother's Day to reflect on the far-reaching impact of mothers is healthy for all of us.

Indeed, our own mothers are forever in our hearts and minds. They are the subject of our fondest thoughts. When we are young, we treasure our mothers. As we get older, we know the treasure to be even greater than we ever imagined.

Let us take time to give thanks to God for the mothers He has given us and for the special role He has chosen for them to be a partner in His creation.