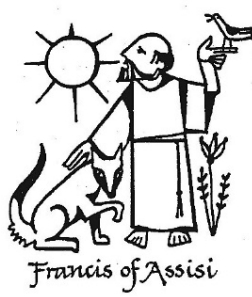


Dear friends in Christ



May 8, 2022, Mother's Day, Easter 4

“My Mama Done Tol’ Me”

The Rev. Dr. John C. Forney, St. Francis Episcopal Mission
Acts 9:36-43; Psalm 23; Revelation 7:9-17;
John 10:22-30

At some point my brother and I learned what most young fellows inevitably learn. You can't fool Mom. The lady has eyes in the back of her head. She had her ways of finding out just about any mischief we had gotten into. She knew when we were just thinking about it.

As Homer tells Bart in an episode of “The Simpsons,” **“You Can't Fool Your Mother** on the foolingest day of your life if you had an electrified fooling machine.” She's on to you. Don't even think about it!

At my first church in downtown Los Angeles, the Pico-Union community, it was a pretty tough neighborhood. We were at the intersection of the territories of three gangs. The student turnover in Tenth Street Elementary School was over fifty percent each year. Not just the students – teachers wanted out of there as soon as possible. The place was a shambles of years of deferred, piled up maintenance. The student's restrooms should have been red-tagged by the health department. Unfit for human habitation.

Our youth were continually in danger of gang recruitment. Especially vulnerable girls. One of our programs for girls in the early evenings was a cooking class taught by a grandma. This wise, old Latina had two missions. Ostensibly, it was to teach our neighborhood girls some of the skills they were not learning at home. The second, and more important, was to provide some guidance, to mentor these girls as they grew up: stay away from gangs and the fast girls; don't let some boy get his hands in your pants and get you pregnant. Have some

self-regard; study hard – YOU actually could go to college or learn a skill to support yourself when you grow up. The college girls who staffed our programs were great role models for what a young girl could become. So, stay in school! There is scholarship money just waiting for you if you are willing to put in the effort. Follow your dream: a teacher, a lawyer, a doctor, a nurse, a writer? Follow the dream. That's what this abuela said.

Women have been learning this lesson through many years of heartbreak. Ella Fitzgerald in her "Blues in the Night" – has that haunting refrain, "My Mama Done Tol' Me."

Her adaptation of this Johnny Mercer hit went down as a warning about shiftless men:

"My mama done told me when I was in pig tails
My mama done told me,
A man's gonna sweet-talk ya, and give you the big eyes
But when that sweet talkin' is done
A man is a two-face, a worrisome thing
Who'll leave ya to sing the blues in the night"

If you hitch your future to some no-account man, you'll be singing the blues for many a night. And you'll be going nowhere. That's the priceless wisdom from mothers that too many young girls are not heeding. Listen to that wise, old Latina! Listen to your mom. Listen to your teacher.

Unfortunately, too many of our mothers are so besieged by their own problems and family baggage that they're unable to exercise maternal instincts and wisdom. In one of my congregations, one fellow was bringing up his two daughters as a single dad. Their mother had been in and out of rehab for alcoholism and that finally ended the marriage. To boot, the court had taken away all her parental rights. This is not an isolated story. I was always amazed that the girls had come out of this so well.

But if the desire is there, it's never too late to achieve sobriety, to heal.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus is portrayed as the Good Shepherd.

"My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. The Father and I are one."¹

If ever we have Good Shepherds in our day, they are our mothers. They give you life in many ways. Their wisdom is life abundant. Good shepherds of

¹ John 10:27-30, New Revised Standard Version.

meaning and purpose. Life does not begin at conception and end at birth as many in the Party of Sedition and Greed would have it.

As much as I have learned kindness, generosity, manners and decorum – it was the result of Mom’s teaching and example. To the degree that I have failed in these graces, that can’t be laid at her doorstep. Women down through the ages have been responsible for what little civilization we have. That’s my belief. They urge us to heed our “better angels.”

We are blessed to have a stalwart supporter for women’s dignity and achievement in our family on my maternal grandmother’s side – Julia Ward Howe. Grandma comes for a long line of Howes, including the British general William Howe, who benefited the American Revolution by allowing George Washington to slip through his fingers three times. Wasn’t he sacked or something?

Here’s where I’m going with Julia Ward Howe. She wrote the first Mother’s Day proclamation in 1870, long before it was made a national holiday. You know her for her famous hymn of the Civil War, “The Battle Hymn of the Republic.” Long before the Hallmark folks turned the day into a monster money-making opportunity to sell sappy poems on outrageously overpriced cards. Though, there was a beneficial spinoff for the Post Office. Got stamps?

Today’s commercialized celebration of candy, flowers, gift certificates, and lavish meals at restaurants bears little resemblance to Julia’s original idea. There is nothing wrong with all that hoo-ha. Whatever makes Mom feel appreciated. But here, for the record’s sake, is the proclamation she wrote in 1870, which explains, in her own impassioned words, the goals of the original holiday.

Ward’s proclamation was a call to mothers to not raise up sons to be slaughtered in war. Her proclamation has bite to it. Nothing sappy here

Arise, all women who have hearts, whether your baptism be that of water or of tears! Say firmly: “We will not have great questions decided by irrelevant agencies, our husbands shall not come to us, reeking with carnage, for caresses and applause.

