



Walking with  
*Moms* in Need  
a year of service



# *The Joy & Dignity of Motherhood*

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*Walking with Moms Webinar*

December 10, 2020 | *Advent reflection*





December 15<sup>th</sup> @ 7:00 pm | *en español*

# Reflection Sources:

## **Pope Saint John Paul II:**

- *MULIERIS DIGNITATEM*- 1988
- *REDEMPTORIS MATER*- 1987

## **Catechism of the Catholic Church**

# Overview

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## 1. Dignity and Vocation of Women

- Truth about the human person
- Marriage & new life
- JOY of sharing in the creative power of God
- Special place within shared parenthood

## 2. Role of the woman in Salvation History

- Physical and Spiritual Motherhood
- Relation to the Paschal Mystery
- Primacy of LOVE
- The Mother of the Redeemer

# *The Dignity & Vocation of Women*

*“Women first learn and then teach others that human relations are authentic if they are open to accepting the other person... this is the fundamental contribution which the Church & humanity expect from women.”*

*--Evangelium Vitae*



# *Two dimensions of women's vocation*

- Virginity and motherhood are two particular dimensions of the fulfillment of the female personality.
- They acquire their full meaning and value in Mary, who as a Virgin became the Mother of the Son of God. These *two dimensions of the female vocation* were united in her in an exceptional manner, in such a way that one did not exclude the other but wonderfully complemented it.
- *Virginity and motherhood co-exist in her*: they do not mutually exclude each other or place limits on each other. Indeed, the person of the Mother of God helps everyone - especially women - to see how these two dimensions, these two paths in the vocation of women as persons, explain and complete each other.





## *The TRUTH about the human person*

- The human being - both male and female - is the only being in the world which God willed for its own sake.
- The human being is a person, a subject who decides for himself.
- At the same time, man "cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of self".[\[39\]](#)
- this definition of the person corresponds to the fundamental biblical truth about the creation of the human being - man and woman - in the image and likeness of God.
- This is not a purely theoretical interpretation, nor an abstract definition, for it *gives an essential indication of what it means to be human*, while emphasizing *the value of the gift of self, the gift of the person*.



# *The foundation of motherhood*

- This truth about the person also opens up *the path to a full understanding of women's motherhood*.
- Motherhood is the fruit of the marriage union of a man and woman, of that biblical "knowledge" which corresponds to the "union of the two in one flesh" (cf. *Gen 2:24*).
- This brings about - on the woman's part - a special "gift of self", as an expression of that spousal love whereby the two are united to each other so closely that they become "one flesh".
- Biblical "knowledge" is achieved in accordance with the truth of the person only when the mutual self-giving is not distorted either by the desire of the man to become the "master" of his wife ("he shall rule over you") or by the woman remaining closed within her own instincts ("your desire shall be for your husband": *Gen 3:16*).
- This *mutual gift of the person in marriage* opens to the gift of a new life, *a new human being*, who is also a person in the likeness of his parents.



## *Openness to others & the gift of self*

- Motherhood implies from the beginning a special openness to the new person: and this is precisely the woman's "part". In this openness, in conceiving and giving birth to a child, the woman "discovers herself through a sincere gift of self". The gift of interior readiness to accept the child and bring it into the world is linked to the marriage union, which should constitute a special moment in the mutual self-giving both by the woman and the man.
- According to the Bible, the conception and birth of a new human being are accompanied by the following words of the woman: "*I have brought a man into being with the help of the Lord*" (Gen 4:1). This exclamation of Eve, the "mother of all the living" is repeated every time a new human being comes into the world. It expresses the woman's JOY and awareness that she is sharing in the great mystery of eternal generation. The spouses share in the creative power of God!

- The woman's motherhood in the period between the baby's conception and birth is a bio-physiological and psychological process which is better understood in our days than in the past. Scientific analysis fully confirms that the very physical constitution of women is naturally disposed to motherhood - conception, pregnancy and giving birth - which is a consequence of the marriage union with the man. At the same time, this also corresponds to the psycho-physical structure of women.
- Motherhood as a *human* fact and phenomenon, is fully explained on the basis of the truth about the person. Motherhood *is linked to the personal structure of the woman and to the personal dimension of the gift*: "I have brought a man into being with the help of the Lord" (*Gen 4:1*). The Creator grants the parents the gift of a child. On the woman's part, this fact is linked in a special way to "a sincere gift of self". Mary's words at the Annunciation - "Let it be to me according to your word" - signify the woman's readiness for the gift of self and her readiness to accept a new life.





