

Dignity New York
12 May 2019, Mother's Day Homily
"Love Your Mother", by John Falcone

1st Reading: Acts 13:14, 43-52

2nd Reading: Rev 7:9, 14-17

Gospel: Jn 10:27-30

Love your mother.

How do you feel towards your mother? The person who gave you birth; the person who raised you; the person who held you and nursed you back to strength. You birth mother, or adopted mother, or other mother. Maybe you have strong feelings towards your mother. Maybe you have mixed feelings. Maybe you'd rather have no feelings at all.

I invite you to participate in a brief prayer experiment – a meditation of the mind and the heart. Prayer puts us in touch with reality. The deeper our prayer, the more real we are being – real with ourselves, and real before God. This prayer experiment focuses on our mothers.

Let's begin.

Think of your mother: the person who birthed you; or raised you; or nursed you.

Now close your eyes.

Think of the sound of your mother's voice; think of your mother calling your name. Notice *all* the feelings that come up with that voice. In your mind, before God, feel these feelings. Ask God to help you feel them even more deeply.

God of Truth,
guide our minds and our hearts
so that our love may be ever deeper, and ever more real.

How can you make your love more honest? More real? Can you love your mother more deeply?

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Earlier this week the UN's Commission on Biodiversity and Ecosystems announced some shocking figures:

Since the beginning of recorded human history, the population of wild mammals has fallen by 82%. Natural ecosystems have lost about half their area across the planet. Today, one million species are at risk of extinction. Here's what the board members said in their summary of the report:

“We are eroding ... our life-support system ...: the ... foundations of economies, livelihoods, food security, health, and quality of life ... We are in a bad way. ... We have lost time. We must act now.”

Think of every plant and animal that you encountered today, every fresh thing that you ate, every piece of clothing that you are wearing. If its plastic or polyester, it came from oil inside the ground. If its cotton, it came from a flower. If it's wool, it came from a fleece. If it's leather, it came from the skin of an animal. The air we breathe, the food and the water, the clothes, the muscles of our bodies, the blood vessels and nerves – we are not separate from nature. We are part of nature. We are enmeshed in a vast, living placenta – knit together in an open-air womb. We are the children of this life-giving planet. The ecosystem has given us birth.

Mother of the Universe,

Open our hearts to the water, soil, air and all living creatures.

Help us to act now for the good of future generations.

Make us advocates for a new, greener economy,
built on sustainability, fairness, and love.

How can you be more courageous in the face of disaster? Can you choose a more difficult, more sustainable way of life? In this moment, this politics, this economy, how can you love your mother more deeply?

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Have you ever thought of the Jewish religion as our spiritual mother? Not simply as a religion that we should respect; not as something that we have moved beyond, or replaced with a truer religion. But as our mother – as the source of our spiritual life.

The readings tonight have a lot to say about Judaism.

The first is most obvious. Paul and Barnabas are two ethnic Judeans – two Jews who also follow Jesus. They arrive in a non-Jewish city in modern-day south western Turkey. The first place they stop is the synagogue – the local Judean community center. Their preaching about a new Jewish messiah starts trending on the social media grapevine. Next Saturday, it seems like the whole town has shown up to hear more – Jews, Gentiles, and spiritual seekers. But a tense relationship develops

between these Jesus followers and the many Jews who did not accept Jesus as their lord and savior. This tension is even more intense in the Gospel reading, when we look at it in its fuller context:

“At that time the festival of the Dedication took place in Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple ... The Judeans gathered around him and said to him, “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.” Jesus answered, “I have told you, ... but you do not believe me, because you do not belong to my sheep. My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. [and so on]” [When they heard this,] the Judeans took up stones ..., in order to stone [Jesus]... but he escaped from their hands.”

“Feast of the Dedication” is the ancient name for Chanukah, the festival that commemorates the miracle of survival in the face of persecution, the triumph of Jewish faith over Gentile ethnic cleansing. This dialogue takes place during Chanukah. According to John, the Judeans in this story have got their Chanukah priorities all mixed up: but what *is* the mix up, exactly? What kind of miracle does Jesus *really* represent?

I think that tonight’s readings are about overcoming. Paul and Barnabas overcome backbiting and petty jealousy. A great cloud of witnesses overcomes persecution; God delivers them into justice and peace. The

flock of Jesus will overcome wolves and bandits – we can depend on Jesus' guidance and on God's loving care.

For centuries, Gentile Christians have argued that Jesus overcame Judaism – a legalistic religion of rules and regulations. But as any good Jew knows, the 613 commandments of the Torah are really 613 ways to sanctify every moment, to make every part of life more ethical; the laws of keeping Kosher and the regulations of Jewish living are ways to dedicate one's life ever more deeply to God.

The miracle of Jesus' story is not the triumph of Gospel over Judaism; it is the triumph of survival in the face of catastrophe – the triumph of hope and faith and love over man-made disasters: over greed, fear, nationalism, misery and exploitation.

For Gentile Christians, embracing this miracle includes sorting out our often mixed up relationship with our own spiritual mother.

Like our own mothers, Judaism is not the same as us, but we *have* come *through* Judaism and we have come *from* Judaism. What kind of appreciation, support and protection do we owe to our spiritual mother? To the Jews in our lives? To the Jews in our country?

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The signs of the times and the challenge of the scriptures call on us to *love our mothers*.

They call to us:

Don't forget where you come from, and who you come from. Don't be afraid that the feelings, or the problems that you experience, will be overwhelming. Don't confuse freedom with the act of leaving others behind.

Don't do that. Instead, love.

Love.

Love never gives up.

Love cares more for others than for self.

Love doesn't crave what it doesn't have,

Doesn't force itself on others,

Isn't always "me first."

Love doesn't fly off the handle,

Doesn't keep score of the sins of others,

Doesn't revel when others grovel.

Love takes pleasure in the flowering of truth.

Love puts up with anything,
Always trusts in God's help,
Always looks for the best
in other people and in ourselves.

Love.

Love your mother.

References:

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/may/06/human-society-under-urgent-threat-loss-earth-natural-life-un-report>