

A Letter to My Mother

This is a letter written to my mother, shared with the parishioners of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, in deep respect and good wishes to all the excellent mothers of this parish.

My dearest Mother,

It is best not to canonize someone until a good fifty years after their death. Such is the traditional practice of the Roman Catholic Church. But we are free to tell the truth about someone – within reason – at any stage in their lives. What I shall say in this letter is simply the truth.

I will never know what it means to have a child, but I can remember and reflect on what it was to be a child. And this reflection leads me to one profound and passionate sense... the sense of gratitude.

This gratitude begins with the nine months of your discomfort during which my life began in your womb. Have I ever thanked you for that? Probably not, nor for the pain it took to bring me into this world. But I do thank you now. Just thinking a little while about that single sacrifice makes me understand why men should take their hats off when a lady comes into the room or open doors for them, or insist they walk first into a building.

As to your skills once I came into this world – how can I possibly count them? Many have been saying for a long time in our country that being a homemaker is too confining, too restrictive with too much drudgery. I'm sure there has been drudgery involved, but there is plenty of it outside the home as we saw on Dad's face when he came home from work; and his work was so narrowly specialized.

But you, you had to master a thousand skills. You had to be a Queen Elizabeth within the home: deciding sales, banquets, birthdays, labors, holidays, anniversaries; and you had to be ready to receive guests at any time with hospitality. And you did so with such consummate ease and perfection that the guests in our home were unaware that you were being polite.

You had to be a store manager and accountant within the home, providing boots and socks, toys, sheets, crayons, books, music, paintings and cakes, all the while accounting for each article which made our home such a pleasant place to live.

You had to be an Aristotle within the home, teaching morals, manners, theology, hygiene, speech and grooming. I can understand how this effort might exhaust the mind, but I cannot imagine why anyone would say that it narrowed your mind.

You had to be a lioness. Woe to anyone who would do me harm if you were around! And for the times I failed in my respect for you, or in obedience to you, I felt the just rod of correction, backed up by the strong hand of that former lieutenant of infantry who was your husband. But how quick and permanent was your forgiveness of my faults! How easily you forgot them! How like the Son of God you have been in this regard.

You had to be a friend too. What consolation you gave me in my lowest days, and what

superb companionship you provided during the best.

In short, I do not understand how people can say that it is such a large career to tell other people's children about the A,B,C's, and such a small career to tell one's own children about the universe.

Bonum diffusa est says St. Thomas Aquinas. "The good diffuses itself." You have passed on an enormous wealth of affection and wisdom and knowledge and love to your children – I see it in the superb skills of motherhood practiced by my sister. And if anyone says that there is anything good in me at all, or kindness or wisdom or morals or love, then I shall tell them that it came from you, the one above all others whom God chose to teach me these things.

St. Bernard of Clairvaux once said that the love on earth which is closest to that of God's is the love of a mother for her children. So if I hear someone wonder aloud what the face of God is really like when we see Him face to face, I shall say I have a good idea.

For I have seen the love of God in the bright eyes and sweet countenance of my mother.