

## Homily for the 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter

In our Gospel today, Jesus paints a beautiful picture for us of His Father's house, which has many dwelling places – places that He is preparing for each of us in heaven because we belong to God's family, the Church. Although Jesus is the only-begotten Son of the Father, we truly become God's adopted daughters and sons in Him. And so, we are members of God's family, all dwelling under the same roof. We have an older brother and Savior – Jesus Christ. And we have one another as brothers and sisters in the Lord. We have His Father as our heavenly Father. But what about a mother?

As we profess in the Nicene Creed each Sunday, Jesus Christ is true God and true man. In Him heaven has forever been wedded to earth – the divine to the human. Therefore, as Christians, we not only have a heavenly Father, God; but, we also have Blessed Mary, the mother of Jesus, as our mother in heaven.

What is the role of a mother? Well, there are too many to count that's for sure! Many times, though, the mother is referred to as the "heart" of the family. On a wonderful website I came across, [www.catholicmom.com](http://www.catholicmom.com), I read the following: "Just as the heart is the central and most significant feature of the human body, through which life-giving blood is pumped to sustain our existence, you, dear mother, are the most important element of your home. Home; that beautiful, wonderful place where our families live out their calling. It's like the body, and all of the members who reside within are the bones and the muscles; the nervous system and the brain. But, the heart...the heart is "mother". As mothers, we nurture the lives in our care. Just as the human heart feeds life into our veins, we nourish our families by our love, our service, and our joy."

I read that, and I couldn't help but think of our Blessed Mother in her role as Mother of the Church. Since the Church is the Body of Christ, we can say that Mary is truly its heart. It's as Church, the Household of God, that we too live out our callings, our vocations. And in giving us Jesus, who is the Bread of Life, we receive our spiritual nourishment in Holy Communion, as Mary also nourishes us through her love, her service, and her joy.

You may have heard it said that there are no coincidences with God – meaning that there is a divine purpose for everything that happens under heaven. Well, in many countries throughout the world this Sunday is celebrated as Mother's Day. The "God-incidence" here is that today, the 13<sup>th</sup> of May 2017, also marks the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Fatima, Portugal. One of the most important Marian apparitions throughout history, I've handpicked a very special movie which tells the story. It's called *Finding Fatima*. And if you were not able to view it with us (after Mass), then I highly encourage you to seek out a good movie, book, or even Internet article to learn more.

But, extending the degree of God-incidence, here we are at this parish devoted to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Back in 1845, some 72 years before those apparitions at Fatima, our very church was "blessed and dedicated to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. It is believed that it was the first Church in the United States, and perhaps the world, to be dedicated to the Mother of God under this title." Well, at Fatima, the Blessed Virgin Mary revealed that in order to save poor sinners, "God wished to establish in the world devotion to her Immaculate Heart." The heart of the mother leads God's family to Jesus, our Savior.

As a mother, Mary always leads us to her Son. In her words at Cana of Galilee when Jesus performed His first miracle in changing water in to wine, she said to the head waiter, “Do whatever He tells you” – so, she says to us. And that, I believe, is one important reason why God the Father has sent His Son’s mother to us as our mother – to remind us of what Jesus told us to do. After all, isn’t that something mothers do so well – remind us of what we can “conveniently” forget, but need to do?

And there are really two big reminders Mary gives us at Fatima. First, to repent of our sins and do penance. In Scripture, “the word penance means a conversion of one's life, a turning away from sin, and a turning back to God. As Our Lady insisted at Fatima: “*Men must amend their lives, and ask pardon for their sins...They must no longer offend Our Lord.*” The eldest of the visionaries, Sr. Lucia, shared what Our Lord explained to her about penance: “*The sacrifice required of every person is the fulfillment of his duties in life and the observance of My law. This is the penance that I now seek and require.*” A good way that we can do this in our daily lives is to accept our daily struggles and offer them to God for the good of others. As Jesus taught in the Gospel, we cannot be His disciples unless we take up our crosses daily and follow after Him!

The second thing Mary reminds us of is the absolute necessity of a meaningful prayer life – for it is only by God’s grace that comes to us through prayer that we can turn from our sins and turn back to Him! In the Scriptures, Jesus time and again taught about and modeled for us the centrality of prayer. And so at Fatima, the Blessed Mother stressed the need to pray every day – from the heart. In particular, she recommended the Rosary, especially for peace in our world and the conversion of sinners. But to pray the Rosary properly requires that we reflect on each of the mysteries we are praying – not just see how fast we can finish it. In the words of Pope Paul VI, without this meditation, “*the Rosary is a body without a soul, and its recitation is in danger of becoming a mechanical repetition of formulas.*” In praying the Rosary we should take Mary as our model, for as the Scriptures tell us, “*She kept all these words, pondering them in her Heart.*” The Rosary may seem like an insignificant thing in light of the magnitude of the evils of today's world, but it is the weapon given to us by our mother. It’s like the slingshot that young David used to take down the mighty Goliath – only because the power of God was behind it.

Finally, just today (yesterday) Pope Francis, visited Fatima to canonize two of the young children to whom Mary appeared back in 1917. On this very special occasion, he prayed this prayer in part: “In the depths of your being, in your Immaculate Heart, you keep the joys of men and women as they journey to the Heavenly Homeland. In the depths of your being, in your Immaculate Heart, you keep the sorrows of the human family, as they mourn and weep in this valley of tears... With your gaze of sweetness, strengthen the hope of God’s children. And with your hands lifted in prayer to the Lord, draw all people together into one human family.” And so we pray, Our Lady of Fatima...*pray for us*. God bless you.