



MEMOIRS WITH LOVE
A Week of Meditations Towards Mother's Day



BOSTON CARMEL MAR THOMA CHURCH
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FOREWORD

Mother's Day is a special occasion observed annually to honor and appreciate mothers and motherly figures for their unconditional love, sacrifices, and contributions to our families and society. It is a day to express gratitude towards mothers, grandmothers, stepmothers, foster mothers, spiritual mothers, mothers at heart and all other maternal figures in our lives. However, I feel that our acts of honor should not stop with gift-giving, sending cards, spending quality time with mothers, or treating them to special meals or activities.

Twentieth-century considerations espouse that history and fiction merit treatment as linguistically and ideologically determined constructs. Our stories from history are habitually silent about our mothers as it was mostly concocted in a patriarchal world. We have challengingly relevant yet unwritten stories of our mothers in the past and present and these stories are capable of making us. Many of those in the past are lost irrecoverably. Hence, it would be a befitting tribute to our mothers if we vocalize their available stories with utmost urgency. As Chinua Achebe in his *Anthills of the Savannah* tells, "Storytellers are a threat. They threaten all champions of control, they frighten usurpers of the right-to-freedom of the human spirit -- in state, in church or mosque, in party congress, in the university or wherever." It is a sad truth that many of us do not even know how to effectively verbalize our mother's stories and therefore, many a times, we downplay, discredit and devalue their lives saying she was nothing special, average, just a housewife or a mother.

It is in such a context that this private publication finds its relevance. This is an amateur and humble attempt to articulate the stories of a few mothers of yester years who passed away into that blessed land of hope so as to enable a dynamic reflection on the importance of mothers in our lives. It is an open acknowledgement that they were mothers but more than just mothers.

I wish to acknowledge the courageous storytellers in our parish who were willing to share their personal stories. I am also appreciative of Neethu and Sheba who walked with me in this prayer-filled and meditative journey of bringing together this work of grace. May these devotionals lead us on an effective path of meditation and prepare us for a meaningful Mother's Day on the second Sunday of May. In this let us honor our mothers and fathers equally, as it is commanded by our Lord. May God's name be praised in all that we do.

Blessed Meditation.

Rev Sujith Sam Mammen

Vicar, Boston Carmel Mar Thoma Church

May 2023.

“For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me”. - Matthew 25:35&36

Among the many things I learned from my mother, one thing that stood out the most was her ability to show compassion to others and treat everyone equally. One incident I remember was her interaction with a poor woman who lived in our neighborhood. The woman belonged to a backward community. Her husband abandoned her when she had three children, all below the age of 5. Many in the community treated her like an outcast and tried to keep a distance from her, however she was willing to do any work to meet her needs. She had been seriously ill one day and was unable to do any work and feed her children. The entire family stayed hungry for days before Amma came to know about it during the night. Immediately, Amma packed up some food and medicine and rushed to her home and took good care of her and the children until she fully recovered. To me, this exemplified Matthew 25:40, which says, “as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.” - **Memoir by Susan Cherian**

Caregiving is an avenue to express Christ like love. Helping those who cannot help themselves is a recurring theme throughout Jesus’s earthly ministry. “Love one another as I have loved you”- John 15:12. Compassion is a selfless virtue. Compassionate caregivers are warm and empathetic, deeply aware of and moved by the other person’s suffering. They have the courage to intervene and make a difference and expect nothing in return. This also best describes the character of Jesus and reflects His teachings centered around prioritizing others. Mothers as caregivers are the hands and feet of Jesus. Jesus was never a detached bystander in a needy world. On the contrary, He was engaged and involved, often crossing barriers and reaching out to lepers, tax collectors, prostitutes, the sick and the poor and everyone else who needed Him and He met them at their point of need. He calls us to do the same, to be ready to help and serve so that more of the world can experience the love of Christ in and through our compassionate care.

“To make a difference in someone’s life, you don’t have to be brilliant, rich, beautiful or perfect. You just have to care”- Mandy Hale

Prayer: Lord, we ask that you help us to see beyond our own troubles and find ways to ease the suffering of others. Let your compassion flow through us to others, so that Your love will be seen by all. Amen