## *A special part within shared parenthood*

- The eternal mystery of generation is reflected in the woman's motherhood and in the man's fatherhood. Human parenthood is something shared by both the man and the woman. Even if the woman, out of love for her husband, says: "I have given you a child", her words also mean: "This is our child".
- Although both the mother & father together are parents of their child, *the woman's motherhood constitutes a special "part" in this shared parenthood*, and the most demanding part. Parenthood - even though it belongs to both - is realized much more fully in the woman, especially in the prenatal period. It is the woman who "pays" directly for this shared generation, which literally absorbs the energies of her body and soul. It is therefore necessary that *the man* be fully aware that in their shared parenthood he owes *a special debt to the woman*. No program of "equal rights" between women and men is valid unless it takes this fact fully into account.
- Motherhood involves a special communion with the mystery of life, as it develops in the woman's womb. The mother is filled with wonder at this mystery of life, and "understands" with unique intuition what is happening inside her.
- The mother accepts and loves as a person the child she is carrying in her womb. This unique contact with the new human being developing within her gives rise to an attitude towards human beings - not only towards her own child, but every human being - which profoundly marks the woman's personality. It is commonly thought that *women* are more capable than men of paying attention *to another person*, and that motherhood develops this predisposition even more.

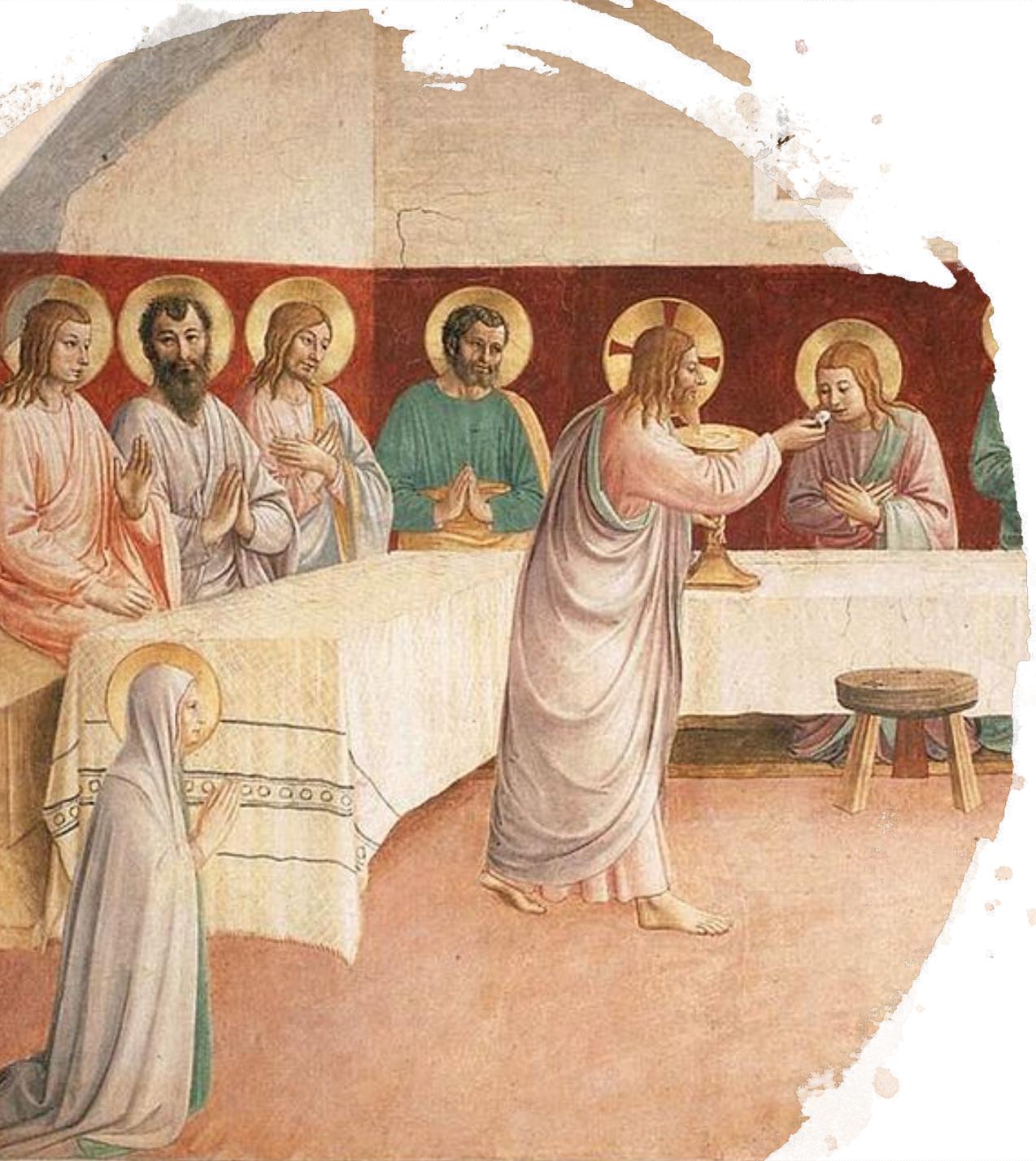
- The man - even with all his sharing in parenthood - always remains "outside" the process of pregnancy and the baby's birth; in many ways he has to *learn* his own "*fatherhood*" *from the mother*. One can say that this is part of the normal human dimension of parenthood, including the stages that follow the birth of the baby, especially the initial period. The child's upbringing, taken as a whole, should include the contribution of both parents: the maternal and paternal contribution. In any event, the mother's contribution is decisive in laying the foundation for a new human personality.
- The "woman", as mother and first teacher of the human being (education being the spiritual dimension of parenthood), has a specific precedence over the man. Although motherhood, especially in the bio-physical sense, depends upon the man, it places an essential "mark" on the whole personal growth process of new children. Motherhood *in the bio-physical sense* appears to be passive: the formation process of a new life "takes place" in her, in her body, which is nevertheless profoundly involved in that process. At the same time, motherhood *in its personal-ethical sense* expresses a very important creativity on the part of the woman, upon whom the very humanity of the new human being mainly depends. In this sense too the woman's motherhood presents a special call and a special challenge to the man and to his fatherhood.





