



St. Stephen's Traditional Episcopal Church

11856 Mays Chapel Rd., Timonium, MD 21093

The Fifth Sunday After Easter, May 13th, 2012
being Rogationtide & Mothering Sunday

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.

It was a blonde haired, blue-eyed charmer named Maureen Woodruff who taught me there is a fundamental, and utterly irreconcilable, difference between males and females of the human species. It was not simply that I wanted to play at massacring the Nazi hordes, while her favorite pastime was "Mothers and Fathers" – a dreary game which largely consisted of changing her favorite doll's diapers and pushing it around in a device the English pompously call a perambulator and that Americans, unpretentiously, term a baby carriage.

The difference runs very much deeper than mere tastes in play. It covers the entire way in which the sexes view creation. This truth came home to me, for example, when I showed her, with great pride of ownership, an amazingly beautiful white mouse I had traded for a broken penknife with Reuben Packer. Montmerency was a gorgeous creature with beady pink eyes, silky pelt and a constantly twitching nose. His bachelor quarters were located in the cozy comfort of my shirt pocket.

I offered Maureen the privilege of holding him, but instead of succumbing to the charm of this sleek rodent's suave manners, Maureen went into hysterics. When the howls and gales of tears subsided, she accused me of bringing vermin into her home and rushed off to tell her mother. What's more, she resisted all attempts to make up, rejecting my propitiatory offerings of a stag beetle, a jam jar of frog's spawn and a grass snake. Sad to relate, she never spoke to me again.

The foregoing notwithstanding, it is a

common modern conceit that there is no difference worth noting between men and women. If that were true, however, today would not be Mother's Day. It would be Mother **AND** Father's Day. The fact it is not Mother and Father's Day demonstrates that in the matter of parenting at least, men and women are clearly very different. And praise be to God for it!

If folks with ideological axes to grind can't see the difference between mothers and fathers, children most certainly can. Consider your own children. I adore kids and mine could easily twist me round their little fingers. I was a hands-on dad. I bottle fed babies. I often changed their diapers and presided at bath time, but invariably it was their mother they ran to when they hurt themselves or got into trouble.

This shouldn't be so surprising. The difference between male and female, mother and father was built into us from the very beginning. Indeed, it's a difference that God pointed to in order to reveal what he is like. God says, unlike us, he is a spirit and, thus, he is neither male nor female. But he goes on to say if we want to picture him in our mind's eye, we should think of him as a father rather than a mother.

It's politically correct these days to reject the God the Father bit as an example of pure male chauvinism. But that misses the point. God is not saying men are **better** than women, he's saying that men are **different** from women. You can understand what he's getting at if, instead of getting hot under the collar, you pause to reflect on how archetypal mothers and fathers differ.

The archetypal father, while obviously loving,

is nonetheless an authority figure. He is the disciplinarian in the family, thus naturally judgmental (an unpopular word these days) and perhaps a little aloof. The archetypal mother, by contrast, is single-mindedly nurturing and the epitome of non-judgmental love. She loves her children no matter what scrapes and difficulties they get themselves into. While father might tell them they can never darken his door again, mother can be relied upon to be infinitely forgiving.

In other words, the roles of father and mother are not interchangeable, but, rather, complimentary. Far from God's fatherhood being a put down to women, it is quite awe-inspiring to think a mother's nurturing role is in many respects complimentary to the role God plays in our lives. That's a very important place to occupy.

If you find that hard to swallow, consider the mother's role in the redemption of mankind. If it was Eve, the mother of us all, who landed us into trouble in the first place it was another mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary, who got us out of it – thanks to her perfect obedience to God and devotion to her son, Jesus Christ..

Aside from the Holy Trinity, Mary is the most important person to appear in the Bible. She is more important, in fact, than Abraham and the Patriarch, Moses and the Prophets and even St. Peter, St. Paul and the Apostles. Indeed, there would have been no redemption if Mary had not told the Archangel Gabriel: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord. Be it unto me according to thy word." In fact she is the only person in the whole of the Bible who instantly agreed to do what God asked her to do without dicker or equivocation.

She played a vital, and utterly irreplaceable, role in Jesus Christ's earthly life from its beginning to its very end. In her teenage years, she had the maturity, courage and, above all, the unshakable faith to bring God's son into the world. Nobody, before or after, has shown greater trust in our Heavenly Father.

Throughout his ministry, she was there, watching and supporting him – even when she didn't entirely understand what he was doing. As a small boy, for instance, he went missing for three days in Jerusalem. After a frantic search, Mary and Joseph tracked down to the Temple

where he was debating the nation's top theologians. His explanation that he had been about his father's business must, at the very least, have earned him the rough edge of Joseph's tongue, but St. Luke tells us that Mary simply pondered things in her heart.

At the wedding in Cana, where Jesus performed his first miracle, it was Mary who prompted him to launch his ministry. "They're out of wine," she said pointedly. "Stop nagging, woman" Jesus replied, "I'm not ready yet." Mary, however, took no notice. "Do exactly as he tells you," she told the servants. And Jesus, it seems, woke up to the fact there are times when even God discovers it doesn't pay to argue with mom.

Mary isn't perfect of course. Even the most perfect human being who ever lived has flaws. When Jesus was denouncing the hypocrisy of folks who thought they were living holy lives, Mary arrived with Jesus' half brothers to tell him to stop alienating potential supporters. "Your mother and brothers are outside and want to see you," Jesus was told.

"Who is my mother and my brethren?" he asked. Then pointing to his disciples, he said: "Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, my sister and mother." It was a stinging rebuke that must have cut her and his brothers to the quick.

But on that terrible day on Calvary, it was Mary who kept watch from the time the nails were driven through Jesus' wrist until his triumphant shout: "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." And when Jesus cried out "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me," her greatest consolation must have been that she had never deserted him, but had stood by him by what she imagined to be the bitter end.

Most mothers, mercifully, do not have to share Mary's anguish, but for those who do, it is important to remember that her story has a happy ending. Three days later, her son rose from the grave and ensuring that all of us who believe in him will not perish but have everlasting life. And that, if I might say so, is the greatest Mother's Day gift of all.

I wish all of you, mothers and children alike, a very blessed Mother's Day. *AMEN*