

Sermon: Mother's Day: 6th Sunday of Easter
May 13, 2007

INTRODUCTION

Today is Mother's Day. It is an important time to recognize our mothers everywhere, living and deceased, and a time to honor those who mother others but are not mothers in a biological way. Think of Mother Teresa. Think of the friend or aunt who has shaped your life or that of others, who has mothered in the true sense. Bob has often shared with me how important his Aunt Maud was to him.

Aunt Maud was his father's sister who lived with his parents, his brother Stephen and himself. She was a true mother to him as was as his biological mother.

Blessings, to all who mother. And for those of us who are given the gift of having children, both naturally and adoptive, may we give thanks for this truly awesome role in life.

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Today I ask that we pray for our mothers and for ourselves in our mothering roles and in so doing, consider how we might extend our mothering to those in need. I will share with you how I decided to honor my mother this year through an educational contribution, and ask you to consider if you feel moved to honor your mother or someone special in your life by mothering someone "far" or "near."

LYDIA: Gentile Woman in ACTS

First, however, I call your attention to our reading from Acts of the Apostles, where we meet Lydia, living in Philippi. She is among the Jews one Sabbath Day when Paul and some apostles came to preach to them. Lydia had been drawn to the God of Israel, although a Gentile, not a Jew. When she heard Paul preach about Jesus, she became a disciple. She heard the Good News of what God had done in Christ.

Lydia, a merchant herself, dealt in purple cloth, which had great value. The fast, non-fading dye was an item of luxury trade, prized by the Romans, who used it to color ceremonial robes. It was believed that the intensity of the purple hue improved, rather than faded, as the dyed clothe aged. (My research revealed that the purple dye came from certain kinds of snails...that's more than I wanted to know.)

Furthermore, Lydia was apparently an independent woman of means herself, having a household of her own, revealed through these words: "When she and her household were baptized, she urged us saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my home."

"Her household." Just as with men heads of households, when she was baptized, so was her whole household. As the mistress did, so did all who depended upon her. Being of a generous disposition, Lydia exuded hospitality to the poor Apostles, who were not usually so well received. She housed them in her own home. There is no better hospitality than that.

Diocese of North East India

In North East India today there are young women who wish to become merchants, like Lydia. Not merchants of purple cloth, but merchants of their own indigenous cloth weaving and crafts. These young women are Anglican women who are part of the Diocese of North East India. North East India is situated between the two great traditions of the India Asia and the Mongoloid Asia. Quite unique and quite remote.

In March when I had the privilege of served as a repeat delegate from the Episcopal Church to the UN Commission on the Status of Women in New York, I met another delegate from the Diocese of North East India. Her name is Pritti Sangma. (Pritti means "love.")

She is well educated and has a big heart. She is a wonderful spokesperson for the needs of the women and girls of her country.

She sees the need to empower poor women economically. It is something I think Lydia would have understood.

Pritti and other diocesan women opened a Center in the city of Tezpur, an ancient city in the foothills of the Eastern Himalayan Mountains. The Center was established to be a model for replication throughout the region of the large Diocese of North East India. The Mother's Union funded the first Center. Now they need help to establish several more around the rural regions. This model center and subsequent centers will empower women to produce crafts and goods and make a living for their families.

Pritti identified the key ingredient in making this happen: a cadre of woman leaders need to be trained in management skills to setup and manage new centers. To that end, the Don Bosco Institute, a well established educational facility located in Kharghuli, Guwahati in North East India, will provide a six month management training course for women to accomplish this goal. It is called the "Women Empowerment Programme: a Skills training Program for Girls and Women."

The Don Bosco Institute is a center for human resource development, leadership and research. It is run by an order of Roman Catholic brothers and is a blessing to the entire North East Indian area, bringing training opportunities to people who would never have dreamed they could improve their lives with the training the Institute makes available.

A six month residential program...that means full room and board and tuition...will cost \$600.00 \$600. Imagine. For \$600, a woman can acquire the necessary knowledge and skills needed to establish training and marketing centers which will enable many, many women to learn skills which will enable them to earn a decent living and build self-esteem. Imagine that.

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My mother is 89 and a half years old now, and is living honorably within the ravages of Alzheimer's Disease, with its indignities and loss of self, but for thirty years she taught grade school children in different venues. In each she was a superb teacher and sought after by parents to be their child's teacher.

She will always be the teacher to me, as she is to the many, many lives she influenced through her profession. Education was her passion, and she embraced organizations which fostered education for women and girls, such as Delta Kappa Gamma.

My mother, the master teacher and counselor, would gladly support the management training needed by the young women in North East India. She would understand how giving such training will have a ripple effect of enabling many other young women to make a living for herself and her family. She would "get it."

My mother has no voice of her own anymore, however. I am her voice now.

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Isn't this how the Holy Spirit works? Doesn't God work through you and me? Aren't we called by God to listen to others and respond as we are able to help the poor, feed the hungry and give shelter to all? Didn't God work through Lydia who gave food, comfort and shelter to the poor Apostles and further the Word of God and good news about what God did through Jesus of Nazareth?

I think this is so. For me, at this time, in the spirit of Lydia and mothers everywhere, I wish to honor my mother by sponsoring one young woman to enter the Don Bosco Institute's residency program.

I hope this will encourage others to choose a way to "mother others" in honor of the love and advantages of education and comfort most of us have received from our mothers or loving caregivers.

There are so many ways to honor our mothers; each of us must determine what is most suitable and meaningful to symbolize our relationship with our mother. This happens to be how the Spirit speaks to me at this time, and I am grateful for the Counsel.

Happy Mother's Day to each and all, remembering those present, and those away today, including those who, though not mothers of their own children, are mothers of those for whom you care deeply.
Amen, Alleluia!

The Reverend Eleanor Ellsworth, St. James by the Sea Episcopal Church, La Jolla, CA

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