# Motherhood & the Covenant

- Through Mary - through her maternal "fiat", ("Let it be done to me") - God *begins a New Covenant with humanity*. This is the eternal and definitive Covenant in Christ, in his body and blood, in his Cross and Resurrection.
- Precisely because this Covenant is to be fulfilled "in flesh and blood" its beginning is in the Mother. Thanks solely to her and to her virginal and maternal "fiat", the "Son of the Most High" can say to the Father: "A body you have prepared for me. Lo, I have come to do your will, O God" (cf. *Heb* 10:5, 7).
- Motherhood has been introduced into the order of the Covenant that God made with humanity in Jesus Christ. Each and every time that *motherhood* is repeated in human history, it is always *related to the Covenant* which God established with the human race through the motherhood of the Mother of God.



# *The meaning of Motherhood*

- "Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts that you sucked!"
- Jesus replies: "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it" (*Lk 11:27-28*).
- Jesus confirms the meaning of motherhood in reference to the body, but at the same time he indicates ***an even deeper meaning, which is connected with the order of the spirit***: it is a sign of the Covenant with God who "is spirit" (*Jn 4: 24*). This is true above all for the motherhood of the Mother of God.
- *The motherhood* of every woman, understood in the light of the Gospel, is similarly not only "of flesh and blood": it expresses a profound "*listening to the word of the living God*" and a readiness to "safeguard" this Word, which is "the word of eternal life" (cf. *Jn 6:68*). For it is precisely those born of earthly mothers, the sons and daughters of the human race, who receive from the Son of God the power to become "children of God" (*Jn 1:12*).



