

Models for Motherhood

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When we search the Scriptures for what the Bible might teach us about an ideal mother, we often find ourselves focusing on Mary, the earthly vessel chosen by God the Creator to be the mother of Jesus, our Lord. Close examination of the few available details about her life reveal that she was an extremely passive and pliant, or yielding person. She accepted without question or complaint all of the hardships that came to her: a pregnancy before marriage in a society that did not accept such behaviour; an arduous journey to her betrothed's home town at the climax of her term; a stable in which to give birth to her firstborn child; and then later, a rebellious son whose activities she could not totally understand, and then finally watched him executed by foreign soldiers that were part of an army of occupation. In spite of all these heartaches, Mary never ceased to love and care for her wayward son.

The Biblical writers have portrayed Mary as an impeccable example of a woman who was a totally giving and loving mother – a woman who even in the midst of the most trying of circumstances displayed neither anger nor self interest. This seemingly languorous account of Mary resulted in her being venerated by many branches of the Christian Church and in some denominations, she was ultimately canonized. Regardless of whether or not you recognize Mary's canonical status as, *St. Mary*, most of us still regard her as having been the perfect mother of the perfect son – our Lord and Saviour, Jesus. We all think of her in a special way because God chose to enter the world through choosing her to represent all of humanity. So today some of you may rightly ask, how then can Mary be a realistic possibility of human motherhood?

Where in the Bible can we turn to for a truly realistic image of, *mother*? One of the more realistic examples might be the life of Rebecca, the wife of Isaac. Rebecca, according to Genesis 27, favoured one son over the other and helped that son to trick his father. Rebecca's obvious favouritism and dirty tricks violate our notion of fairness but make her humanity more easily to identify with as, *real*. We must not judge her too harshly. She helped Jacob because of her love for him and because she believed that one day he would be a better leader of the people than would his brother Esau. Although Rebecca's behaviour may not seem appropriate to us, her behaviour is none-the-less fully human because she reveals a very human

combination of concern for others and self interest. So, we observe the effects of her deception of Isaac that created a painful rift between the two brothers, Jacob and Esau. Jacob was forced into temporary exile as a result of his mother's scheme.

Rebecca demonstrates to us that human mothers are indeed somewhat less than perfect when measured by all the standards that we might want to apply. She represents very human, earthly mothers who are persons who have all the needs, desires, and problems that are inherent in what it means to be, *human*. Mothers can therefore, act not only out of concern for their children but also out of self interest. They can influence the lives of their children through a variety of conscience and unconscious motives. Yet often what is done, is done not with malice, but with love. Regardless of the particular motive however, the actions that the mother takes can have unexpected results. In short, we acknowledge that mothers are fallible. Instead of criticizing their shortcomings, we need to celebrate their general dedication to the difficult tasks of raising children and maintaining a household. Most mothers invest themselves heavily in the lives of their children. It is they, who do the greatest amount of nurturing of the next generation, and it is they, who prepare their children for the challenges of becoming adults. So, the message I wish to affirm with you today, is that our mothers need and deserve our love and understanding. For those of us who no longer have our mothers with us, we can do no less than to continue to love them and honour their lives that were lived, more often than not, with selflessness and love for us.

I believe that the majority of us are who we are today, because we were fortunate to have loving, very human mothers. Your mother is more than merely a biological parent. A mother is a symbol of God's abiding love for us. Motherhood is God's way of granting us life from generation to generation by allowing us to be responsible for the continuation of life.

The children that we as God's people bring into this world and nurture, constitute God's everlasting blessing and the promise of His continuing presence in our lives and in the world.

Mothers are the very human and very fallible, earthen vessels of God's gift of love, exemplified through the life of His Son and His earthly mother.

We wish each of you a blessed and happy Mother's Day, and a blessed and happy family day. Amen