

Mother's Day Reflections 2017

Erika Maria Moseson

Hello, Church-

My name is Erika, and I am the proud mother of the most amazing child that has ever been born. His name is Ignacio, and he is the light of my life. I am convinced that no mother has ever had a baby so sweet, with a laugh that injects joy so perfectly into the hearts of all who hear it. I am certain that nobody could ever feel the love I feel when he puts his chubby little arms around my neck and says "hug." Of course, intellectually I recognize that this cannot be true. That every mother, back to our Holy Mother Mary and our ancestor Eve, felt the same emotions for her darling child. And I imagine the fathers here today might also insist that they, too, love their children more than anyone else has ever loved theirs. With that overwhelming love, can come an overwhelming fear. I am sure that I am not the only mother who lies awake at night fearing for her child in our often harsh world. Some days it seems that our fundamental values and our world are changing so quickly, I will never be able to prepare and protect my son for what lies ahead. From war and violent extremism, whether domestic or international, to climate change, to racism, to pollution poisoning our land, water, and air, to the Cascadia subduction event, I feel the helplessness of an individual mama bear trying to protect her cub. That is where I find comfort in our church community and the teachings of Jesus Christ, who lived in his own tumultuous times as a member of a minority religion in an occupied land. In the times when I feel like Thomas, in our Gospel reading today, asking Jesus, "How can we know the way?" I find it helpful to reflect on the teachings and person of our Lord and His Church to know the way forward.

There are also many of these teachings that keep me up at night, reflecting on my own failings. As someone who won the global lottery by being born in the United States to a loving, well-off, and intact family, enjoying the heights of every kind of privilege, I constantly reflect on the teaching "It is easier for a camel to fit through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter Heaven." We are the richest country on earth. My mother raised me to believe that to whom much is given, much is expected.

Jesus tells his disciples in the Gospel today that the Father dwells in him, and that whoever believes in Him will do the works that He does. The person of Jesus Christ reveals that divinity exists in every human being, in every child. The recent surge in anti-immigrant sentiment and racial intolerance constantly makes me think of this passage. When I was younger in Catholic school, I truly struggled with the idea of original sin. As a child, I thought it referred to me stealing the good candy out of my sister's Christmas stocking before she woke up. As an adult, though, I have come to see the most vicious and horrific original sin pervading all of us is our

profound failure to recognize our neighbor as ourselves. To recognize that the child of another mother is as dear to his mother as Ignacio is to me. That Ignacio and her child are equally dear to God. As is said in Galatians-“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” Islam did not exist in those days, but as a religion that also honors the mother Mary and her son Jesus, the child of the Muslim mother must be as precious to me as my sweet boy, if I am to follow the true calling of Jesus. To be true Christians, we must regard the children in Syria and Iraq and Yemen as our children. Catholic Charities, following this teaching, works hard to resettle refugees, but the current political climate may lead our wealthy nation to sinfully turn our backs on children that should be as dear to us as our own. As Catholic Christians, we are compelled to speak out against this, and hold our leaders to account for such moral failures.

In the early 1800s, a young boy named Simon Enriquez came with his uncle, a priest, to the Americas. Simon fell in love with a young Apache woman in what is now New Mexico, married her, and never returned home to Spain as originally planned. A good Catholic family, they had 16 children, 10 of whom survived to adulthood. One of them, Monica, would go on to have a daughter named Angelita, who would have a son named Guillermo, who would have my mother, Bertha Alicia. My family has been living in the same location, speaking Spanish, since before New Mexico was a part of the United States. Yet when my mother was a child in school, she was punished for speaking Spanish in the same place where her family had spoken that language for generations. The vicious inability of a people in power to recognize the humanity of those around them, including the sweet Spanish-speaking children of their neighbors, is why it is harder for a camel to fit through the eye of a needle, than for the rich and powerful to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. We have to open ourselves to the true reality that children around the world must be as precious to us as our own. When a mother is deported away from her child, that must be as painful to us as the idea of someone taking us from our own children. We must recognize that mother was once a child herself and is beloved of God. She came seeking opportunity or protection for her children. Which of us would not do the same? Which of us does not seek to give our children every opportunity? Our sin occurs when we try to deny others a chance at that opportunity, or even worse, deny that they deserve that chance. We sin when we deny that those children are equal to our own.

Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras had over 17,000 murders in 2015 alone due to gang violence. El Salvador has a murder rate that surged 67% in that year, and is among the highest in the world. Many mothers are told that their daughters will be subject to horrific violence and killed if bribes are not paid. Many of these mothers and children have fled north for safety and asylum. In the aftermath of World War II, after Jewish refugees had been turned away from countries around the world and returned to slaughter in their homelands, the US helped create the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, part of an international vow that such

horrors would never happen again. In violation of that Convention, the US began detaining asylum seekers from Central America, women and children, deporting them without adequate legal procedure, justifying this measure as deterrence to prevent more from coming. Some of these children have been murdered after their deportation, and the current immigration climate is not likely to afford reprieve. The Innovation Law Lab, here in Portland, in conjunction with the Catholic Legal Immigration Network, provide legal help to these women and children who are being held in dismal conditions in for-profit prisons in remote areas at high taxpayer expense. My friend Cameron has travelled to Dilley, TX to one of these facilities multiple times to help translate. He has met many of these mothers and their children. The stories he tells are heart wrenching.

This is another manifestation of original sin. It is too easy not to see these children as our own children, or say that there is something different this time, that makes the situation unique, or these people more dangerous. It is never different. The only way out and forward is not in trying to build bigger and higher walls and deport or persecute everyone who doesn't speak only English, or worship as we do, or look like we do, or share our political thoughts and opinions. The only answer is to look at every person, every news story, every action our nation takes, and ask, "Are we treating this child of God as we would want our own treated? Are we loving this child as our own?" It is a clarifying question.

On this Mother's Day, the greatest gift is to reach out to a mother facing desperate circumstances for herself and her child and offer our support. Our parish has an Immigration Justice group. Catholic Charities is helping refugees. Innovation Law Lab, here in Portland is a disruptive innovator, helping Catholic Legal Immigration Network lawyers crowdsource representation to these remote areas where sending legal help is made deliberately difficult by our government and the for-profit prison industry. Donations of time or money to any of these causes make wonderful Mother's Day gifts. Every child deserves love and support, and they deserve that their whole lives. When we can see every individual as the child of a loving mother, a child of God, as brothers and sisters first, we will come closer to the teachings of Jesus to love one another as He has loved us. And every mother could stop lying awake at night in fear, knowing the world loves her child as much as she does.