“Our sons shall not be taken from us to unlearn all that we have been able to teach them of charity, mercy and patience. We women of one country will be too tender of those of another country to allow our sons to be trained to injure theirs.”

From the bosom of the devastated earth a voice goes up with our own. It says, “Disarm, disarm! The sword is not the balance of justice.” Blood does not wipe out dishonor nor violence indicate possession.

As men have often forsaken the plow and the anvil at the summons of war, let women now leave all that may be left of home for a great and earnest day of counsel. Let them meet first, as women, to bewail and commemorate the dead. Let them then solemnly take counsel with each other as to the means whereby the great human family can live in peace, each learning after his own time, the sacred impress, not of Caesar, but of God.

In the name of womanhood and of humanity, I earnestly ask that a general congress of women without limit of nationality may be appointed and held at some place deemed most convenient and at the earliest period consistent with its objects, to promote the alliance of the different nationalities, the amicable settlement of international questions, the great and general interests of peace.

Julia today would urge all women and the men who support them to get up off the couch, turn off the sit-com, and get out in the streets. She was one of the early Women's Suffragists. She constantly pushed women to seize their full economic and political potential.

[I think this paragraph's content has already been well explored above. Otherwise, I did not find any issues.]

In the United States, the origins of the official holiday go back to 1870, when Julia Ward Howe – an abolitionist best remembered as the poet who wrote “Battle Hymn of the Republic” – worked to establish a Mother's Peace Day. Howe dedicated the celebration to the eradication of war, and organized festivities in Boston for years.

In 1907, Anna Jarvis, of Philadelphia, began the campaign to have Mother's Day officially recognized, and in 1914, President Woodrow Wilson did this, proclaiming it a national holiday and a “public expression of our love and reverence for all mothers.”

And while we're talking about women's empowerment, my wife came in with this gem for Mother's Day. Fitting, given the recent leak from the Supremes.

“He who has no uterus should shut up.” Fallopian 5:2.

So, mothers, women, and all who admire and support them, here's some Mother's Day suggestions worthy of that original 1870 proclamation.

Arise, all women who have hearts. Let us work together to reinstate the Expanded Child Tax Credit, passed early on in the Biden administration.²

This program cut child poverty by 25%. At \$3000 per child, this was a lifesaver for many families.

Critics said the money would be wasted on booze, drugs, fast cars and wild women. NOT THE CASE! Over 90% of those families living below poverty spent the money on such necessities as utility bills, rent, food, clothing. The number of children who didn't have enough to eat fell by 3 million.

Critics were expressing mostly their resentment, not reasoned policy differences. I didn't hear this crowd bellyaching over the outrageous amount spent for Bezos's few hours in space, or Elon Musk's \$44 billion to gobble up free speech in his purchase of Twitter. Nothing at all mentioned about these extravagances from the Fixed News crowd. AND, NO – this wasn't solely their money. They gifted it off of tax loopholes not available to the likes of you and me. What might these billions have done for early childhood education programs? For addiction treatment centers? For the remediation of student debt?

Of course, Julia Ward Howe and her sisters would today be casting an eagle eye on our bloated defense budget. Yeah, what's a little waste and abuse among friends? And these are very good friends. And, I'm sure, eminently worthy of the largess. Let's consider, just as an opening bid, a 10% cut as a Mother's Day gift for this upcoming budget.

That's why our charity has always supported women's education and economic advancement in Africa. Give the opportunity, the money to mothers who bear most of the burden for the care of their families, and they'll use it wisely. The men would be down at the bar or the juke-joint. And who knows what they would have spent it on!? Meanwhile, mothers would be using it to enroll their children in school and feed them. The truism is: raise up the women and a nation prospers.

Here's another Mother's Day gift opportunity. Write your representatives, send a letter to the editor pushing our government NOT to freeze Russian's reserves that we are holding in American banks. DON'T FREEZE THEM – LIQUIDATE THEM to support the refugees streaming out of Ukraine, most of whom are women and children.³

² Ezra Klein, "America Has Turned Its Back on It's Poorest Families, *New York Times*, April 20, 2022.

³ Laurence E.H. Tribe, Jeremy Lewin, "Don't Freeze Russia's Reserves. Liquidate Them," *New York Times*, April 17, 2022.

Use these funds to rebuild their houses, their schools, their hospitals, their factories.

Of course, Putin would complain bitterly. O well. We have to get the money from somewhere to rebuild this nation. We're talking about hundreds and hundreds of billions, especially if our NATO partners join in concert. A good down payment on the damages he's caused. War reparations can cover the rest. And if Russia ever becomes a democracy again, we can at that point consider another Marshall Plan.

A donation to Citizens' Climate Lobby would be a superb gift of a livable planet for a mom. Or another organization like 350.org (Bill McKibben's group) or The Climate Reality Project (Al Gore's group). A livable planet would indeed be a nice gift to remember or honor Mom.

Or make a donation to Ukrainian Relief through the UNHCR or your church's international aid organization.

All these opportunities are openings for God to work healing and restoration, much better than some sappy card. I have to now go out in the yard to see if I can find some dandelions to cover the flower thing. Maybe, I can make up for them by cooking dinner. Do whatever you have to do to let her know she is appreciated and loved. She's your Very Good Shepherd. In any case, Happy Mothers' Day. Amen