The sorrow  
and JOY of  
motherhood

*"When a woman is in travail she has sorrow,  
because her hour has come;  
but when she is delivered of the child,  
she no longer remembers the anguish,  
for joy that a child is born into the world"  
(Jn 16: 21).*

- The first part of Christ's words refers to the "pangs of childbirth" which belong to the heritage of original sin; at the same time these words indicate *the link that exists between the woman's motherhood and the Paschal Mystery*. For this mystery also includes the Mother's sorrow at the foot of the Cross - the Mother who through faith shares in the amazing mystery of her Son's "self-emptying": "This is perhaps the deepest 'kenosis' of faith in human history".
- As we contemplate this Mother, whose heart "a sword has pierced" (cf. *Lk 2: 35*), our thoughts go to *all the suffering women in the world*, suffering either physically or morally. In this suffering a woman's sensitivity plays a role, even though she often succeeds in resisting suffering better than a man.
  - maternal care for her children, especially when they fall sick or fall into bad ways;
  - the death of those most dear to her;
  - the loneliness of mothers forgotten by their grown-up children;
  - the loneliness of widows;
  - the sufferings of women who struggle alone to make a living;
  - and women who have been wronged or exploited.
- Then there are the sufferings of consciences as a result of sin, which has wounded the woman's human or maternal dignity: the wounds of consciences which do not heal easily. With these sufferings too we must place ourselves at the foot of the Cross.





# The JOY of Motherhood

- But the words of the Gospel about the woman who suffers when the time comes for her to give birth to her child, immediately afterwards express joy: it is "*the joy that a child is born into the world*".
- This joy too is referred to the Paschal Mystery, to the joy which is communicated to the Apostles on *the day of Christ's Resurrection*: "So you have sorrow now" (these words were said the day before the Passion); "but I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you" (*Jn 16: 22-23*).

# Spiritual Motherhood



- Virginity according to the Gospel means *renouncing marriage and thus physical motherhood*. Nevertheless, the renunciation of this kind of motherhood, a renunciation that can involve great sacrifice for a woman, makes possible a different kind of motherhood: motherhood "*according to the Spirit*" (cf. *Rom 8:4*).
- Spiritual motherhood takes on many different forms... it can express itself as concern for people, especially the most needy: the sick, the handicapped, the abandoned, orphans, the elderly, children, young people, the imprisoned and, in general, people on the edges of society.
- *In this way a consecrated woman finds her Spouse*, different and the same in each and every person, according to his very words: "As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (*Mt 25:40*).
- Spousal love always involves a special readiness to be poured out for the sake of those who come within one's range of activity. In marriage this readiness, even though open to all, consists mainly in the love that parents give to their children. In virginity this readiness is open *to all people, who are embraced by the love of Christ the Spouse*.
- A woman is "married" either through the sacrament of marriage or spiritually through marriage to Christ. *In both cases marriage* signifies the "sincere gift of the person" of the bride to the groom.
- In this way, one can say that the profile of marriage is found spiritually in virginity. And does not physical motherhood also have to be a spiritual motherhood, in order to respond to the whole truth about the human being who is a unity of body and spirit?

# The primacy of LOVE



- The calling of woman into existence at man's side as "a helper fit for him" (*Gen 2:18*) in the "unity of the two", provides the visible world of creatures with particular conditions so that "the love of God may be poured into the hearts" of the beings created in his image.
- From the "beginning", woman - like man - was created and "placed" by God in the order of love.
- *the commandment of love is known already in the Old Testament* (cf. *Deut 6:5; Lev 19:18*) and placed by Christ at the very center of the Gospel "ethos" (cf. *Mt 22:36-40; Mk 12:28-34*).
  - This also explains the *primacy of love* expressed by Saint Paul in the First Letter to the Corinthians: "the greatest of these is love" (cf. 13:13).
- Unless we refer to this order and primacy we cannot give a complete and adequate answer to the question about women's dignity and vocation.
  - this refers not only or above all to the specific spousal relationship of marriage-- it means something more universal, based on the very fact of her being a woman.
- The **woman is the one who receives love in order to love in return.**
- A woman's dignity is closely connected with the love which she receives by the very reason of her femininity; it is likewise connected *with the love which she gives in return*. The truth about the person and about love is thus confirmed.
- "Man, who is the only creature on earth that God willed for its own sake, cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of self." → *Woman can only find herself by giving love to others.*



