



ST. STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

11856 MAYS CHAPEL RD., TIMONIUM, MD 21093

The Sunday After the Ascension, May 13th, 2018
Also Being Mothering Sunday

In the Name of the Father ✠ and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, Amen.

In today's Gospel, reading Jesus tells his disciples that after he has ascended into heaven, he'll send the Holy Spirit to comfort them. In fact, that's what he calls the Holy Spirit: the Comforter. And the word "comfort" happens to be associated with the only two occasions recorded in the Bible where God uses female imagery to describe himself.

It's quite surprising, when you come to think about it: God repeatedly refers to himself as "father, yet he only likens himself to a mother twice – once in the 66th Chapter of Isaiah and again in an incident recorded by St. Matthew and St. Luke.

God's apparent male fixation is completely at odds with our 21st century sense of sexual equality and civil rights. How dare God be such a terrible male chauvinist! He needs to be put straight and who better to do it than feminist scholars who have de-sexed the Bible and given us "gender neutral" and feminized liturgies. God the Father is out and God the Mother is in. No more nasty old Yaweh or Jehovah, her name is Sophia today.

The trouble with this is if God is all he's cracked up to be, he presumably knew what he was doing when he inspired the scriptures to be written. If he genuinely is all-knowing,

all wise and omnipotent, it could well be that in his constant references to himself as father he's trying to tell us something important about himself.

If his Biblical revelation is relevant for all time – and not just for those benighted souls who lacked the good fortune to be born in our enlightened times like ours – we might benefit from a glance at the only two passages in the Bible in which God likens himself to a mother.

The first, Isaiah 66:13, reads: "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you . . ." In St. Matthew and St. Luke, Jesus laments the fate that awaits Jerusalem: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children unto me as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings . . ."

God tells in the scriptures that he is a spirit and is neither one sex nor the other. But he says we want to see him in human terms, we'd do best to think of him as a father.

This doesn't imply that God thinks men are superior to women. Read the scripture, and you'll see that he doesn't find much to admire in us. By contrast, among the many admirable qualities women possess, there's

one he esteems particularly highly: And that is a mother's ability to comfort.

One of the more silly politically-correct conceits of our exceptionally silly age is that men and women are alike in every respect with the exception of their reproductive organs. To appreciate the folly of such an outlandish notion, we need only consider the profound differences between the relationship of mothers and fathers with their children.

The bond between mother and child is unique in our experience. Modern social theory notwithstanding, it is the most powerful bond that can exist between two human beings. And this shouldn't be altogether surprising. After all, children are nurtured and protected within their mothers' bodies for the first nine months of their lives.

By contrast, children's relationships with fathers – though just as necessary for their well-being – is very much different. Children must learn to love their fathers and this by no means always comes easily. Frequently in early childhood, a father is regarded as a rival for mother's affection. I recall being none too pleased at the age of three at the appearance of a mustachioed stranger who greeted me with unpleasantly prickly kiss.

Furthermore, the relationship between father and child – unlike that between child and mother – is based to a very large degree on approval. Indeed, we frequently read in biographies of the famous and infamous) of the difficulties they experienced in gaining their fathers' approval. Approval, however, rarely plays a major role in people's relationships with their mothers.

When the chips are down and folks need a shoulder to cry on – no matter how terrible the things they might have done – their mothers will generally be the last people to turn them away. Indeed, mothers can usually be relied on to stand by their children even

when their fathers, their spouses and even their children have washed their hands of them.

Life would indeed be bleak if there was nobody in this world capable of recognizing that element of good in us that eludes everyone else but mother. Indeed, life would be utterly intolerable if we didn't have somebody who loves us as our mothers love us – selflessly, unreservedly and unconditionally.

God, himself, experienced that selfless, unreserved, unconditional love at first hand: The Blessed Virgin Mary was a pillar of comfort and support for Jesus during his entire earthly life. She was a constant influence not only from childhood, but throughout his earthly ministry. It was she who, at enormous emotional cost to herself, endured with him to the bitter end offering – what comfort she might as he suffered on the cross.

But Mary was not solely mother to Jesus. In many respects, she is the mother of us all. In bringing Jesus into this world, she played an irreplaceable role in our salvation.

She is the only person in human history to obey God instantly and without equivocation. Her only query was a technical one: “How shall this be seeing that I know not a man?” Curiosity satisfied, her response was: “Behold the handmaid of the Lord; Be it unto me according to thy word. It was an extraordinarily courageous response from a young woman living in a society that punished extra marital sex by stoning.

In short, a mother's love is as near to perfection as human love can get. And this why for all of us Mothers' Day should one of the most joyful celebrations of the year. Happy Mothers' Day to you all. *AMEN*

To the only wise God, our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, now and forever. AMEN