

not the underlying part. Here and there, in the most congested tenement and along the shaded avenue, in a home on a grimy street and out in the broad stretches of farm-land, in the busy offices of the metropolis, and in the quiet of the villages, there are human souls who by their very way of life, their smile, their attitude, their faith, their dependability, indicate to us how unmistakably God ministers to mankind. And among them we think of certain mothers who are so girded about with the atmosphere of the sacred and the holy that in their presence it seems absurd to question the Love of God for mankind.

Once a year, at a port in the south of France, a scene takes place which is always written up graphically in our American newspapers. Whenever I read the account of that scene I cannot put it from my mind for days, for it breathes forth a lasting impression of horror and degradation. I refer to the annual sailing of the prison ship which transports the worst of the French criminals to the prison colony off the coast of South America. It is a dreadful picture. Under heavy guard the men, each with his small bundle of belongings, file down the gang-plank to the iron cages below deck where they will stay until they reach the living death of the prison colony. Some of them are sullen. Some of them smile in defiance. All of them are men of desperate criminal record. When all are on board the ship sails away. It is their last sight of France and they know it. An escape without recapture is a miracle. For them it means hard labor, poor diet, primitive quarters, tropical heat, and a quick death as a blessing. As the ship moves away on its long journey a howl of execration goes up from every prisoner on board and until the distance makes it impossible the onlookers on shore hear the ghastly, cursing sound. I doubt if civilization anywhere in our time contains a more depressing sight. It means sin and despair, the ugly, horrible side of life. It represents the method of France in dealing with her impossibles; but it seems a method of hopelessness and desperation.

Two years ago, when this convict ship sailed away, something happened which introduced a new note into that dreadful scene. Before the prisoners come on board, the ship has to be put into good order and charwomen are employed for the task. One of these charwomen stayed on board in hiding. No one knew it; but she had a son in the ranks of those condemned to a lonely exile of imprisonment off the South American coast. When he filed on board the next day she rushed out to greet him with one last kiss, one last fond embrace, one last whispered assurance of her mother's love and confidence in him. It must have melted the hearts of the officials who stood nearby with loaded guns. Of course, it was against the rules and as speedily as possible they rushed that mother off the ship. But she had done her part, and to the very last all who witnessed the sight would remember it.

"If I were hanged on the highest hill,  
Mother o'mine, O mother o'mine!  
I know whose love would follow me  
still,  
Mother o'mine, O mother o'mine!  
"If I were damned of body and soul,

Mother o'mine, O mother o'mine!  
I know whose prayers would make me  
whole,  
Mother o'mine, O mother o'mine."

In that mother's action, so strange and yet so natural, there is the touch of Calvary. It was while we were yet sinners that Christ died for us. He made the sacrifice for our sakes. His blood was shed for the remission of our sins. Somehow or other, there is a distinct and lasting connection between the cross outside the city wall and our own problem of the evil instinct and the sinful heart. And when that French mother stooped down to the level of that convict ship to share something of the experience of her wayward son she was obeying a power that found its chief and perfect expression in Him Whom we call Saviour. If that convict lives today in the French prison colony, who knows the redemptive love that may be reclaiming him and his fellows because his mother had faith enough to perform this last act of hope!

It is the privilege of motherhood to suffer well as to love. It is impossible in actual living to separate suffering from love. And so when we think of the finest mothers we have known, we have made real for us not only the Love of God, but the Suffering of God. As we think of families in which motherhood has done its great constructive work we give thanks for the children growing into manhood and womanhood, the boys clean of limb and pure of life, the girls readily expressing in themselves what their mother has exemplified to them. We can all bring before our mind's eye certain families where the rich heritage of a mother's devotion has done its perfect work. Such families bless a neighborhood and count inestimably in all that helps to make for character and high living. But even the best of parents and the finest of mothers does not always have this happy fruitage. Any human life, at any period from the cradle to the grave, is capable of strange choices and unbelievable impulses. Do you suppose that the French mother who sought out her convict son had failed to stand by him as guide and counselor from the day of his birth? And yet despite every effort on her part he failed to realize her hope for him. I wish that could be regarded as a rare and isolated instance of a mother's sorrow. The truth of the matter is that the tragedy is all too common, the failure of the child, in childhood, in youth and adult life, to understand and follow in the way of truth and righteousness in which the mother herself walks. There is no greater pain than that in which the elements of love and grief multiply the intensity of each other because they meet in one human soul. Each act of waywardness and evil stabs the mother's heart with untold grief, because her love is immeasurable.

In this tragedy of the human heart which we have to witness too often, and in which some of us have a very direct part we gain an insight into the Divine tragedy of man's refusal of the Love of God. Once more motherhood reduces for us to real and vivid terms the truth that seems almost too big for our vision. It is almost too big for our vision. Is it difficult God Who suffers because of man's sin and wilfulness, when on the next

house there dwells a woman whose face has the lines of an unrequited travail over her son? Once upon a time I took a train journey beside a woman whose boy had paid the penalty of the law with his life. He had been a medical student, with everything in his background to insure a career of usefulness, but in a moment of infatuation and weakness he performed the act which meant the forfeiture of his own life in legal terms. She was a Christian woman and she had done her best by that son. She was old when I met her and the breaking sorrow of her life was in the years that lay behind, but it always would be her daily travail and she spoke to me about it that day on the train because she knew I was a minister of the Gospel. It was an unforgettable experience. If she had such a sorrow, what must be the sorrow of the Eternal Heart when men deny and defy and deliberately refuse the choice of faith and power and righteousness! When we think of the Atonement we are apt to think only of what man gains. We must remember what it cost God and what it costs Him now when men refuse His Love.

Why is it that Mother's Day appeals to us? Is it merely a matter of sentiment? No: Mother's Day makes its appeal to us because in the highest ranges of motherhood there is something that speaks to us of the Love of God and the Sorrow of God.

Mrs. Bridey: "I'm afraid the cake is heavy, darling."

Husband: "That's all right, angel. I only have to lift one piece at a time."

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