

Easter 6

Sometimes the skeptics among us can look at a day like today, Mother's Day, and whisper rather loudly that it is all about money. It is about selling cards and flowers. It is about getting us to take our mothers to expensive restaurants or, if we are very wealthy, to send them on cruises or trips to different and distant places. Therefore these skeptics don't want to celebrate it. And of course there are also the strict liturgists among us who would say that Mother's Day is not a liturgical feast and therefore should not be allowed to invade the liturgical calendar. And, according to an old joke, there is no arguing with a liturgist, for that is how a liturgist differs from a terrorist. You can negotiate with a terrorist, but there is no negotiating with a liturgist.

But most of would say that it seems like a good thing to honor our mothers, and if that is a case, then there must be a connection between doing so and our faith. I think there is, and I think we can find it in today's Gospel. We are reading from the 14th chapter of John's Gospel. Jesus is here portrayed as having dinner with his friends on the night before his arrest and as using the occasion to teach them many things. He tells them that if they love him they will keep his word (I suppose that means his teachings) and then

the Father and he will come to them and make their dwelling with them. The divine indwelling, spiritual books used to talk about. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit dwell in us.

In the past few days the papers are saying that some of us still carry genes inherited from the Neanderthals. Since the dictionary describes Neanderthals as human beings, why is this something to write about? The reason seems to be because we were a more developed form of humanity, yet we mated with the Neanderthals who were less developed, and the traces of this mixing can still be found in some of us. Personally, that is not a surprise. I presume that everything which is part of the evolutionary process is interrelated, from its highest to its lowest forms.

What our faith brings to this evolutionary view of things is its claim that this whole process in its human expression is now taken up into God himself. God dwells in us. Or, to put it another way, God reaches down to us and takes us into his own reality. Do we believe that? Do we believe that God dwells in us? Of course, there is a great condition in this matter. God will not come to dwell in those who do not want him. God makes the offer, but we can refuse. We can refuse to love God and His word, Jesus, and then the Father and Son will not come to dwell in us. But if we accept

the divine offer, we become part of God's own family. Then God lives in us and we can live in God. That is the divine indwelling. St. Paul used the image of a body to describe this reality. We are all parts of the one body of Christ.

And now we can compare God's dwelling in us to our mothers' love for us. We begin our lives literally dwelling in our mothers. And then after birth they still feed us with their own bodies, and then the physical intimacy of the first two years grows into a spiritual intimacy for the rest of our lives. They are always there for us. We literally continue to dwell in their love for us, and they know us perhaps better than we know ourselves. And in our old age we look back at what they said to us, what they did for us, and we marvel at their constant care and concern for us, even as adults. They always remained with us. We continued to dwell in their love as adults. And even after their death the memory of their love for us sustains us.

Who else loves us like that? A father? Yes, but in a different way, one less physical, one somehow more distant and distinct from us. The intimacy of our mother's love in those first months and years is not possible for a father's love. Only God, only the Word, only

the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit, can dwell in us the way the love of our mothers does.

Children who have not had a mother's love in their infancy may spend the rest of their lives trying to make up for this deficiency, because it is absolutely essential to us as human beings. Could we not say the same thing of us with respect to God and His indwelling in love within us? If we do not realize that God wishes to dwell in us, and does dwell in us if we keep his word, then we too will go through life trying to make up for this fundamental lack. We will be forever orphans. We will never realize that we live and move and have our being in God. We will never realize that all we have to do is turn to God in order to find him dwelling within us in love.

God's own life is one of love. Jesus defines his own life as one of love with the Father, a love which makes them one. And Jesus, in imitation of his Father, has loved us. Now he asks us to become part of this chain of divine love by loving him by keeping his word, his teachings.

Brothers and sister, if each day we attempt to dwell in the love of God present within our minds and hearts, all will be well for us.

We will, as St Paul tells us, be able to do all things in him who loved us and gave himself up for us. We will dwell in God's love as we dwell in the love of our mothers---forever.