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God”. - Colossians 3:16

My mother grew up as a devout Christian in a small village in Mannar, Kerala. Along with her secular studies she was an active Sunday school student. I remember her saying she was the topper of her center at the Sunday school exams. She came to Baroda, a small town in Gujarat in 1964 as a feisty young girl (when most girls those days came after their marriage). She trained herself and got multiple jobs and decided to work for income tax, a department, where it was easy to be corrupt, but she served it diligently and faithfully as a true child of God. She taught us to be grateful for all the blessings received from the Lord. Apart from being an active participant in all the liturgy of the hours, she always volunteered for the works of charity that her parish undertook. She was a true witness of our Lord for all people around her. What I cherish the most is her keenness to wake us up for the early morning Easter service, such that we didn't miss a single part of the service. It inspires us even today to be regular participants in the worship services. She also taught her grandkids the Lord's Prayer in Malayalam. Our kids learnt many Malayalam hymns because of her. -

Memoir by Sheena Simon

All women are called to play the role of spiritual mothering, regardless of whether we mother children in our own families. Titus 2:3–5 gives a brief glimpse of the importance of this role in the church, with Paul instructing Timothy to ask older women to act in the lives of their younger counterparts. Both men and women need spiritual mothers. Timothy's mother, Eunice, and grandmother, Lois, were credited with nurturing him spiritually. In the early days of the church, with few models to follow, people needed spiritual mothers and fathers to teach them how to be Christians. In modern times, this role is just as important as earlier. In our own intergenerational community, we see many young people live far away from their parents. They also have the additional challenge of trying to understand the modern influences on Christianity. Nurturing includes the teaching and training of our young ones to know and honor the Lord and to encourage and equip them to live for God's glory.

“Not every woman can give biological birth, but every Christian woman can enter the high calling of spiritual motherhood.” – Susan Hunt

Prayer: Lord, we praise you for our generations. Help us to be models to them to grow them in faith. Amen

"If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us".- Acts 16:15

Mothers are always filled with many caring and nurturing qualities. My mother exemplified several qualities, especially that of being a gracious host. Whenever someone visited her, she would make sure that they were always treated like family and made them feel welcome in her home. During my school years in Kerala, I had a classmate who lived far away in another town. As her commute was far, she wanted to find a closer place to school. She was having difficulties finding a place. When my mom heard about this, she insisted that she live with us. Even though she made many sacrifices including giving up space, for an entire year, she hosted my classmate and treated her like her own child. She truly demonstrated what being a gracious Christian host entails which is to share one's time, energy and life with others. She showed true hospitality by taking care of her and never showing discontent. She treated strangers as we would want to be treated. She not only invited people into her home, but also into her heart, and gave them love and compassion just as Christ Jesus gives to all of us. - **Memoir by Ponnamma Mathew**

Hospitality is a remarkable and powerfully reassuring trait of God as evident in the good shepherd metaphor in Psalm 23 who provides for every need of the sheep as a gracious host. Christian communities consider hospitality as an important virtue as it is part of the Apostolic teaching. As a reflection of their faith, Christian mothers often play a significant role in demonstrating gracious hospitality – welcoming guests, offering food and drink, providing a comfortable and clean space, and making their guests feel at home in an atmosphere of warmth and kindness. It serves as an opportunity to connect with and build up resilient communities. Traditions of the Church says that without the radical, self-sacrificing hospitality and compassion of Mary, the mother of John Mark and several other women, the tender movement of the Christian church would not have survived the persecution during its initial days. In partnership with God, in loving obedience to Jesus, Mary opens up her home to provide the sacred space where some of the first miracles of the Church occur, including the Pentecost. Christian mothers of our times may also consider their hostess role as an opportunity to edify the Body of Christ by their display of Christian love and compassion to others.

"God offers hospitality to all humanity... by establishing a home... for all." - Amy Oden

Prayer: Lord Jesus, may I be hospitable to everyone as you have welcomed all who came into your presence. Amen

“Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” - 2 Corinthians 9:7

Those who knew my mother would attest to her steadfast faith, gentleness, to a lesser extent her knowledge and unwavering love of Scripture. Not too many would know about her ‘Giving’ ways.

The following sheds light on a very private generous woman.

I was about nine. On a hot summer day, my sister Shanti and I were sitting idly on the veranda of the Chepad parsonage, yards from NH 47. A KSRTC bus stopped right in front. Minutes later, Amma got off the bus and rushed through the gate, not looking around, not even at her girls. Closely behind her was a tall gentleman wearing a mundu and white shirt. Amma went straight into the kitchen, spread some rice on a plate, with something else I can’t recall, my attention was seriously on the strange happening. The young man ate, left without uttering a word, we never saw him again. Subsequently, upon asking Amma responded, he was on the bus with her, appeared about to faint from hunger, no job, no money, and without a fleeting thought she invited him in to feed him. Food/Rice scarcity was at its peak in 1959 Kerala. For Amma, not even Forty, to bring home a young man, it was uncharacteristically impulsive, and she didn’t give it a second thought.

