

Sermon, May 12, 2024

Luke: 1:46-55

“The World’s Greatest Mom”

The World’s Greatest Mom! No doubt there are multitudes of women who fit the bill, some who may even have coffee mugs with those words emblazoned on them. My mother and I had a sometimes-strained relationship, but I loved her and I think she was great. But this morning I want to talk about perhaps the most unique mother in human history, maybe even the greatest. She lived two thousand years ago, she lived in a town called Nazareth , and she had a Son named Jesus.

She doesn’t appear in the Bible a lot of times, but at pivotal moments in its history. We first find her as a young girl when the angel Gabriel appears to her and says, “Greetings favored one! The Lord is with you!”. Hard to not find that there is something special about her , seeing that the Lord considers her favored! Gabriel then informs her that she will bear a Son who will certainly be most unique. When that child is grown, we find her at a wedding where she intercedes for her Son. Later, when Jesus is arrested and crucified, all but one of his disciples run and hide. But she, although heartbroken, courageously stands at the foot of the cross, looking up at him with both anguished and loving eyes as he suffered and died. And, Jesus, in the last moments of his life, looks down at her and places her in the care of the one disciple brave enough to stand with her. The last time we see her she is in the Upper Room on the Day of Pentecost with the disciples as they await the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

In the early years of the Church, she was greatly revered, and that would continue down through the centuries with her bearing many titles, such as, Second Eve, Mother of God, and Queen of Heaven. In the Middle Ages, the years of chivalry, the Knights simply called her Madonna, which means, Our Lady. She was also called the Immaculate Conception, which I will come back to.

Then, in the 16th century, along came the Protestant Reformation. Some of the Reformers, such as Martin Luther, were still devoted to her, but, rather quickly she fell out of high regard, and was virtually pushed out of many Protestant Churches, which I personally consider both a tragedy and a travesty.

Some have said, perhaps because of its somewhat radical message, that today’s reading, called the Magnificat or Song of Mary, should not have been included in this gospel, but I can assure you that Luke would not have used it if it did not mirror her Son’s mission and message.

I have also heard Protestants say unkind things about her. One day I overheard a guy joking and saying derogatory things about her, and I couldn't constrain myself. I said to him, "May I ask you a question?" He said, "Okay". I said, "How would you feel if Jesus spoke that way about your mother?" He got sort of a stunned look on his face, and I never again heard him make such remarks.

Now, before I go on, I'd like to say something about the title , Immaculate Conception, which is so often misunderstood, sometimes, even by Roman Catholics. The title first arose in the second century but did not become official Catholic doctrine until the 19th century. It is often confused with the Virgin Birth of Jesus. It is related to it, but only tangentially. It means a that at the moment that Mary was conceived in her mother's womb, she was cleansed of Original Sin, which then made her a clean vessel in which to bear the Son of God. As Protestants, we need not accept the doctrine, but we should at least understand it.

Now, I have been called a Mariolator , which is okay with me, but I am not alone. In recent years a few Protestant theologians and pastors have written books suggesting that our churches should begin to reconsider her place in the church.

Now I am not suggesting that Mary be worshipped in Protestant churches, and I should point out that contrary to what some might think , she is not worshipped in either the Roman Catholic, or the Eastern Orthodox Church. She is venerated, meaning she is held in high regard and respected. Worship belongs to the Trinity alone.

Nor am I suggesting that you start praying the Rosary or asking her to intercede between you and her Son. I am simply saying that she should be more respected in Protestant churches, and she should be held up as a model of what the church should be - a place of great faith and hope - a place of tremendous courage in the face of trying times undergirded by that faith and hope - and a place of undying love.

A former professor of mine , named George Lindbeck, served for twelve years as co-chair of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue. In the course of those years, they determined that their theologies were compatible, and that there are only two issues that still stand between full union between them - one being Mary, and the other, papal authority. My prayer would be that Mary should never be seen as an obstacle to unity within the Church universal.

When the young Mary visited her relative, Elizabeth, under the influence of the Holy Spirit Elizabeth exclaimed, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb". If she is blessed in the eyes of God, then maybe she should be blessed in our eyes as well, and maybe such divine blessing does make her the World's Greatest Mom! Amen.

Let us pray: Gracious God, ever loving and kind, as always, we thank you for this day, and seek your guidance within it. We thank you for the gift of your Son Jesus and ask that you give the ears to hear and the eyes to see what he calls us to be and to do in this world. May we be empowered to do so through the influence of your Holy Spirit. We also thank you for Mary, whom you called blessed, and ask that you help us to see her as a role model of what we in the Church should do. We also ask that you bless all moms, not only on this special day, but throughout their lives. We also ask that you give comfort to those for whom this is a difficult day. We also continue to pray for peace in the world, especially for those torn by war, such as Ukraine, Sudan, and Israel/Gaza. May peace also prevail on college campuses around the country...Amen.