

# The Mother Of All Loves

John 19:16b-27

Mother's Day

8<sup>th</sup> May 2011

Oh, the joys of motherhood! A woman decided to take time out from her job and stay home to take care of her new baby daughter. But after countless hours of “peekaboo” and “incy wincy spider”, she found she was beginning to think like a child. One evening, padding around the family room in her bare feet, she hit her toes against a piece of furniture. Crying out in pain, she grabbed her foot and slumped on to the couch. Her husband rushed to her side and asked which of her toes she had hurt. With tears running down her face, she moaned, “It’s the piggy that ate roast beef!”

Oh, the joys of motherhood! A young woman was rushed off her feet every day looking after 3 very active boys. One evening, she was playing cops and robbers with them out in the backyard after dinner. One of the boys pointed his finger at her and “shot” his mother. “Bang! You’re dead!” he shouted excitedly. Playing along, she fell to the ground and lay motionless. When she didn’t get up after a reasonable time, her next-door neighbour rushed over to see if she had been hurt. As the neighbour leaned over her, she opened one eye and whispered, “Don’t you dare say anything. This is the first time I have had a chance to rest all day.”<sup>1</sup>

Oh, the joys of motherhood! But, oh, the triumphs of motherhood too. When Carole Middleton stepped out of her limousine in front of Westminster Abbey a week past Friday morning, on the way to see her daughter marry Prince William, there were those who, reportedly, did not wish her well. After all, the envious thought to themselves: What right had this self-made woman, the granddaughter of miners, brought up on a council estate, a former air stewardess, to have her daughter be the chosen one, to leapfrog over the obviously more eligible and more aristocratic young women of the day and become royalty?

Says one newspaper, “Not so long ago, female courtiers at Buckingham Palace were quoted as describing her in sneering terms as a ‘meddling misfit’, as ‘pushy, rather twee and incredibly middle-class’. One haughtily said: ‘There are some social mountains you can’t climb. Re-laying your front drive and trimming the wisteria around your front door isn’t going to make your home, or your daughter, fit for a prince.’ [But]today, Carole Middleton is the mother of our future queen. She has outsmarted them all.”<sup>2</sup>

And to crown it all (no pun intended), Carole seemingly played her trump card that day by wearing an outfit that didn’t come from Marks & Spencer, as some had joked previously. But, rather, it came from the design company of Catherine Walker who produced all the very fashionable clothes that Princess Diana had

worn – a very astute move that was seemingly not lost on her son-in-law. Oh, the triumphs of motherhood!

Oh, the joys and the triumphs of motherhood! But, oh the sorrows too! Think of those Canadian mothers who have lost sons and daughters in Afghanistan. Or Libyan mothers losing sons in the uprising there. Or Ugandan mothers losing sons and daughters every day to AIDS. Or mothers in Bangladesh helplessly watching their children die from malnutrition. Or mothers of children who have gone missing, having been abducted from their care. Or economically stressed mothers in our own community, unable to provide the basics for their children. Oh, the sorrows of motherhood!

Probably nobody knew the sorrows of motherhood more keenly than did Mary, the mother of Jesus, shamed by bearing a child out of wedlock, living a life of poverty in Nazareth, bringing up a house-full of children single-handedly after the death of her husband Joseph.<sup>3</sup> Then having to watch her beloved eldest son put on trial, mocked, scourged and nailed on a cross, without being able to anything to save him. What must it have been like for her standing there on that bleak Good Friday, with Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Clopas at her side, watching her dear son suffer so terribly?<sup>4</sup>

Listen to this piece of music. It’s from Rossini’s *Stabat Mater*,<sup>5</sup> sung by Andrea Bocelli [PLAY MUSIC]. It describes very poignantly the scene at the cross in our reading today from John’s Gospel, when Mary stood, looking on helplessly. *Stabat Mater* means literally “the mother was standing”. The Latin words, translated, read, “Her grieving heart, languishing and lamenting, was pierced by a sword. Oh, how sad and afflicted was that blessed mother of an only Son. She mourned and grieved, and trembled as she saw the suffering of her glorious Son.”<sup>6</sup>

How tragic that Jesus’ mother had to suffer so much! How tragic that so many mothers down through history have had to suffer so greatly – and still do today! Yet, through their suffering, we get a glimpse into the heart of God because, in so many ways, the love of a mother reflects the very love of God himself. Through the love of a mother we get an excellent insight into the protective, self-sacrificing love of God who would give anything for the good of his children.

A writer tells of seeing a young mother mallard duck with her brood on the lake early one morning. When she sensed danger she would quickly gather the little chicks beside her and hustle them into the nearby reeds to hide. Once, when someone got too close, she flew away, as if she was abandoning her little ones. But, the writer says, she wasn’t running away. She was

offering herself as a decoy to lure the intruders away from her young. “She was willing to sacrifice herself in order to protect her offspring.”<sup>7</sup> Such also is the self-giving, self-sacrificial love of a God who would do anything for his children. “For God so loved the world, he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have ever-lasting life.”<sup>8</sup>

Now, this motherly love of God is exactly the kind of love that each and every Christian should seek to emulate. Being a follower of Jesus is not simply about being nice to people who are nice to us. Being a follower of Jesus is not about doing a kind deed here or there when the fancy takes us. Being a follower of Jesus is not just about saying the odd prayer and going to church once in a while. Being a Christian is demonstrating again and again that motherly-like, self-sacrificing love of God that is willing to give of oneself without ever giving up.

Rev. King Duncan tells how a mother was sitting one day with her 6 year old son in the crowded waiting room of their local hospital’s emergency department. As they waited to see the doctor, the little boy began to ask all sorts of questions. “In half an hour,” he said, “the little fellow managed to cover almost every subject known to humanity. To the wonder of all the others sitting in the waiting room, his mother answered each question carefully and patiently. Inevitably he got round to God. As the other people listened to the relentless ‘hows’ and ‘whys’ it was plain to see by the expression on their faces that they were wondering: How does she stand it? But when she answered her son’s next question, she answered theirs too. ‘Why,’ the boy asked, ‘doesn’t God ever get tired?’ ‘Because,’ she replied, ‘God is love and love never gets tired.’”<sup>9</sup>

As we celebrate Mother’s Day today, whether we are mothers or not, let’s be inspired by the self-sacrificing, self-giving motherly love that reflects the very love of God himself. And let us, in our own lives, as Christians, seek to model our love on this love – the love that gives and gives. And never gets tired.

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<sup>6</sup> Andrea Bocelli, *Sacred Arias*, Subito Music Publishing, 1998, 1999

<sup>7</sup> Glenn E. Ludwig, “A Mother’s Love – A Godly Passion”, *Walking To – Walking With*, CSS Publishing, Lima, Ohio, 1994

<sup>8</sup> John 3:16

<sup>9</sup> King Duncan, “Like The Love of A Mother”, *Dynamic Preaching 2006*

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<sup>1</sup> King Duncan, “A Mother and Her Son”, *Dynamic Preaching*, 2005

<sup>2</sup> Amanda Platell, “That showed them!”, MailOnline, 30 April 2011, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk>

<sup>3</sup> There is no mention of Joseph after the dedication of Jesus in the Temple in Jerusalem when he was 12 years old (Luke 2:22 ff.) leading scholars to believe that he died around this time.

<sup>4</sup> John 19:25

<sup>5</sup> Stabat Mater is a 13<sup>th</sup> century Roman Catholic sequence attributed to Jacapone da Todi. It’s title is an abbreviation of the first line which reads “Stabat mater dolorosa” (“The sorrowful mother was standing”) It has been set to music by many composers, including Rossini.