

THE MEANING OF MOTHER'S DAY

A Mother's Day Sermon

By Rev. Frank Fitt, As Published in the May Issue of "Church Management"

Many years ago, in a small town in Virginia, there lived a woman who, throughout her mature life, was the moving spirit of the Sunday school of her church. Some time after this woman passed away, the superintendent of the Sunday school wrote to her daughter, then living in Philadelphia, asking her to arrange a memorial service which could be held in the church with which her mother had been associated for so many years. The daughter did so, and in her task she suddenly realized that the custom of an annual service honoring motherhood might be possible. It was in 1908, just twenty years ago, that the first Mother's Day service was held in the small Virginian town. In 1914 the second Sunday in May was set apart officially as Mother's Day by resolution of Congress and proclamation by the president of the United States. Each year the recognition of this day has spread among the churches until now there can hardly be a community in the United States in which the meaning of the day is not given some emphasis. Within a score of years the observance of Mother's Day has established itself as securely as the observance of Thanksgiving Day and already seems to hold more meaning for the people than some other days of inspiring association in the Christian year. Why should this be? Why should Mother's Day leap into such a rapid and genuine acclaim? Is it merely one more sentimental outburst of the American mob mind? Or is it something much deeper and more meaningful?

After all, mothers are imperfect like the rest of us. While it is the manifest obligation of every son and daughter never to refer to their mother in any way that is not kind, the fact remains that mothers are just as human in their frailties and weaknesses as the rest of us. We know young mothers who seem entirely irresponsible and pleasure-loving. We know mature mothers who with rouged lips and short skirts caper around in this jazz age in a manner that is hardly admirable. And we know aged mothers who are querulous and complaining, hard to live with, selfish and demanding. If we are to have Mother's Day, why should we not have Father's Day? We can think of certain fathers who meant everything to their children. As a matter of fact we are supposed to have a Father's Day in the fall, but it has never received the response that comes so naturally to Mother's Day. Or why should we not have a Middle-Aged Day or a Young People's Day? We are all acquainted with admirable men and women of middle-age and young men and women who carry inspiration every time we meet them. But, somehow, such a suggestion does not appeal to us. Mother's Day remains by itself. Why is this? What is there about Mother's Day that makes its appeal?

In our attempt to get at the secret

of the appeal of Mother's Day we may as well make up our minds that no anniversary can receive general recognition among people of all ages and social groups, unless it links itself very definitely with something deep and fine in the human heart. The florists and the candy manufacturers have a material stake in Mother's Day; but they did not originate the day or develop its popularity. They may profit by it, but only because its foundation is spiritual and not material. Subtract all of the sentimentality that gathers around mother's Day and something beautiful and compelling remains. What is that something? What is that inner core meaning that accounts for the common attitude of reverence and respect on this second Sunday in May? I believe it to be our recognition, conscious and unconscious, that in motherhood we have the nearest approach in human terms, the most definite hint in our human experience, of the perfect and transcending ideal of the Love of God. Not in all mothers do we find this; but

in many mothers it stands out clear and distinct, the blinding, passionate love that nourishes and guides and directs, that redeems and restores and recreates; and because we feel this in some mothers as the nearest approximation of the Divine Love we honor motherhood as a whole on Mother's Day.

This is the explanation of the fundamental appeal of Mother's Day. Easter is a parade of fashion, and something more—the anniversary of that day when Christ our Lord broke the bonds of death. Mother's Day has a good deal of the artificial and the sentimental, and something more—the recognition that in a mother's love there is a note of tenderness and redemptive power that we find in perfect terms in the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation. At least, that is the way in which Mother's Day explains itself to me. If it were merely a day of sentiment I should not want to waste any time over it in a Christian pulpit. But it is a day of meaning, a deep and moving meaning which brings us close to the central message of our faith. And I am glad to think that

in the midst of our bewildering experience of life, with its temptations and its tragedies, there are certain examples of motherhood which stand out with the glowing light of the Divine. Francis Thompson in "The Hound of Heaven" has given us a picture of the Love of God relentlessly seeking out man as he tries to flee away on his own devices. It is a great poem. But I prefer the conception of parenthood, and more particularly motherhood, as helping us to understand the redemptive power that we Christians call the Love of God.

On the face of it, in the daily round of our activities, it is not easy to believe in the Love of God as the controlling and final factor. The ingratitude of human nature, the small-mindedness and hatred of which any community is capable at times, the machinelike tread of modern civilization establishing us in various grooves, the struggle to survive economically, the ugly and defiant materialism of a factory town—all this seems to stamp out the light we call Divine. But that is only part of experience, perhaps the most obvious part, but

Everything Depends On Mother



Thursday, May 9, 1929

not the underlying there, in the most and along the sh home on a grimy the broad stretche the busy offices of in the quiet of the human souls who ef life, their sm their faith, their eate to us how unm isters to mankind. we think of certai so girded about w of the sacred and their presence it question the Love kind.

Once a year, at of France, a scen is always written our American ne ever I read the ac I cannot put it days, for it breat impression of horri I refer to the an prison ship whi worst of the Freer prison colony off America. It is Under heavy gu with his small b file down the gar cages below deck until they reach the prison colony sullen. Some of age. All of the perite criminal r on board the sh their last sight know it. An es ture is a miracle hard labor, poor ters, tropical hea as a blessing. away on its lon execration goes oner on board a makes it impos shore hear the g I doubt if civil our time contain sight. It means ugly, horrible sents the metho with her imposs method of hope tion.

Two years ag ship sailed away which introduced dreadful scene come on board, into good order employed for the charwomen stay No one knew i in the ranks of a lonely exile of South American on board the ne to greet him w last fond embr ed assurance of confidence in hi ed the hearts stood nearby course, it was as speedily as that mother o had done her last all who w remember it.

"If I were han Mother o'mir I know whose still, Mother o'mir "If I were dar