She was following The Commandment as in Matthew 6:2-4. - **Memoir by Mercy Koshy**

It’s a challenge to nurture seeds of generosity within ourselves while balancing potty training, discipline, work, meal planning and all the rest. But the Scripture encourages us to give generously and promises good rewards for our labors of love. Giving cannot be without sacrifice and we are exhorted to give generously and with a truly joy-filled heart. Nevertheless, how much should we give? How much should we sacrifice? How much should we pour out of our time, talent, and resources? Absolute giving comes from an overflow of heartfelt love! The calling as a mother or parent, is to find a piece of yourself separate and apart in others, that all the same you could not live without. From this perspective, it becomes easier to live out what Jesus says, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). We may prayerfully acknowledge the people in our lives, thoughtfully notice their needs and give. Our children will come alongside us and truly enjoy this process if we set a tone of happiness and sacrifice in our giving.

“ I f e v o l u t i o n r e a l l y w o r k s , h o w c o m e m o t h e r s o n l y h a v e
t w o h a n d s ? ” - M i l t o n B e r l e

Prayer: Lord, give us hearts that want to serve you and one another through the motivation of love and not guilt. Help us to give our time, talent and resources for developing our relationship with you and with one another in the Body of Christ. Amen.

“That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.” - John 17:21

I was raised in a large family with nine siblings. My mother was efficient and always in control as she balanced caring for us, overseeing workers in the fields and doing household chores. Not formally educated herself, she was adamant that her daughters should be educated much against public opinion in those days. She disciplined us, understood our diverse needs and temperaments and was the glue that held us together. I grew up watching her kneel and pray. I was with her when she fed and strengthened a malnourished stranger who had collapsed from exhaustion. She called it “doing Christ’s work”. She was a peacemaker focused on bringing people together. She always spoke the truth and people listened. Even our neighbors trusted her fair and impartial opinions and often reached out to her to settle their disagreements. She was a powerful influence in my life, and I am truly grateful. - **Memoir by Saji Varghese**

Social media, as we know, is rampant with influencers who are rapidly gaining trust and controlling the decision making of their spectators. While this is a recent development, most of us can agree that in the family setting, the earliest influencer in a child’s life who has stood the test of time is the mother. Mothers are uniquely poised to discipline and spiritually nurture children, to speak the truth in love and to establish family values that hold her family together in a Christ centered home. It takes a godly and influential mother to keep her family integrated. Jesus was a powerful influencer and integrator. Although He was challenged and questioned, He taught the truth with authority and conviction. He was able to bring people together and gain their trust because He never compromised the truth for the sake of short-lived unity or agreement with His critics. As Christ’ followers we are encouraged to bring people together, to have meaningful dialogues, to speak up and speak out for the truth but to do so in love; to be peacemakers despite our differences thereby proclaiming our oneness in faith in Jesus Christ.

“Coming together is a beginning, keeping together is progress, and working together is success.” - Henry Ford

Prayer: Lord help us to be committed to the good of one another. We ask You to mend our broken relationships and to restore our unity and peace. Amen

"Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer". - Romans 12:11-12

Mom was a "figure it out and do it all mom". My mom grew up in a city and had to adapt to a village life after her marriage. Growing up my dada was mostly out of town/state due to his work and the burden of running the day to day household activities fell on my mom. So, my mom did the usual household chores such as cooking, cleaning and helping with our school homework. In addition, she also managed and delegated farming work while solving all the labor problems that arise when a woman is taking the lead. She also managed to make time to fulfill social obligations such as attending baptisms and weddings among other things. She was always on the go managing all the household activities in a timely fashion. In midst of all these, she made time to both teach and lead us in Christian ways of life. Above all my mom was courageous, determined, compassionate and a loving mom who had to come up with clever solutions to resolve a multitude of issues that she had to deal with single handedly. - **Memoir by Remi John**

Determination is insistently banking on your capacities and pooling resources to make something happen when it isn't easy. Having confidence that a solution is possible even when they are in neck deep trouble is something that we find in many mothers around us. The Bible also abounds with such women of valor. In the face of her son's death the Shunammite woman's decisive and determined action brings her to the prophet at Mt. Carmel, who immediately responds to her distress. Similarly, the anonymous Canaanite woman (Matthew 15:21-28) knew what she needed. She identified that only Jesus could satisfy her need and was determined to do whatever it took to get to Him. She was persistent. Christian mothers can be powerful problem solvers who draw on their faith, compassion, and determination to navigate through difficult times and serve as exemplars of resilience to humanity at large.