# *Awareness of a mission*

- The biblical exemplar of “woman” also appears within the eschatological perspective in the Book of Revelation [\[60\]](#) as “a woman clothed with the sun”, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of stars (cf. Rev 12:1). One can say she is a Woman of cosmic scale, on a scale with the whole work of creation.
- At the same time she is “suffering the pangs and anguish of childbirth” (Rev 12:2) like Eve “the mother of all the living” (Gen 3:20).
- She also suffers because “before the woman who is about to give birth” (cf. Rev 12:4) there stands “the great dragon ... that ancient serpent” (Rev 12:9), already known from the Proto-evangelium: the Evil One, the “father of lies” and of sin (cf. Jn 8:44). The “ancient serpent” wishes to devour “the child”.
- While we see in this text an echo of the Infancy Narrative (cf. Mt 2:13,16), we can also see that the struggle with evil and the Evil One marks the biblical exemplar of the “woman” from the beginning to the end of history.
- It is also *a struggle for man, for his true good, for his salvation.*
- While the dignity of woman witnesses to the love which she receives in order to love in return, the biblical “exemplar” of the Woman also seems to reveal *the true order of love which constitutes woman's own vocation.* Vocation is meant here in its fundamental, and one may say universal significance, a significance which is then actualized and expressed in women's many different “vocations” in the Church and the world.

# *The Church gives thanks for women*

- *The Church desires to give thanks to the Most Holy Trinity for the "mystery of woman" and for every woman - for that which constitutes the eternal measure of her feminine dignity, for the "great works of God", which throughout human history have been accomplished in and through her. **After all, was it not in and through her that the greatest event in human history - the incarnation of God himself - was accomplished?***
- ***The Church gives thanks for each and every woman:** for mothers, for sisters, for wives; for women consecrated to God in virginity; for women dedicated to the many human beings who await the gratuitous love of another person; for women who watch over the human persons in the family, which is the fundamental sign of the human community; for women who work professionally, and who at times are burdened by a great social responsibility; for "*perfect*" women and for "*weak*" women - for all women as they have come forth from the heart of God in all the beauty and richness of their femininity; as they have been embraced by his eternal love; as, together with men, they are pilgrims on this earth, which is the temporal "*homeland*" of all people and is transformed sometimes into a "*valley of tears*"; as they assume, together with men, *a common responsibility for the destiny of humanity* according to daily necessities and according to that definitive destiny which the human family has in God himself...*
- The Church gives thanks *for all the manifestations of the feminine "genius"* which have appeared in the course of history, in the midst of all peoples and nations; she gives thanks for all the charisms which the Holy Spirit distributes to women in the history of the People of God, for all the victories which she owes to their faith, hope and charity: she gives thanks *for all the fruits of feminine holiness.*
- The Church asks at the same time that these invaluable "*manifestations of the Spirit*" (cf. *1 Cor 12:4ff.*), which with great generosity are poured forth upon the "*daughters*" of the eternal Jerusalem, may be attentively recognized and appreciated so that they may return for the common good of the Church and of humanity, especially in our times. **Meditating on the biblical mystery of the "woman", the Church prays that in this mystery all women may discover themselves and their "supreme vocation."**



# The Season of Advent

When the Church celebrates *the liturgy of Advent* each year, she makes present this ancient expectancy of the Messiah, for by sharing in the long preparation for the Savior's first coming, the faithful renew their ardent desire for his second coming.

— CCC 524



*Alma  
Redemptoris  
Mater*

“Loving mother of the Redeemer,  
gate of heaven, star of the sea,  
assist your people who have fallen  
yet strive to rise again.

To the wonderment of nature  
you bore your Creator,  
Yet remained a virgin after as before.

You who received Gabriel's joyful greeting,  
have pity on us poor sinners.”

– *Marian Antiphon for Advent*



# Take-aways

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- Our motherhood is rooted in the truth about the human person and who we are as women.
- Our dignity and vocation finds its deepest meaning in light of the Gospel.
- We are body & soul:
  - Just as in the season of Advent we reflect upon the role of Mary & the coming of Christ both in the Incarnation and the Last Judgement...
  - ...So in our own motherhood we are open to life and bringing children into this world, but most importantly, we pray that the love with give to others through our gift of self bears fruit for eternal LIFE.



Questions?

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# Next Monthly *Walking with Moms* Webinar

Date:

Thursday, January 7, 2020

Topic:

How to SERVE LIFE all year long



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