"If plan A doesn't work, the alphabet has 25 more letters - 204 if you're in Japan". - Claire Cook

Prayer: Lord, Help us to stay strong relying on your Word that promises that you will refresh the weary and satisfy the faint. Amen.

MOTHERHOOD - TRIED AND TESTED

“The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit” - Psalm 34:18

Motherhood is like a beautiful canvas capturing the unique journey of a mother and child, sprinkled with assorted experiences, fluctuating emotions, and precious memories against a backdrop of pure love. Joyful anticipation of a promising future for her child is the hope of every mother, until her joy is painfully and unexpectedly disturbed by a crisis. We all know women shattered by the loss of a child, heartbroken by a child's health crisis, devastated by childlessness or broken otherwise.

UNDERSTAND THE CHALLENGE

We are often consumed with the sunny side of motherhood that we tend to overlook the challenges of these women. As a faith community we are called to “Bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ” - Galatians 6:2. Understanding the sensitivities of these women in their unique difficulty is the first step in the right direction.

“Some say you are too painful to remember, I say you are too precious to forget.”

Coping with the loss of a child of any age is devastating on so many levels. All mothers experience loss differently and heal at their own pace. Their grief is their own, it is a sacred space and unless we have walked in their shoes, we cannot and should not claim to understand their sadness. These mothers teach us RESILIENCE from the unthinkable. When they pick up the pieces and get back on their feet, we recognize them as some of the STRONGEST women among us.

“I praise You because my differently abled child is fearfully and wonderfully made.”

Mothers raising differently abled children view perfection from God's standard and assure them that they are wonderfully made in the eyes of Jesus. Completely invested in their children, they are often unprepared for the weight of the responsibility that follows. The rhythm of their life alters as they balance hospital visits, care, and advocating. Their challenged child is visible to the world, and these mothers enforce boundaries to protect them from unhealthy curiosity. They teach us to SELFLESSLY LOVE WITHOUT EXPECTATIONS. They LISTEN WITH THEIR HEARTS and find joy in the simplest yet profound expressions of their children who never fail to inspire and empower them.

“Childlessness is a private sorrow...lived in public.”

The inability to conceive is a rude awakening for women eager to start a family. They fight a relentless uphill battle, enduring painful medical interventions, and repeated failures with incredible PERSEVERANCE. Unfortunately, their journey to reconcile is a lonely struggle. In a society where the cookie cutter model for family life dictates that marriage should be followed by motherhood, they have fallen short, and needless inadequacy can set in. If we judge them by the same yardstick, we stand to lose them. Our role instead is to embrace them and point them to a loving God who collects all their tears in a bottle. When we recognize their value and realize together that the mantle of motherhood does not define them, we SPIRITUALLY ENABLE AND EMPOWER each other. Some women move on to adopt and patiently navigate the legal issues and challenges that accompany it. As adoptive mothers they experience newfound joy in their children, and we applaud the generosity of their hearts to LOVE WITHOUT BOUNDARIES.

COMMIT TO CARE

A faith community's witness is to care for their own. Small gestures like these go a long way.

- ◆ Pray for them. Stand in the gap and intercede on their behalf.
- ◆ Check in on them. A message, call or visit shows you care.
- ◆ Words matter. Encourage them with words of hope not a pity party.
- ◆ Be present. Be their shoulder to cry on as they heal.
- ◆ Bring them back to the fold from the sidelines. We need to see and hear them.
- ◆ Seek out opportunities to get them involved.

Finally, it is difficult to understand God's purpose in our challenges and as a mother blessed to care for my amazing and differently abled child, I grapple with it myself. However, what I do know is that when I put my trust in Jesus and release my burdens to Him, He overwhelms me with His love and gives me the strength and grace to carry on.

Blessed Mother's Day

Neethu Preetam Korah

Prayer: Lord help us to keep our eyes on You and not our problems. Comfort and strengthen us to make it through. Amen

ACKNOWLEDGMENT



Boston Carmel Mar Thoma Church would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude to the following members for sharing personal narratives from their beloved mother's lives.

Susan Cherian

Sheena Simon

Ponnamma Mathew

Mercy Koshy

Saji Varghese

Remi John

The faithfulness of these mothers is their true, lasting legacy. We hope as you meet them in these readings and get to know more about their lives, they will challenge you, motivate you, encourage you, and inspire you with love for the God whom they trusted and served. May our hearts be set ablaze with the very same faith, may our lives be characterized by a similar faithfulness, and may our soul be overwhelmed with love for the extraordinary God they worshiped.

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Published for Private Circulation by
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Cover Photo- Hope is the Thing with Feathers by Allison Gobbell | June 27th, 2018.



*Happy
Mother's
Day*